



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, September 28, 2006**

—  
**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, September 28, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*English*]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to one petition.

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### ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(3) of the Auditor General Act, the Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons for the year 2006.

[*Translation*]

This document is referred permanently to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

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[*English*]

### INDIVIDUAL MEMBER'S EXPENDITURES 2005-06

**The Speaker:** I also have the honour to lay upon the table a document entitled Individual Member's Expenditures for the Fiscal Year 2005-06.

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### HOUSE OF COMMONS CALENDAR

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 28(2)(b), I have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons calendar for the year 2007.

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS OF CANADA 2005-06

**Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's new government is committed to openness, transparency and accountability. Today will be the first time in 25 years that the Public Accounts of Canada are being tabled publicly in the House of Commons.

Therefore, it gives me great honour to table, in both official languages, the Public Accounts of Canada for 2005-06.

**Mr. John Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to congratulate the President of the Treasury Board. As the chair of the public accounts committee for many years, we asked for, demanded, that these documents be tabled openly and publicly rather than surreptitiously through the back door. I would like to congratulate the minister for doing so.

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### NATIONAL OVARIAN CANCER MONTH ACT

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-355, An Act to establish National Ovarian Cancer Month.

He said: Mr. Speaker, on a day when this House and the Liberal Party are dedicating their time to advancing women's rights, I am humbled to be able to introduce a bill that would fight and raise awareness of a disease that afflicts over 2,600 Canadian women per year.

Ovarian cancer is often treatable when caught in the early stages. However, due to its vague symptoms, it is imperative that we support research into early detection tests and raise awareness of this disease across Canada.

Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to introduce my private member's bill which will declare September as national ovarian cancer month. I would especially like to thank Ryan Kelahear for his hard work on this file and extend personal support for the women and families fighting this disease. Together we can find a cure.

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

\* \* \*

•(1005)

### 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 Speaker:** Is that agreed?

*Business of Supply*

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government fails to recognize the many roles of women in Canadian society and the importance of providing all Canadian women with equal opportunity; and the House objects to the government's partisan and discriminatory cuts in federal support for women's programs and services.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Beaches—East York, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, October 3, 2006.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me today to rise to support this motion.

The motion deals with an issue that is extremely important to all Canadians: equality for women.

Budget cuts affect us all, but mostly the very vulnerable in our country.

The Treasury Board president defends his government's cuts by referring to the cuts to social programs made by the Liberal government 10 years ago. However, we cut spending in a successful effort to deal with a \$42 billion deficit resulting from the fiscal mismanagement of the previous Conservative government. The Conservatives had reduced Canada to what the brokers on Wall Street described as a third world economy.

Today's cuts are being made despite the fact that we have a \$13.2 billion surplus, thanks to the prudent fiscal management of the recent Liberal government.

We are heading down the meanspirited path of Mike Harris in Ontario. Two former Mike Harris hatchet men are leading the charge in their new federal roles as finance minister and Treasury Board president.

Soon there will be no funding and no services, and it will take a generation to fix. The most vulnerable groups are affected first, including women.

It is all in the cuts. The list includes: \$5 million from status of women; \$45 million from housing, we were fighting for housing just two minutes ago and here we are now cutting; volunteerism, now the government is punishing volunteers; youth international internship programs; youth employment; literacy; court challenges program; and important support programs for the most vulnerable in our society. The government is hammering women, aboriginals and youth. This is totally unacceptable.

It is targeting equality seeking groups because this government believes that they are a threat to its voter base.

A government with only 125 seats out of 308 in this House has absolutely no mandate to make such major changes to the social fabric of Canada.

Let us not forget that this Prime Minister, during the recent election campaign, signed a commitment to "ensure that Canada fully upholds its equality commitments to women".

How do we square that with the Draconian cuts to women's programs that this government has just made?

I have news for the folks across the aisle. The government must address the needs of all Canadians not just its favourite ones.

Our democratic system has to support the fight for equality rights for all citizens, including: minority language groups, immigrant groups, religious groups, disability groups, same-sex rights groups, and women's groups. They all need the resources to ensure their arguments are heard when their rights are trampled on.

We are approaching the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It should be a cause for celebration. Instead, this government dishonours that by shutting out equality seeking groups. Women were only included in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, and that was only after they marched on Ottawa to demand recognition.

The court challenges program established under the Liberal government was meant to implement this kind of thing. That program was dismantled by the Brian Mulroney Conservatives. It was then reinstated by the former Liberal government. Now, this Conservative government has chopped this program yet again.

What does the court challenges program really do? It seems to me that people think it is a waste of time fighting for people's rights. Let me give some examples.

One example is ESL for immigrant women. In the late eighties the policy of the government was that immigrant women should not receive subsidized English language training because they were not deemed to be going to work, whether they did or not, it did not matter. They did not need English language training. Only men could get training.

It was as a result of a court challenge, which I personally, by the way, was involved with, that women were able to get that turned around.

*Business of Supply*

•(1010)

I have here another charter challenge. The Canada pension plan was extended to include on reserve workers after a status Indian, employed on reserve for many years, was excluded from CPP simply for working on reserve, funded by a court challenges program. This was another aboriginal woman again.

The other example is the rape shield. We all know the famous decision on that one, the protection of therapeutic and confidential files of sexual assault survivors in the context of criminal proceedings. These are only but a very few examples. I have many others if the members opposite are interested. The elimination of the court challenges program is just the beginning of the Conservative plan to cut the legs out from under all equality seeking groups.

The cuts that have just been announced are yet another example of the government's lack of compassion for ordinary Canadians. Women have many roles in today's Canada and face many problems of discrimination and violence. The government has to be there to protect. It has to be there for the people of Canada. Instead, the government guts the funding to equality seeking groups that help raise awareness and fight discrimination.

We are saddled with a minister who will not rule out the possibility that Status of Women Canada might wind up on the Conservative chopping block. Does the minister not see the important role this agency serves in promoting gender equality and the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada? If, as she has shown so far, she is not prepared to fight for Canadian women, she should resign today.

My colleagues were taken aback, as I was, to hear the minister say:

Our government is not a government that just keeps institutions alive in any of its areas...just for the sake of keeping an institution alive.

What planet is she living on? Maybe it is Pluto. Her attitude is offensive to all Canadian women struggling for decent affordable housing, a decent income and retirement years free from poverty. The minister has no heart in this case and no clout.

The minister says that money spent on women's programs can be farmed out to other departments. The other solution is to hide the problem. By mainstreaming responsibilities, she will be ensuring that no one is responsible for guaranteeing women's equality rights, rights guaranteed to them under the Constitution. When nobody is responsible, there is no accountability.

Without a full department under a real minister, the rights of women under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will be non-existent. That is what the Status of Women Canada is, which is why it is so important that it be preserved and supported as a lead agency for all government departments in the ongoing quest for equality for the women of Canada.

The knowledge and experience that it has gained in such areas as pay equity, gender based analysis, just name it, must not be sacrificed on the altar of the REAL Women ideology. Canadian women are still marginalized within key political, social and legal institutions. These are still the realities of today. They must have a strong and independent women's movement to promote recommen-

dations in support of women's rights. We must have that to support equality before the law, an adequate standard of living, to fight for meaningful employment and access to justice.

The government must demonstrate leadership and vision on women's equality on all those issues and many more and it must increase the women's budget and make it sustainable, not cut it.

The government must ensure that core funding is available to sustain day to day operations of women's groups. This is what is demanded and this is what is necessary. Instead of this, the President of the Treasury Board says that the government is cutting fat. For the Conservatives, parental leave is fat, affordable housing is fat and women's health is fat.

As we all know, we established the National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health all cross Canada, which was never done before and did not exist. I guess the present government considers the research centres of excellence to be fat. I guess the ESL for immigrant women that I mentioned earlier, which, under a charter challenge, were given the right to access programs, is fat.

•(1015)

The Prime Minister says that Canadian men and women of the armed services coming home in coffins is the price we must pay for bringing freedom and equality to Afghani women. Meanwhile, his government is slashing spending on hundreds of programs upon which Canadian women depend for an improved quality of life. He is prepared to leave them voiceless.

Does anyone follow the logic of committing military force to protect the rights of Afghani women while, at the same time, slashing spending on programs designed to promote and protect the rights of Canadian women? I certainly cannot.

We need to further strengthen women's rights to equality and security of the person, not weaken them as the minority Conservative government is doing. The Conservatives are simply caving in to the pressure of right wing radical groups, such as REAL Women, that believe a woman's place is in the home, barefoot in the kitchen.

Women's groups still have a long battle ahead to achieve equality in this country. We are not there. The fight is a huge one. Women in this country were well on their way until the present minority government came along and removed equality from the national agenda altogether.

Liberal governments, on the other hand, are known for their commitment to women's equality. Building on the Liberal achievements from 1993 to 1994, the former Liberal government continued to take action. The following are only some of the things it achieved: first, Parliament established the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in September 2004, which the Conservative government tried to eliminate at the beginning of this Parliament.

*Business of Supply*

In October 2005, an expert panel was created to provide advice and options to strengthen accountability mechanisms to advance gender based analysis and gender equality issues.

In 2000, parental benefits were extended to one year. National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health and the Institute for Gender and Health were created to work on health policy issues unique to women.

Thirty-two million dollars were committed on an annual basis to the national crime prevention initiative and \$7 million were committed to the family violence initiative. Of that money, \$1 million over four years is being provided to address violence against aboriginal women.

In the fall of 2005, trafficking in persons was added as an offence to the Immigration and Refugee Act, Bill C-49.

In response to the sisters in spirit proposal, the Liberal government provided \$5 million over five years to the Native Women's Association of Canada. These funds support NWAC's work with other aboriginal women's organizations and the federal government on activities aimed at ending violence against aboriginal women.

To help make post-secondary education more affordable for lower and middle income Canadians, \$2.1 billion over five years were committed to improving student financial assistance. There were \$1.3 billion over five years committed to improving settlement and integration services for new immigrants to Canada.

Budget 2005 ensured that senior women would benefit from a \$2.7 billion increase over two years to the guaranteed income supplement and a \$15 million increase to the new horizons for seniors program.

Despite the progress that we have made, women still only make 71¢ for every dollar a male earns in Canada. The government, in conjunction with women's organizations, must deal with the growing problem of women's economic security.

The National Council on Welfare research shows that women, especially lone parents, stay in poverty longer than others. Poverty costs all Canadians in many ways: increased health care costs, social disintegration and associated crime, untapped potential and labour market activities.

Women are still disadvantaged by the employment insurance program. The program was supposed to be reviewed to assess the inequities for women. Still today, women are less likely to qualify and less likely to get full benefits. Part time workers, mostly women, are excluded. Maternity and parental benefits are least accessible to those mothers who need it the most.

• (1020)

Senior women and caregivers are among those most severely at risk of poverty. The old age security and the GIS benefits are below the poverty line and do not factor in actual costs of living, such as rent in Toronto.

EI must be reformed. Hours needed to qualify must be reduced. Self-employed women must be able to contribute and qualify for maternity and parental benefits.

CPP is very important for senior women as well. This is another part that is based on employment but could be interrupted because of violence, child rearing and caregiving. This affects women in a totally different way than it affects men. Taking time out is something that affects women.

The poverty level of seniors is increasing. Unpaid work for women is a major cause of poverty, as I mentioned earlier, because of having to take time out. Caregivers of today are the poor seniors of tomorrow. Women making 71¢ for every dollar made by men is not acceptable. That has to change.

The way we structure the CPP has to change to allow women to deal with taking time out for caregiving, as we do when we have children, because, quite frankly, they are the backbone of our nation. They are holding up the nation right now and are saving us billions of dollars in caregiving. However, because they are pitching in they will pay the price when they are seniors and that is not acceptable.

Increased education levels for women have not changed and this is appalling.

The report from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women clearly shows that the current system does not work.

We need new pay equity legislation. The Liberal Party committed to introducing this legislation in the House but the Conservative government's response to the standing committee, which basically says that it will not introduce pay equity legislation, is further proof that the present government is dead set against equality for women. It has chosen to keep in place an archaic system that has not worked for the last 30 years and has refused to introduce pay equity legislation that would give women some semblance of income security. It is quite obvious that the government does not intend to respect and promote women's human rights. That is yet another clear reason why it is so important to ensure the ongoing federal funding for advocacy groups that defend women's rights.

The government's response to gender based analysis is that it will make sure it is adhered to but it is not prepared to put in place a process or legislation to ensure its use by every department, especially the Department of Finance and other departments that have traditionally resisted integrating gender based analysis of all programs into their systems, which would address the issues of inequalities. This could be identified up front before policies are made and before they impact on women in a negative manner. This is another area that the government completely refuses to act on. We are supposed to trust it on everything but it will eventually get rid of the Status of Women. It seems that it is on the chopping block and that will completely obliterate women's rights.

With respect to pay equity, it is absolutely unacceptable that pay equity is not part of the government's program. When we were in government, we committed to bringing in legislation because the departments were not prepared to function. The only place where we were successful was at CIDA and maybe one other ministry. We actually led the way in training the World Bank with respect to gender based analysis because we had the expertise in the Status of Women Canada department. However, we are not able to use that expertise in our own departments because there is no will to force it. We were prepared to push that with legislation but the present government has refused to do that.

I am proud to inform the House that the Conservatives received only 18% of the vote in my riding of Beaches—East York. My voters understood what the Conservatives would do if they ever came into power. These latest budget cuts demonstrate that my constituents were right when they concluded that the Conservatives were most definitely not fit to govern.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** What a meanspirited speech, totally meanspirited.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Yes, it is a meanspirited government when it goes after children, youth and women. It has a surplus of \$13 billion which means, of course, that it has to cut services because, my goodness, it does not have the money to pay for them. This is a very sad day indeed.

•(1025)

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and address a number of the comments made by the member opposite.

Maybe that is how campaigning looks in Beaches—East York, but it is fearmongering, plain and simple, going door to door and casting aspersions. I do not know how long that is going to work for that member. I just do not know. The picture she paints of the government is simply not true. The facts do not meld with what she has said. It is just pure fearmongering. Obviously that is what Liberal polls are showing: that this is the latest tactic, the tactic of the week.

Let us ask ourselves this. The member talked about what the government is doing and she cast all kinds of aspersions. Whose interests did the previous Liberal government take care of? It took care of Liberals. That is exactly what the sponsorship scandal was all about. Everyone watching today at home will know. They will remember the envelopes full of cash stuffed under the table in Montreal, Liberals taking care of their friends, Liberal insiders.

What did Canadians think about that? We are talking about millions of dollars, money that could have gone to support programs for women, money that could have supported programs for first nations, money that could have supported our seniors.

What did Canadians think of the Liberal sponsorship scandal? What did Canadians think of Liberals taking care of Liberals? Canadians unceremoniously dumped the Liberal Party from power. The member for Beaches—East York talked about her plurality, but that may change.

### *Business of Supply*

What are we on this side of the House doing? We are providing tax savings for all Canadians. We are giving money directly to parents to benefit their children, to families instead of it to advocacy groups. I would like to ask the member, given that this government—

**An hon. member:** You increased the income tax.

**An hon. member:** Nothing about women.

**Mr. Dave Batters:** We put \$13.2—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. We do have a lot of people trying to get in and the member has already used up a couple of minutes.

The member for Beaches—East York.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, the member is throwing a lot of stuff in there. Let me set a few things straight. First, I do not do fearmongering door to door. I am very proud of that. You can check that in my riding. You can go door to door. I do not run dirty campaigns.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The member for Beaches—East York has a couple of times already started saying “you” this and “you” that.

Could the member please sit down while I am talking?

The hon. member should not be using the second person. She has done it a number of times and I have hesitated to interrupt her, but I can only listen to it for so long. The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

•(1030)

**Hon. Maria Minna:** That is right, Mr. Speaker, and I will simply say that I do not, and I am not even going to go there any more.

Quite frankly, those members are not prepared to speak about the real issues. All they are going to is fearmongering. They are going through stuff from before. I am not going to go to the smear stuff. They are not prepared to address the real issues. They are afraid to talk about women's issues. There was no mention of what they are planning to do. I think it is despicable that they are going down to the level of the gutter, quite frankly, instead of addressing the issues we are trying to address today.

I cannot believe that the member is actually referring to and being proud of the \$1,200. The government actually cut the supplement for children under seven from the poorest families. The government increased taxes for the poorest families and then taxed the \$1,200 it is putting into their hands. These families will get a lot less than families with higher incomes. The poorest people will get about \$585 or so whereas people in the upper income group will end up getting something closer to \$900. That does not even begin to create an early education and child care program in this country.

We are the last country in the world to have such a program. Most progressive countries have a true early education program. The Conservative government is not even interested in discussing real issues today.

*Business of Supply*

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would certainly agree with the hon. member when she says the Conservatives are afraid to address the real issues as they relate to the status of women. The government has a pretty awful record from what we have seen over the last couple of days, with a billion dollars in cuts.

I would like to ask the hon. member about the record of her own government. The Liberal government's record is nothing to write home about. For the past five years when the Liberals were in power they made no significant increases to the Status of Women budget.

Also, the Liberals failed to introduce pay equity legislation. There was a massive two year pay equity task force review. There were wide consultations and a 500 page report. The Liberal government did nothing to move on that very important task force report, which would have brought in new legislation to ensure that women get equal pay for work of equal value. Why did the hon. member's government do nothing on that score?

The Liberals again failed when it came to child care. The former Liberal government had 13 years to bring in legislation around child care. Nothing happened.

I think it is very interesting to have this debate today, because it is about a record. I would ask the hon. member to look at her own government's record when it was in power. She will see that women's equality actually decreased, not increased, under the Liberal government's watch. What is the member's response to that?

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, when the task force report on pay equity came in, the government made a commitment to introduce pay equity legislation. Actually, the hon. member's party knocked us out of power and therefore we were not able to do that. Maybe she needs to report that.

On early education and child care, again, we tried in 2000 with \$2.1 billion on the table and we could not get the provinces to come onside. Finally, in 2005 we were able to, after much negotiation and \$5 billion and basically with conditions saying that the provinces would not get the money otherwise. It took 13 years and we finally got the provinces to sign. Even with that, the province of New Brunswick, headed by a Conservative, was still hedging and it was only an agreement in principle.

The Liberal government did have in place a national program before that party knocked the Liberal government out. That program is still in place. The Conservative government intends to cut it in 2007. Had we been there, that program might have had a chance to actually survive a few years and take root.

With all due respect, we do not have much to apologize for.

**Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important debate from a justice perspective also, because we have just seen the cutting of the court challenges program.

I know that the member for Beaches—East York was involved in an early court challenges program that helped the status of women in this country.

I know also that the Law Commission of Canada, something that was established by Parliament, has just been cut by this government. It is not a funding project. It is a statute of this Parliament, the law

commission, and that justice minister and his supposedly accountable government are choosing to ignore a statute of Parliament. The government is eliminating something that can only be eliminated with another law from this Parliament.

The justice minister is supposed to be accountable. Here he has to respond to law commission reports, some of which are about senior women. He has a duty to do that. That is what the statute says. What does the government do? Cut it.

I want to ask this member how she feels about the cutting of both the law commission and also the court challenges program and how that affects women.

• (1035)

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, what it tells me first of all is that the Conservative government does not believe in citizens being able to fight for their rights and defend themselves under laws that are made by governments.

We have a three-branch governance in this country. We have the parliamentary system with Parliament, the executive branch and the judiciary. The judiciary is there for a reason. The charter challenges program was there to support the most vulnerable citizens of this country in being able to fight for their rights.

The law commission is absolutely fundamental. It was very fundamental in helping us to develop the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to develop some of the rights that we now enjoy in the Constitution. It is there to vet our laws and to encourage and guide. I cannot believe that the government would get rid of the law commission, which, as my colleague said, is a statute.

As I said earlier, on charter challenges, these were immigrant women who were not able to get ESL. I mentioned that earlier. I will not go into it again, but many charter challenges have been made.

**Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I noticed in the hon. member's speech that she neglected to mention a very positive initiative that the government has brought forward to help all women across Canada.

The government does not support elitist programs. We want to reach out to everyone. In particular, there is our child care program, which has delivered benefits to all Canadian families. I know the hon. member will talk about her party's alternative, but since the Liberals had 13 years in government and never implemented it, one has a hard time taking it realistically.

I want to ask the hon. member why she does not support a program that helps all Canadian families and all Canadian women, helping them to raise and support their children.



*Business of Supply*

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, I have said many times that the \$1,200 as income support under the child tax credit is absolutely no problem. It is not an early education and child care program. It does not help all women in Canada. In fact, it hurts the poorest women in this country. As I said, the child supplement was cut and the Conservatives increased the taxes. The \$1,200 does not provide any infrastructure for early education and child care. It actually does not help at all. It cannot be called a universal program.

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

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, I am opposed to the motion brought forward by the member for Beaches—East York, first of all because of her misleading use of the facts.

However, before I proceed, I want the House and all Canadians to know that neither I nor any member of this new Conservative government believes that all Canadian women by nature are weak, frail or vulnerable. They are strong, determined and industrious individuals who want a chance to contribute to their families and their communities and succeed in their ambitions and dreams.

Society will have those who will need the help of others and this government will be there for them, but this government will not characterize all Canadian women as the frail and the vulnerable. We will recognize their abilities and vision and enable them to take charge of their lives and realize their full participation as Canadians.

This government has gone further to help women fully participate in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada than the previous Liberal government. We have gone beyond the talk and have taken action.

We all know that women account for over 50% of Canada's population. Women are single mothers, stay at home mothers, presidents, CEOs, business owners, students, and farmers, and the list goes on.

If anyone questions our commitment we have for women, they need only look at our actions. Contrary to what the member opposite would like, actions speak much louder than words.

For example, statistics show that nearly half of all Canadian small and medium sized enterprises have at least one female owner, and since 1997, on average, women have started small and medium sized businesses at twice the rate of men.

In budget 2006, we took action to benefit these businesses. We raised the threshold for small business income eligible for the reduced federal tax rate from \$300,000 to \$400,000. Also, we reduced the 12% rate for eligible small business income to 11.5% in 2008 and 11% in 2009.

All new Canadians, including immigrant women, are contributing to society. I am proud that this government has provided for increased settlement funding, funding that will enable these women to more quickly become part of the wider Canadian community.

Traditionally, aboriginal women have played key roles in their communities, but it is unacceptable that Canada's record over the past decade on aboriginal women is shameful. Canada, in October of

2005, was cited by the United Nations committee on human rights as failing to adequately address the high rate of violence against aboriginal women. These women and their children deserve safe communities where their economic, social and cultural lives can flourish.

I have met with first nations, Métis and Inuit women's organizations and their message was clear. They are looking for a government that will deliver change. We must continue to support those in the aboriginal community, like Sisters in Spirit, who are taking action.

Aboriginal women are strong leaders in their communities, leaders such as Tracy Gauthier, the Chief of the Mississauga of Scugog Island in my riding of Durham, who has ensured that the needed social and child care needs of her community are being met. Also, there is Leslie Lounsbury, who started the first ever youth magazine in Winnipeg. She is seen as an inspiration for aboriginal women across Canada and, indeed, for all women across Canada. These women are vibrant reminders of how vitally important they are to their communities and how women can make a difference if given a chance.

I would also like to remind the House of the measures this government has taken to strengthen Canada's response to the unique needs of the victims of human trafficking, victims who are often women and children.

● (1040)

In the past these women and children were treated not as victims but as criminals to be detained and deported. The Canadian Council for Refugees has been calling for policy changes for several years under the previous Liberal government. This government responded within months of taking office.

As we move into this new century and as the diversity of Canada grows, women are faced with increasingly complex challenges: how to invest in their education, whether to start a family, caring for their elderly family members, or managing the time demands of this new era. The key to helping women and families is to provide the opportunities and choice.

We have implemented new programs that support families such as the new universal child care benefit. In 2007 we will be creating an additional 25,000 new child care spaces across the country each year. These measures reflect the government's commitment to support both women and men as parents in the workforce. We will ensure that all the policies and programs of the government reflect our commitment to the equality for all Canadians.

*Business of Supply*

As the House knows, Status of Women Canada is the federal government agency that promotes the full participation of women in the economic, social and cultural life of our country. I am pleased to inform the House that yesterday the terms and conditions for the women's program were renewed with a mandate focused on achieving results for Canadian women. The women's program will continue to assist organizations such as Single Women in Motherhood Training Program in London, Ontario, which works to help young single mothers to get out of the cycle of poverty and gain access to education, training and employment.

We will also support the Community MicroSkills Development Centre in Etobicoke, Ontario, which is designed to improve the economic and social opportunities for immigrant, racial minority and low income women in that area.

The new terms and conditions are consistent with our commitment to accountability and value for money. Canadian women know the value of a dollar. They know what good use of hard earned money means.

The government wants to make a real difference in Canadian women's lives. We know they want accountability. We know they will test our results in that area because they have to budget every day and every week for their families, and we will meet that challenge.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the entire government, the new Conservative government, to the full participation of women in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada.

The government was elected on a promise to deliver efficiency and accountability. The government was elected to deliver change. The government was elected to stand up for all Canadians and not marginalize any sector within the Canadian population. The government will deliver and we will deliver so that we make a difference in the lives of Canadians, Canadian women, Canadian children, Canadian seniors, all Canadians in the future as we move forward.

● (1045)

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the minister. However, the mandate of the Status of Women is to promote gender equality and full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the country. By doing that, it means we are investing in women's issues. We are ensuring that surveys are done. We are doing work on human trafficking. All of them are very important issues.

Given the fact that there is a \$5 million cut in the budget of the Status of Women, contrary to an independent non-partisan panel that recommended the Status of Women should have an increase in its funding, could the minister explain what the cuts are, how will she deal with that issue and how it will impact Canadian women?

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that the government recognizes, knows and does not have to be told that women are equal. We start from that premise. We do not have to consistently tell women they are not equal, they are vulnerable and, therefore, they need more surveys, more research and more studies. We want to deliver action.

Women across Canada will support the \$5 million cut. It is not acceptable that it takes 31¢ to deliver \$1 to a women's organization. Consequently, we also know that this 31¢ is not always going, as it had in the past, directly into the hands of women or organizations that will directly help women in their communities, in their families and in their daily lives.

The \$5 million cut is through efficiencies. For example, we found locations where Status of Women offices have been renting separate space, when accommodations were available in those cities within federal government buildings already being rented. These are very simple, common sense efficiency cuts that we know we can find without affecting our direct assistance to the women across the country.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for the Status of Women has said that actions speak louder than words. Let us look at that. Why are all the Conservative chairs of the committees of the House of Commons male? What does that say about the government's record?

As the minister responsible for the Status of Women, why has she cut 40% of the annual operating budget of the Status of Women? She said that those were administrative things and that they did not affect programming. If that is correct, why did the money not go back into direct programming? We have not seen any increase in programming, so there is a real contradiction in the government claiming that it supports women's equality.

Why was the court challenges program cut, if the government supports women's equality? Why was a \$13.2 billion surplus applied to the debt and not reinvested, ensuring that those programs reach women? Finally, when she talks about the Status of Women, why does the minister not defend her own department when she says that the government is not a government that keeps institutions alive just for the sake of keeping it alive? What does she mean by that? Will this department now disappear?

● (1050)

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Mr. Speaker, only a member of the NDP thinks the solution to everything is more money. Conservatives and all Canadian women believe that we need the resources, but we need the resources to do the job effectively. Before one can do a job effectively, one has to identify what needs to be done. Therefore, we have now committed, under the new terms and conditions, that the funds for women's programs will be directed more effectively to action that will make a real difference in Canadian women's lives.

I reiterate, Canadian women are Canadian citizens. Canadian women are Canadian taxpayers. Canadian women are part of the Canadian business community. Cutting down the deficit will impact and benefit them as equally as Canadian men. We recognize the role that the Status of Women can potentially play. It is the programs that are important. It is also important that the action benefits Canadian women and makes a difference in their lives.

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**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I must commend the members of the committee, particularly the minister in charge of the Status of Women for her work, for their work in considering the issues facing women now in Canada.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women was struck for the first time in the 39th Parliament in 2004. In the last several months we have begun to approach a wider spectrum of issues facing women in our society today.

As members of the House, we bring forth varying opinions on issues from accountability measures for gender equality, to pay equity funding, parental benefits for self-employed workers, and the importance of providing all Canadian women with equal opportunity. As our minister has stated, Canadian women are Canadian citizens and they contribute in a major way to the Canadian economy and social aspects of our country.

The committee continues to expand and does not limit itself to a parameter of issues facing women, as all are important when they deter from one's capacity or capability, and we are making giant strides to explore, research and make change.

More recent, we brought forth discussions on the topic of human trafficking, or as some refer to it, modern day slavery. Many people may not be aware that Canada is a receiver of trafficked persons as well as a transit country for trafficking victims intended for the United States. The key aspect that distinguishes trafficking from other types of migration is the aspects of coercion and exploitation. Confiscation of travel documents, violence, threats to harm family members and debt bondage are used as tactics of intimidation and control over trafficked women. In the case of trafficking, the consent of a victim is irrelevant because of the coercion. The majority of transnational victims are trafficked into commercial, sexual exploitation.

Trafficking of women and children is the third largest illegal money making venture. According to Interpol, a trafficked woman can bring in between \$75,000 and \$250,000 a year for her captors, while costing as little as \$1,500 to purchase.

The connections between the demands for prostitution, legalization of sex work and the trafficking in and exploitation of women are being explored. In countries, where sex work and prostitution are legalized, there is an increased demand for the services of trafficked women. This is unacceptable. This is the difference between our government and members opposite. We do not support the legalization of prostitution.

Our new government has recognized the need to respond and address human trafficking. Countries around the world are battling the same issue. We cannot turn a blind eye to the severity of cruelty to women in our own backyards. This is a woman's issue. This is a worldwide issue. We are partnering with organizations such as the Ukrainian-Canadian Congress in Canada to share ideas, stories and legislation, so, together, human trafficking will no longer be tolerated on our soil.

In the last couple of years the RCMP has produced a video to train officers on how to handle situations in human trafficking, which clearly shows that it is aware of this problem. Committees, people,

organizations and NGOs are all getting involved to put a stop to this crime.

The motion put forward before the House is incorrect when it states that "the House objects to the government's partisan and discriminatory cuts in federal support for women's programs and services". We take the issue of human trafficking very seriously.

Earlier this spring the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced new measures to help victims of human trafficking. First, victims of human trafficking will receive temporary resident permits for up to 120 days so they can recover from their ordeal and decide if they want to help in the prosecution of their traffickers. Second, the government will give these victims medical support and access to counselling services to help them begin to recover.

Does this sound like a government that is cutting funding for programs and services? I think not. Under the leadership of the minister, the status of women is going in the right direction for all Canadian women.

Human trafficking is a horrific crime and a very serious issue. It is an issue that affects women and children. Therefore, I strongly disagree with the motion put forward by the member opposite, which suggests that the Conservative government fails to recognize the many roles of women in Canadian society and the importance of providing all Canadian women with equal opportunity.

• (1055)

Equal opportunity has to do with what the minister just previously said, building business, supporting women, putting money into programs for single parents, and action plans. Not spending 30¢ on the dollar toward those action plans but putting that whole dollar directly toward women's organizations. That is exactly what our minister is talking about today and that is what we are proud to talk about on this side of the House.

I also strongly disagree with the member for Beaches—East York who stated at the status of women committee:

If we deal with only trafficking, which is a small slice of the real issue—an important slice, no question at all—we will not address the real issue, and again we will be diverted to something that is really nice and sexy. It's high-profile, it will get attention and what have you, but it won't address the core problem, it won't.

In view of the fact that on April 6 there was a trafficking ring taken down right in Ontario, this is something that the member opposite should be very aware of and be really ready to study. This is the direction that our government wants to take. We believe, on this side of the House, that there is nothing nice and sexy about abuse, period.

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I conclude by saying that we recognize that the many roles of women in our society unfortunately include victims, and by identifying and assisting them with support, we are providing them with equal opportunity. I am proud to be part of a government that continues to explore albeit traditional issues facing women but also those who fall outside of the traditional box. We are working to expand and set precedents.

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find it reprehensible that the member feels comfortable taking something that was discussed at committee, which I said, out of context. I did not mean sexy in that negative context. I was trying to be facetious in the sense that we needed to discuss also and primarily the economic security of women which underpins some of that issue. She seems to have chosen to quote only a part of it, which shows to me how seriously the government takes this issue.

The issue of trafficking, which is a heinous practice, does not take away from the fact that economic security for women underpins what is going on, whether it is trafficking, prostitution or any other situation. We need to address and tackle the underpinning situations. For instance, 36% of female lone parents are at the poverty rate, 38.4% of unattached women under 65 are at the poverty rate, and unattached senior women are at even a much higher risk.

These are real figures of economic security issues within Canada. There are situations, some of which I mentioned earlier, with respect to unemployment insurance biases, with respect to the Canada pension plan, and with respect to women who are now caregivers.

The member opposite is really skewing words. The issue is the cuts to the Status of Women, and not that we do not agree with trafficking. Of course it is something we need to address, but let us deal with the bottom line.

● (1100)

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I have heard many things over the past few days. One day the member for Beaches—East York writes that we cut funding to over 500 shelters and the next day on CPAC she says women's hospitals are funded by the women's program. It goes on and on. How can she tell women that spending over 30¢ to deliver \$1 is good for Canadian women?

On this side of the House, we are going to be studying more the economic challenges of women. We have divided the Status of Women and the presentations into two parts. It was ruled by a vote that first we would study human trafficking until Christmas, then following that, we would study all these other economic issues, something that we are very concerned about.

The member opposite has taken this opportunity to stand on the Liberal bandwagon and make misleading statements. Canadians are not listening to that. Canadians want solutions to problems and so we are discussing problems and preparing an action plan that will solve those problems.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is the vice-chair of the status of women committee. I was surprised that she chose to only focus on one issue. Maybe she feels that she cannot defend anything else that her government has done.

I want to come back to the pay equity task force report. When the committee received that report last year, all parties on the committee voted to support the pay equity task force report and the need for new legislation because the existing regime is very ineffective. It is a complaint-based model. It is impossible for women to gain pay equity under the existing system. So very clearly, the report laid out the need for new legislation, which her committee adopted.

However, recently, the Conservative minister has now come back with his response to the committee, saying that he was sorry, he was not going to do that. It was not needed. The government is going to have more mediation, more education, more resources, but it is not actually going to adopt these recommendations.

I would like to ask the member if she agrees that the pay equity task force report should be implemented and new legislation is required, as voted by her committee last year?

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** Mr. Speaker, indeed, pay equity is a very top priority to women all across our nation and it is a top priority to this government and to our minister in charge.

The recommendation was that new legislation come forth. Upon close examination over a number of months, clearly, if exercised, the government could simply say no to tabling pay equity, but right now we decided to work with the legislation that is there.

The minister has put in supports to support the current legislation, to put in supervisors who will be able to go into businesses and take a look and see if things are really happening. We do not want to waste taxpayers' money. We do not want to reinvent the wheel.

Pay equity is extremely important to this government. We believe in equality for all people, especially for women as we are speaking, and as our minister previously stated.

Having said that, we are looking at a very common sense program that supports pay equity for women and makes things work, and will make it work faster, instead of taking 13 years like the previous Liberal government did.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, October is almost here, and October means not only Hallowe'en but Women's History Month. Unfortunately, as we will show, October 2006 will be a sombre month for women in Canada and Quebec.

Since 1992, Canada has celebrated Women's History Month annually in October. The highlight of the month comes on October 18, Persons Day, which commemorates the historic "persons" case in 1929, a decisive victory in Canadian women's struggle for equality.

This year is also marked by an important anniversary, the 25th anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. How can the government of this Prime Minister act in this way on the eve of this historic anniversary? It makes no sense.

Do I have to remind this House that social and human progress has been made largely through the efforts of women's movements? Women's struggle has always been humankind's struggle. Women have demanded rights not just for themselves, but also for children and for men the world over. I will give you a few examples of this.

Access to education: I do not think that education here in Canada is just for girls; it is for everyone. There is also women's right to vote, the right to own property, freedom of choice, the adoption of pay equity legislation in Ontario and Quebec, the institution of public day care and the introduction of an outstanding accessibility program in Quebec. Women in Quebec even helped set up a department of the environment under Bourassa. There again, the environment is for everyone. Those are but a few examples.

For over a century, women's struggles have led to major advances. Women have helped change social, economic and cultural conditions and, as a result, have enabled women to become full citizens, but they have also made an extraordinary contribution to all humankind.

In Quebec, we also recall milestone events, such as the bread and roses march that took place on May 26, 1995. At the time, women demanded a number of things from the Quebec government, including a tuition fee freeze—which Quebecers now pretty much take for granted and do not want to see changed—more money for scholarships, a minimum wage above the poverty line and at least 1,500 subsidized housing units per year. They sought these things not just for women, but for everyone. I feel I need to clarify this, because people sometimes think that women's movements fight only for women's rights. That is not true; they fight for everyone's rights.

Throughout history, women have demonstrated the true meaning of the words solidarity, equality and justice. These are more than just words; they are concrete actions.

Women's groups in Quebec also helped found the World March of Women, a worldwide network of 6,000 feminist organizations in 163 countries and territories fighting poverty and violence, especially as they affect women and children.

Women have gradually been taking on what has become a crucial role in Canada and Quebec's political, economic and social landscape. But the fight is not over yet. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we are far from achieving equality. There is still much work to do.

• (1110)

Life for women in Canada is far from perfect and the situation remains worrying. In a report commissioned by the federal government dated December 2005, entitled *Equality for Women: Beyond the Illusion*, the Expert Panel on Accountability Mechanisms for Gender Equality sounded the alarm on the situation for women in Canada.

The report stated that women are underrepresented in the federal, provincial and municipal governments. This is not news; just look

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around this House. Less than 25% of the members are women. Girls are more vulnerable to sexual assault against minors; some 80% of victims are girls; 51.6% of single mothers are poor; 35% of single women live in poverty. Visible minority women are more often victims of job discrimination. New immigrants, 24 to 40, with a degree who work full time earn \$14,000 less than people born in Canada and Quebec. We know that full-time salaried women in all categories earn 71% of what their male colleagues earn.

These figures speak volumes about the work that still needs to be done, at a time when this government is cutting funding for Status of Women Canada. During the election campaign, on January 18, 2006, the Prime Minister signed a letter in which he said:

Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality.

If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada.

You can see where I am going with this. Signing this declaration and making such cuts does not make sense. It defies logic. On September 18, 2006, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Justice of Canada denied the request of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to have the government introduce legislation on pay equity. This request was based on a lengthy report by the Pay Equity Task Force tabled in May 2004 after three years of work. This report found that the current legislative provision—section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act—was insufficient and that what was needed was federal legislation on pay equity, such as is currently on the books in Quebec and Ontario.

On Monday, September 25, with a surplus of over \$13 billion, the Conservative government announced cuts of \$5 million over two years to the \$24 million budget for Status of Women Canada, representing just over 20% of its annual budget, excluding funds allocated to specific programs.

What has Status of Women Canada done to deserve these cuts?

Status of Women Canada focuses on three areas: improving women's well-being and economic autonomy, eliminating violence against women and children, and advancing women's human rights. We support their mandate. It is a huge undertaking.

This government has made cuts after the Prime Minister promised in the election campaign to support women's human rights and to take immediate and concrete action.

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What more can I say? I just do not understand it and I leave it to the members to come to their own conclusions. On Monday, September 25, this government also abolished the court challenges program.

• (1115)

Not only has this Prime Minister cut funds to programs that are already underfunded but, in addition, he is eliminating citizens' means of defending themselves. I would like to quote Mrs. Shelagh Day of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, who denounced this odious action, with just cause. She said, and I quote:

This program was the only means available to women to have their constitutional rights to equality recognized. The right to equality does not mean anything in Canada if women and other Canadians who are victims of discrimination cannot exercise them.

I would like to remind my Conservative party colleagues that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended, in item 356 of its report, that Canada:

—find ways for making funds available—

And not that it take away funding.

—find ways for making funds available for equality test cases—

I would like to remind this House once again that the Prime Minister signed a declaration whereby he undertook to protect and support women's human rights and to take more—the word “more” is there—immediate and concrete action. The government has refused to implement legislation on pay equity, has cut funding to the Canadian Feminist Alliance and has abolished the court challenges program.

In regard to the specific steps taken by this government—yes, these are specific steps—people are entitled to wonder and now they can pass judgment on these kinds of specific steps. They can pass judgment not only on the steps but also on the value of the Prime Minister's signature and, by extension, his word. Here we see that the right-wing ideology innate in this government takes precedence over its promises. That is too bad and very sad. As the old adage goes, a leopard cannot change its spots.

A number of women whom I have met today think that the Prime Minister was hiding his true intentions during the election campaign. In view of his January 18 statement, many women are telling me that they feel deceived.

During question period, we have heard the Prime Minister and his ministers offer all kinds of explanations, utterly preposterous ones in my view, in response to our reproaches. Nothing, however, absolutely nothing can change the facts and the truth about the incredible and unacceptable disparity between what the Prime Minister promised and the steps he has taken since the last election.

In view of the current budgetary situation, in view of the \$13 billion surplus—we must remember—nothing could justify such cuts to Status of Women Canada or the actual abolition of the court challenges program. What the Prime Minister should have done instead, in order to show his good faith, is what the Standing Committee on the Status of Women asked: increase the budget of the women's program. That would have been a very good step.

The people are never wrong, but they can be wronged. Once again, this has been proved in spades.

What will be the effects of these cuts? First, it will likely be hard for Status of Women Canada to operate, especially as it was already underfunded. This agency is important to the women's movements. The government did not actually cut the women's program; it cut Status of Women Canada. In case this government does not realize it, in order for a program to operate, it needs someone to manage it. So if the administration is slashed, how can the agency be managed? It is a non sequitur.

• (1120)

Any organization can be improved of course. But improved does not mean cut. To the contrary, improved means more funding and studies of how it operates in order to improve it.

I think that what is happening now to Status of Women will slow women's progress toward real equality from the standpoint of physical safety, economic security, and democratic and political rights. Whether intentional or not, when there are cuts, groups cease to exist, in this case the groups that advocate on behalf of women.

I have been closely involved in international policy and am therefore able to say that after having tarnished 50 years of Canadian diplomacy on the international scene—I saw it when I was in Lebanon—the Prime Minister now apparently wants to destroy more than 40 years of Quebec and Canadian feminism.

As an aside, I would like to speak for a moment about the word “feminism”, an over-used word that it has become a catch-all. Some people have only negative things to say about feminism. What is feminism? Feminism is to believe in the equality of men and women and to seek that equality. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you believe in gender equality, and you are therefore a feminist, like myself, and like everyone else in this House who also believes. To be a feminist is to believe in equality for everyone, including men and women. We should be proud of being feminists. I hope that the Prime Minister is also a feminist. If he believes in gender equality, then he is a feminist.

During question period two days ago, I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women a question regarding these cuts, and she replied:

Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate that the women of Canada made their decision when they elected this new Conservative government and put it into power.

While it is true that Canadian women voted for the Conservative government, they did so based on false representations. That is how I see it. I think that women in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada voted for the Conservative Party because the Prime Minister, on January 28, 2006, signed a document affirming that he would defend the rights of women.

Since I only have a minute left, I will conclude by adding that the women's movement will not be defeated. We believe in peace, equal rights and access to justice for everyone. Long before any of us in this House was born, this country was being built by women who deserve our respect.

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[English]

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite made an eloquent speech. The member has been a real voice for the women of Quebec. I have been so impressed with the work she has done in terms of the human trafficking issue.

We spoke earlier about the human trafficking issue. Perhaps the member expand a little on why it is very important that Status of Women work with this question and address this issue for all Canadian women across Canada. Whether they be in Quebec, Alberta, or Ontario it is a very important issue.

Could the member opposite comment on that please?

● (1125)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, human trafficking is a serious subject.

As my colleague has mentioned, we will be dealing with it at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

It is essential that human trafficking should be dealt with in relation to prostitution. That is also a very important subject that we should be examining.

I would simply like to return to the question. Unfortunately, we are discussing cuts. In committee, surely we will look closely at human trafficking, but there are other groups that can contribute to this issue. Many women's groups are working to combat human trafficking, trafficking in women and children. It is estimated—although I am not certain of this figure—that more than 90% of human trafficking involves women and young girls. These are often women forced into prostitution. That is serious.

If we cut funding intended for people who are fighting against human trafficking, against social injustice and for the rights of women, we cannot make any progress.

We will do great things in committee. I am sure because many members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women are extraordinary women. There are also men there who do excellent work.

However, our role as members of the committee is to support all the women's groups that provide input to us because we are not in the front lines. These women are in the real world and they know the subject well. We must not let them wither and die because they are underfunded or because Status of Women Canada cannot do its work because it is short-staffed due to budget cuts estimated at \$2.5 million per year.

[English]

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I came into the House upset, as everyone will gather from my tone. I am the human rights critic for my party and I find it a sad turn of events to see what is happening to an organization that has fought so hard for so many years to elevate the human rights of women in Canada.

The member opposite might note that there seems to be an art of deflection taking place on the government side. It does not seem to want to talk about the fact that this organization, the Status of

Women, that is being cut has promoted gender equality and full participation of women in the economic and social culture and political life in Canada and focuses on improving women's economic condition.

As we know, the fact is that women are concentrated in the lowest levels of pay in this country. Youth and women account for 83% of the minimum wage workers in our country. The average prepay income for women is just 62% of that of men.

Would the member agree that this is a slap in the face to Canadian women, especially those who have worked so hard to move the women's agenda ahead in this country? To see it happen in a time of historic surpluses is just unconscionable.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Speaker, clearly this is a slap in the face. Since June or July, I have received an enormous number of email messages and calls from women's groups all across Canada. Those women told me about rumours that Status of Women Canada and the women's program would be abolished. There was a great deal of fear.

I asked for a meeting with the Minister responsible for Status of Women Canada so that I could eliminate those concerns, reassure those people and give them the correct story. When I spoke with the minister, I understood that everything was going well; that these were no more than rumours, and that the women need not worry. Status of Women Canada would continue as before—although there had been cuts—and that the only change would be new regulations for the women's program. We have seen that was not the case. There have even been budget cuts of \$5 million.

It is time now to wonder about those famous regulations that will be introduced for the women's program. Personally, that worries me. What kind of regulations will they be? I would like the minister to say more about them. I will be calling her office to get an answer to this question.

Indeed, as my colleague stated, I can only observe that women have been given a slap in the face. It is not a nice expression but I agree with his comment.

● (1130)

[English]

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wanted to say that the Status of Women was actually established in 1971. As the hon. member knows, it was a major catalyst in women getting their rights embedded in the Constitution of 1982. Women were not part of the Constitution at that time and did not have equality.

Since then, through charter challenges there has been a tremendous number of other rights which women have been able to receive. In fact, in the last 10 years there were over 1,200 applications for charter challenges which goes to show that there is still a major need.

Could the member tell me given the cuts, how will that impact on the ability for the Status of Women and for the women of Canada to actually exert their rights in this country?

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[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Speaker, it is clear that having no avenue for asserting one's rights complicates things. Some women may not have enough money to hire a lawyer and pay astronomical sums to defend their rights.

It is an even greater paradox to say that we do not need pay equity legislation, then turn around and cut this program. It makes no sense not to have a law. People who are victims of inequity must prove it. If there is no way to prove it, how can they do so?

I would just like to tell my Liberal colleague that, unfortunately, the Liberal party has no reason to pat itself on the back. When it was in power, what was it waiting for to put more money into the women's program? Let us not forget: that government also had budget surpluses in the billions of dollars. That said, I share my colleague's opinion. She has good reason to feel indignant about what is happening. I would like the government to think twice about what it is doing and reconsider its position, because it cannot be that dogmatic.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I rise in support of the motion, but it is a sad comment that we even need to be debating it. I will give the House a little context.

I had the privilege of serving on the very first parliamentary committee on the status of women. I want to acknowledge the very good work done by the member for Winnipeg North and the member for Vancouver East in making sure that committee became part of the parliamentary standing committees. It was the very first committee on the status of women. It was something for which the NDP had fought long and hard over a number of years. We were very excited about having that committee in place to tackle the very critical issues that were coming before women.

Let us have a little context. Back on January 18, 2006 while campaigning for the job of prime minister, the current Prime Minister signed a pledge which read:

Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality. If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitment to women in Canada.

I wonder how that commitment to women's equality translates into a \$5 million cut to the status of women and how it translates into cuts to programs like court challenges.

On the other hand we have the Liberals. I will talk a fair bit about the very sorry Liberal record. Although I applaud the member for bringing this important motion forward, I question why in the 13 years the Liberals were in government they failed to address the crisis in women's communities from coast to coast to coast.

In Canada 20% of women live in poverty. Senior women face double the poverty rates of men. Shelters and crisis lines have closed from coast to coast to coast. Although some of those are provincial responsibilities, there were cuts in funding that came from the federal government to the provincial governments to fund these critical programs.

Unless people think we escaped international notice, CEDAW, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, in 2003 cited numerous issues that the federal Liberals of the day had failed to address: women's shelters, poverty, aboriginal women not having access to all kinds of services. A very critical piece that the parliamentary committee on the status of women addressed was gender based analysis, how the Liberal government of the day had failed to consider the impact on women of programs and services across the board. We could cite any number of programs and services where the impact on women was not even considered, despite the fact that somebody may have checked a box that said they had looked at how it might impact on women.

One program in particular was the employment insurance program. When the parliamentary committee on the status of women looked at the impact on women on employment insurance, it found that women were disproportionately disallowed when trying to make claims. It found that the number of women who were eligible for maternity benefits was falling.

We had a government that failed to consider the needs of over half the population in this country.

In addition, another body, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, in May 2006 issued a report that talked about making some recommendations around extending the court challenges program to permit funding of challenges with respect to provincial and territorial legislation and policies, provide civil legal aid with regard to economic, social and cultural rights, take into consideration the right of women to work and the need for parents to balance work and family life by supporting care choices through adequate child care services.

We have a current Conservative government that has ripped up the court challenges program and destroyed the child care initiatives that had been signed with provincial governments. However, the Liberal government, when it had the opportunity, failed to enshrine in legislation a national child care act and failed to recognize the recommendations around legal aid that made sure that women and their children had access to legal aid.

During the very good work that the first parliamentary committee on the status of women did, it heard from women from across Canada. There were times when committee members were in tears when they heard the tragedy of the lack of funding for women's organizations and for the women on whom this impacted.

● (1135)

One of the things that came through loudly and clearly in hearing from these women's organizations was the issue of funding. I am going to quote for members from the first report the committee put together:

The Committee has heard that the women's movement has played an important role in keeping equality issues on the public agenda, but that these organizations have been weakened over the past decade as a result of decreased funding as well as a shift away from core/program funding toward project-specific funding.

That was under the Liberal government. Now what we see is the Conservatives further eroding the ability of women's organizations, equality-seeking organizations, to adequately bring forward the needs of women in this country.



*Business of Supply*

Again, I have a quote from a representative of the YWCA of Canada. She said:

The last fifteen years...have seen a marked decline in the visibility of equity issues on the Canadian social agenda. This decline is directly correlated to the significant funding cuts experienced by women's groups in the early 1990s.

As a result of hearing from women across the country, the committee had a unanimous report that went before the government, calling for a 25% increase in core funding to women's organizations. It called for 25% and what the committee recognized was that this amount of money was actually inadequate, but we thought that was a good first step toward ensuring that women's voices were at the table, that women's needs were met across this country, and that women actually had an opportunity to step into their full capacity and be full, active, participating members in our country.

When the committee was looking at its position, we recognized that with a total female population of close to 16 million, the funding disbursed by the women's programs to groups working toward gender equality is less than \$1 per girl and woman. The committee thought that we actually needed \$2 per girl and woman in this country, but we took a more reasonable step at that time by recommending only a 25% increase in core funding. That was not put in place by the Liberal government of the day. Now we have the Conservatives further eroding our ability to have women join their rightful place in this country.

In May 2005, the parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women tabled another report, "Funding Through the Women's Program: Women's Groups Speak Out". I will read three parts from this report for members. The first states:

Many women's organizations today are financially fragile because they depend on a web of unpredictable, short-term targeted project funding.

That is from a brief submitted by the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba.

The brief submitted by the Women's Economic Equality Society states:

Women's organizations have a wealth of knowledge about project-based as well as core operational funding. They should be involved in the design of a new model.

The brief from Danielle Hébert, general coordinator, Fédération des Femmes du Québec, on May 10, 2005, states:

What is needed is mixed funding that better reflects the actual circumstances in which these groups work, by making sure they have the infrastructures they need to carry out their projects.

One of the things we have learned both internationally and domestically is that if we want to make sure that we have successful, effective programs and services, and successful, effective laws that address the needs of the people they are going to have an impact on, we need to have the people at the table.

We had a Liberal government that failed to do this. Now we have a Conservative government that has just cut that \$5 million with no consultation and no debate.

I want to read a statement from the Women's Centre in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. These women are pleading for the Conservative government not to ignore their needs. This is their statement:

As a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the political, social and economic equality of women, the Nanaimo Women's Resources Society opposes the

[Conservative] government cuts. In particular we are concerned with the \$5 million in administrative reductions to Status of Women Canada, and the elimination of the Court Challenges program.

It is disappointing to see federal support for women diminished, particularly after the severe cuts to women's centres throughout British Columbia. Status of Women Canada is the federal body responsible for promoting gender equality in Canada.

To wrap up, I would urge each and every member in the House to support this opposition motion before the House to ensure that women can achieve all they are able to achieve in this country, through having access to programs and services and through having access to the things that make them able to participate in this society in a full and equal way.

● (1140)

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member feels the need to slam and to criticize. Nobody is perfect. Sometimes it takes a few years to get things done, but—

**An hon. member:** Thirteen years.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Yes, but we did a lot of great things in those 13 years. We did not have to lose the child care. We did not have legislation, but we did have an agreement. There was a structure in place for child care in this country. That was established.

On pay equity, we did have the study and we did commit. There is a report to the committee that we would introduce legislation.

We also established Centres of Excellence for Women's Health in this country. We established the court challenges program, which had been cut by the Conservatives and we reinstated. In addition, there were the OAS and GIS income increases.

I am not going to go through the list, because I could go through a very long list of things. What is most important here today, and what I would like the hon. members to share with us, having said all of the things we are saying, is this. The bottom line here is that we have a court challenge program that has been in place for some time, was cut by the previous Conservatives, was reinstated and now is cut again. We also have the cut to the women's program, which therefore will not be able to have the kind of strength it had before.

Could the hon. member tell me exactly what will happen for women in this country without a voice for them at the national level?

● (1145)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, before I answer the second part of the question, I have to address the first part.

Let us just talk about pay equity for a minute. A full-blown consultation process began in 2001 and concluded in 2004. The Liberals had ample time to draft proactive legislation and get that put in place, particularly in the fragile ground that they were operating in as a minority government. They had an opportunity to do that and get it on the table so that women in this country would have equal pay for work of equal value. It was a lost opportunity.

What we see here is Conservatives continuing with a Liberal agenda. What we see here is Conservatives finishing the cuts that the Liberals started. What we are going to see is a worsening of the representation of women in this country. We are going to see an erosion of human rights in this country.

*Business of Supply*

Again, I think it was a lost opportunity on the Liberals' part, but we need to push back on this at this point.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Clearly, Mr. Speaker, program funding for women is not cut and will not be cut. There are no plans to cut that.

Members opposite repeat the same words over and over. But Canadian women are intelligent people. With the past government, when we boil the whole thing down, basically 30¢ on the dollar was used for women's programs. Now Canadian women are looking at this and saying, "Yes, we need to be frugal with our money, and we need to make those precious dollars work". Women are used to budgeting. Women are used to making money work, to making money grow. Now when we look at this, program funding for women is not cut but the action plans are used.

I have a question for the hon. member on pay equity. Pay equity is a very serious thing and is something that members on this side of the House clearly pay very close attention to. In the status of women committee, yes, at that time, the majority of the people, including me, voted for looking at legislation. We looked at it. We decided that what had happened over the last 13 years was that the legislation was there and nothing was done with it.

This minister right now is taking this legislation and making it work. That is another way of making the precious tax dollars be utilized, so would this member not agree that utilizing what we have out there without starting right at point one is a more prudent thing to do? Why start all over again? It is there. Making it work right now is the more prudent thing to do.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, we have heard from women's organizations about how ineffective the current process is. Women are waiting as long as 20 and 30 years to have their pay equity complaints heard. It is unbelievable.

What was recommended in the report was proactive pay equity legislation. The women's organizations in this country, FAFIA, NAWL and a number of others, were prepared to step up to the table and work with the Liberal government of the day. I am sure they would be fully prepared to work with the current government to draft proactive pay equity legislation that would actually address the needs and the inequality of women.

Women earn, on average, 72¢ on the dollar. We cannot continue to have women not take full economic advantage. Surely the Conservatives, who often tout economic performance, should recognize the fact that if women earned as much as men they would actually have more money to generate in the economy. It makes good economic sense and it is a human right.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is very important for us today to put on record and give voice to the concerns of Canadians who are deeply disturbed by the developments of the last couple of days, the decision by the Conservatives to arbitrarily, without any attempt at transparent and democratic government, slash \$1 billion from programs and to in fact allow for another \$13 billion to go straight against the debt.

I hear the Conservatives clapping, and I was hoping the Conservatives would clap again, as they do every time for their \$13.2 billion going against the debt, because we have seen the

display from both sides of this House, with both Liberals and Conservatives vying for who can screw Canadians the most. That is precisely what has been happening in this place over the last few days. It is time, through this debate, that we actually address the impact of those decisions and the costs we are incurring as a result of that kind of imbalanced approach.

There is no one in this House, and including women in this House or women across the country, who does not believe that we should not put some money against our debt. The question is, what is the appropriate balance? Women know more than anyone else that if we put all our money toward paying off a debt such as a mortgage, to the point where our kids go to school hungry or we do not have the ability to provide for fees to play hockey or buy pizza at lunch, we are cutting off our nose to spite our face. That is exactly what the government is doing. The government is refusing to present a balanced approach that would actually benefit all Canadians, especially women.

There is no question that the cuts of the Conservatives are very ideological. They do believe, and we have heard this time and time again, that in fact women should be home, barefoot and pregnant. They do believe that Status of Women should not exist. They have implied that. They have insinuated that. They have stood in this House and suggested that they know what is best for working women, that they know what is best for me in terms of my decisions around my children. They are going to limit my choices and the choices of women, which is contrary to everything that is part of this country and the values that built this country.

They in fact are supported by the likes of REAL Women, who just presented at the finance committee two days ago. I want to just Diane Watts from Real Women, who said, "Yesterday's announcement of long-overdue elimination of inefficient government programs, including...the status of women, is an excellent beginning in what we hope will be the eventual elimination of status of women".

Is that not what the Conservatives want? Is that not who they are working with? Are the Conservatives and REAL Women not working together to ensure that in fact we get rid of any kind of program which ensures that women are able to pursue their fullest, to be who they are as individuals and to offer this country their talents and their abilities?

I was reminded in committee and I am reminded again today of just how much we have to battle that sentiment day in and day out. My son Joe, who is 17 years old today, was in a schoolyard at his local school when he was nine years old when somebody in the playground said, "Feminists are all women who kill children and divorce their husbands". He stood up in that playground and said, "No, feminists are people who fight for women's rights".

*Business of Supply*

That is why Status of Women funding is important. That is why it is important to ensure that every group in our society has the benefit of some support to help themselves. That is what the government is destroying.

I think it is time, in fact, that we look at what real women are. Who are real women? These are women, whether they are in the home, trying to provide for the needs of their children and make a proper home with often limited resources. Real women are people trying to put their professions to use and contribute to this country. Real women are everywhere in all walks of life. They are not in one category.

● (1150)

I want to reference a real woman's story by referring to an email I just received from Christine Robinson in Winnipeg. She tells me that she just had a daughter in March and that she has been searching for quality day care since before her daughter was born but that she cannot find any. She says that she is on a list for day care but that there are no guarantees she will get a spot for her daughter. She says:

I am starting to become very disgruntled and in turn am stressing so much about who will care for my daughter when I return to work, that it is beginning to get in the way of me enjoying my time at home with my precious girl.

I am a working woman who has great pride in her career as a teacher. I don't have to go back to work. I choose to. I love my job and helping to shape tomorrow's leaders. I find it very disturbing that the current Conservative government has made going back to work more difficult for me, and also developed institutional bias towards those of us that do choose to go back to work.

That is what is wrong with the Conservative's decision. That is why we are perceived to be ideological. That is why it has no place at all in this place or in Canadian politics at any time.

I began working in the field of status of women 30 years ago as a women's organizer for the federal NDP. The first thing we did was to encourage women to run for politics and this has reaped rewards today. Forty-one per cent of our caucus are women. At that time we put out a t-shirt that said "A woman's place is in the House of Commons". The first t-shirt was worn by our beloved Stanley Knowles as a way of signalling to the world that we in the House had to deal with the disparity and the inequalities in Canadian politics.

During those 30 years I spent most of my time battling the Liberals. I spent most of my time trying to get them to be true to their words and to live up to the spirit of what status of women means, which is to treat people as equals and recognize what feminism really is. Every step of the way we have battled and lost.

As the Liberals stand today and question why we are talking about them in this debate, I must remind them that they did not build the foundations to ensure we have something to work from. In fact, under the Liberals we lost what we had gained 30 years ago. We lost in many ways.

I would remind Liberal members about unemployment insurance and what they did to a woman by the name of Kelly Lesiuk. She had just had a baby by c-section and needed EI. She was a part time worker but she did not have enough hours to qualify for EI. She took this to every level she could and won her case at the adjudicator. However, what did the Liberal government do? It rejected the decision and decided to appeal Ms. Lesiuk's right to have some

access to EI, which she paid into, so she could look after her baby at home.

We can look at Kelly's case or we can look at what Anne McLellan did when she was minister of health. She denied a motion at committee to have 50:50 representation on a committee dealing with reproductive technologies. Not even at that level, in matters pertaining to women's health, did the Liberal government agree to gender parity?

Let us look at the question of funding. Where did this problem start? It started under the Liberal government when it took away core funding for women's organizations. Why do we have this huge problem today? The National Action Committee on the Status of Women pleaded with the Liberal government for years to restore those funds. Here we are today with the Conservatives taking what little bit is left and just frittering it away and leaving nothing at all.

I blame the Liberals more than anyone for the state of affairs in terms of women in Canada today. I hope they understand what kind of damage they have done to this country. I blame them for not acting on their child care policy in 1993. I blame them for creating the longest running broken political promise in the history of this country. I blame them for not taking action when the dangers were known about breast implants. I blame them for cutting back on health and education, which had a disproportionate impact on women. I blame them for suggesting that all we had to do was to get rid of the debt and the deficit and everything would be fine and we would build from there. I blame them for what they did to women in that process. I blame them for not recognizing that women need to pay off some of their mortgage while at the same time putting food on the table for their kids. Women still have to get their kids to school while trying to build their own future. If all their money is put toward their mortgage, then their children will have no future. We need to balance things out.

I will end with a definition of what we are talking about so people will understand that we are not biased and we are not trying to support one group of women over another.

● (1155)

The following was said by Gloria Steinem 30 years ago:

We wish for all of us the courage to hold on to a vision of a world in which children are born wanted and loved, with enough food and care and shelter to grow up whole. The vision of all people as perfectible and transcendent — free of social prisons of sex and race—and remarkable for the hopes and dreams and capabilities that exist in unique, unrepeatably combination in each of us

● (1200)

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I felt the need to stand today and address one specific comment that the member made. I have a lot of respect for the member, as I do for all women and all hon. members in the House.

I stand here as a Conservative with the full appreciation for the full equality of women in this country. Women are not frail creatures that need protection. They are equal participants and very capable participants in this great country. We have very strong women in this chamber, the House of Commons.

*Business of Supply*

I have been fortunate enough in my working career to work with a number of very capable women. Women are leaders in our business community. The day will come very soon when we will have a woman prime minister in this country.

I would like to give the member the opportunity to stand in her place and perhaps reconsider one of her comments. I hate to repeat a negative because perhaps it will be taken out of context and be put in her party's campaign literature, but she made a comment that the Conservatives think that women should just stay at home and be barefoot and pregnant.

I wonder if the member would rise in her place and take that comment back. I am a Conservative and I see women as full participants in this country. Laurie Kosior, a staffer in my riding of Palliser working in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, has just given birth to her second son, Owen. She looks forward to coming back to work and serving the people of Palliser.

Will the member rise in her place and just take back that comment? It is just out of place in a serious debate here today.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** First, Mr. Speaker, I should thank the member for suggesting that women are capable. I certainly consider myself capable, educated and able to do a good job in this place. However, I am able to do this job because I came from a province where the government understood the importance of ensuring that choices were available to women.

Without the Manitoba government's decision to invest in child care, I would not have been able to take the very difficult decision of combining work and family responsibilities. It is because I was able to access quality, non-profit child care that I chose to enter, first, provincial politics back in 1986, get elected and then immediately go into cabinet holding four portfolios while raising a child who was two years old.

As an example of why I think Conservatives really do have a bias—

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Apologize.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** I will not apologize because by their policies there is a bias.

Back then, when I had a playpen in my office, a Conservative stood up and suggested I was a high priced babysitter. That is discrimination and it is contrary to our beliefs on this side of what it means to have equality.

When a government puts in place a policy that gives more money as a child tax rebate to the wealthy banker's wife than to the single parent woman living in poverty, what does that policy say except that the Conservatives are biased in favour of women who stay at home?

If the member takes offence when I say that they believe women should be barefoot, pregnant and living at home, that is the implication and the outcome of their policies. What we are trying to suggest is that the government's policies should not be biased, which means that all women, regardless of where they come from and what they believe—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite has a long history of involvement in and commitment to improving the situation of women, both in Manitoba and in Canada.

The member had a lot of good fun going after the Liberals but she neglected to speak about the parental benefits and the fact that they were extended for a year. She neglected to speak about the many programs that were funded in our communities through the Status of Women Canada. I speak most particularly of the program at the women's health clinic that she and I both know well and that has had an impact on policy in the province. She neglected to speak about the fact that the trafficking of persons was put on the agenda. She also neglected to speak about palliative care and the fact that the government trashed the budget by 35%.

Will the member take responsibility for the fact that by bringing down the previous government we did not have a response on pay equity and the child care program was cut?

• (1205)

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to clarify why I have been so dismayed at the battles we have had to fight with the Liberals over the last 30 years.

I began working in the area of women in politics before I was elected to this place and I had to deal with Liberals standing in the House of Commons stating that “the unemployment rate is not so bad because it has actually dropped among men 25 years of age and over and, I suggest, with respect, that these are the breadwinners”. They also went on to suggest that working women were a social phenomenon.

Today, the Liberals are a little more clever and a little more subtle. They do not make direct disparaging remarks against women but the implications of their policies are the same.

If we look at the Kelly Lesiuk case, she was a woman who wanted to stay at home, look after her children and get the EI she deserved. What did the government do? It challenged her victory with the adjudicator and took it to court. Therefore, we did not get any kind of benefits for women like her.

In terms of appointments and affirmative action, the Liberals were a real failure. After 10 years in power and making 8,000 appointments to key positions in those three terms, the number of women in key positions had only increased by 1%.

I look at the loss of core funding for NAC, which is at the heart of what we are dealing with today. I look at the Liberals' failure to move on pay equity when they had a chance.

Yes, I believe the Liberals had every opportunity to implement their promise of 1993 for a national child care program, and to suggest now that because they brought it in the dying days of their government that the cut to child care is our fault is just nonsense.

**Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for St. Paul's.

*Business of Supply*

Monday was an enlightening day for Canadians. We learned an awful lot about this Conservative government on that day. Let us take a closer look at what happened and what it says about the Prime Minister and some of his colleagues.

On Monday the government announced a budget surplus of some \$13 billion. I am sure that like me many Canadians found it rather amusing to hear the Minister of Finance make it sound as though he actually had something to do with achieving that surplus. He seemed to be fishing for a pat on the back. Perhaps the ones he was giving himself were not satisfying enough.

The surplus was welcome news in this House and across Canada. It reflected a legacy of responsible management that put an end to deficits in this country of almost a decade ago. It represented another impressive example of what we can achieve together as Canadians.

However, that was not the only announcement the government made on Monday. The Minister of Finance also revealed a series of cutbacks. This was truly an instructive moment for anyone keen to understand the motivations and beliefs of those who so steadfastly refer to themselves as Canada's new government.

The true colours of a government can be seen in each of its decisions, both large ones and small ones, not only in how it spends its billions but how it spends its thousands. The true priorities of a cabinet can be seen in each of its choices, not merely those of grave significance that alter a nation's course.

The true measure of a Prime Minister can be taken not only from how he treats premiers and dignitaries but in the manner in which he treats the less fortunate, the disadvantaged, those whose voices are not always heard, and those whose place in our society is not always one of comfort, but often one of need.

What have Canadians learned about this government? On the very same day that it announced one of the largest financial surpluses in Canadian history, a windfall of billions upon billions, this government celebrated by turning its back on women, turning its back on those who cannot read, and turning its back on those of modest means who would seek to defend their rights as guaranteed under our charter.

On the same day that the government announced one of the largest financial surpluses in our nation's history, Parliament and Canadians were witness in this House to the exercise of cold ideology and the unmasking of this government's true colours, this cabinet's true priorities and this Prime Minister's true measure.

One of the biggest targets was the Status of Women Canada, which has long been on the hit list of hard core social conservatives. Its budget has been cut deeply. Its ability to do its important work has been compromised.

There will be a price to pay and that price will be paid by individual Canadian women in communities across our country: women who strive to escape violence; women who seek nothing more than the opportunity to participate fully in the economic and cultural bounty of Canada; and women who work so hard to advance the rights of other women and girls around the world.

As is true of many of the departments and programs that were cut, those who benefit from the work of the Status of Women are in many

cases Canadians who lack the voice or the resources or the political influence to stand up for themselves, to stand up for their needs and fight back. It falls to progressive minded members in this House to speak on their behalf.

If it was not clear before, the Conservative perspective on women is clear now. This government has slashed funding to the department charged with helping women who need it the most. This government has turned its back on a plan that would have created hundreds of thousands of new and affordable child care spaces, in favour of a token payout that totals a few dollars a day, helping few and creating new spaces for none.

Also on Monday, this government again, showing its social conservative inclinations, announced its intention to eliminate the court challenges program. This is not a program that most Canadians will have ever heard of. Canadians will know its legacy and the social programs that it has helped bring to our country.

The court challenges program has helped minority groups, including women's groups, launch and fight, and win a series of historic court victories during the past three decades. It is a program that has helped to define Canada as one of the most progressive nations in the world; a country determined to protect the rights of all, not just some; a country that respects its history, its standing as a nation of minorities; and a people who see that history and that modern reality as a strength.

● (1210)

In terms of the budget, the court challenges program is a small expenditure, a few millions dollars a year, but it has delivered tremendous value in helping Canadians to expand and to protect their rights and their freedoms. More than that, it is a symbol of the kind of country that we are.

More than 30 years ago we in Canada had the courage not only to enshrine a great Charter of Rights and Freedoms but to also dedicate a modest amount of resources to allow individuals and groups to launch court challenges to ensure those rights are being respected and correctly interpreted in today's context.

What good are rights if there is no way for someone to challenge those who would violate them? What good is the promise of equality if only those people who have the means and the abilities to ensure that promise is kept? These are important questions, but they are questions on which the government chooses not to dwell because they are inconvenient. They reveal more about the character of the government than the government would like Canadians to know.

Overall, the Conservative cuts announced on Monday were small in terms of the overall government expenditures and yet devastating to those who were affected. They were a surgical strike to the heart of our progressive society, a lashing out that spoke plainly and harshly to the government's uncompromising politics and its ideological agenda.

*Business of Supply*

I have sat for long enough across from Conservative members and for more than long enough in their company to understand what motivates them, what their goals are, and what they seek to achieve in this round of budget reductions. The cuts brought down on Monday are not about budgetary matters or meeting financial demands. They are a triumph not of fiscal reason but of social conservative thinking. They are a jarring symbol of the hard and narrow perspective of the Conservatives and their fundamental distrust of the very institution that they fought so hard to lead.

The members of the Liberal Party understand the power at the government's disposal to help ensure Canadians are afforded equality of opportunity. The members of the Liberal Party believe in the government's ability to do good, to help raise people up, to improve their lives, to find their way, and so do members of the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois. Government cannot do it all, nor should it do it all, but there is a progressive role it must play if we are to ever achieve the ideal of our nation as a truly just society.

The true colours of a government can be seen in each of its decisions, large and small. If we look beyond the numbers on a budget sheet, there are people, lives, homes and dreams. The Government of Canada represents all Canadians, not just the privileged. It represents all Canadians, not just those who voted for its members. A government achieves no progress for the people, no progress for any citizen when it isolates the vulnerable and subjects them to an ideological toll.

• (1215)

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the member for Newmarket—Aurora finds herself leading the so-called charge to save Canadian women. The member prized herself, I understand, on coming from a business background, so I have two questions.

I am wondering how the member can justify spending over 30¢ to deliver \$1 to women's organizations. How does that past history wash with her? Is mismanagement of taxpayers' dollars good for women? I do not think so.

I would also like to ask her, if she believes so strongly in women's issues, why is there not one single woman on the board of directors at her company, Magna? Where is her leadership there, or is she just slipping into Liberal rhetoric with the perfect scripted speech and the perfect sentences? We are talking about women's issues, rights of women, professional women, and I think we have to talk about real women in the real world.

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Mr. Speaker, let us talk about Real Women for a moment, as they are called: realistic, equal, active, for life. This group of real women does not believe equality for women. They are anti-choice. They are anti-gay. I do not have to go any further, just look at their website. It is despicable, actually.

This group has obviously contacted members across. Ian Brodie says that this group "raises interesting points that warrant close inspection". I say to the members across and to the vice-chair of the committee and to the minister, who do they take direction from?

I would also like to point out that it has been about eight months since the minister has been before the committee to address some of these extremely important issues.

The member opposite raised some good questions about the economic status of women. Women only make 72¢ on the dollar of what a man makes. Women are the head of households. Two-thirds of women head up single parent households and 68% of the part time workers in this country are women. Women still have a long way to go and until we face the challenges and enable them to achieve economic security and parity, we will not have equality.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member a question about the pay equity situation in Canada.

It is incredible that even today we still do not have pay equity for women in Canada. Women still cannot expect equal pay for equal work. In the past, they have been subject to endless litigation around this issue and endless mediation. The Liberals introduced a complaints-based process that was found to be totally inadequate. In fact, a two year study of pay equity found the whole system that the Liberals set up did not really address the situation of pay equity.

In the last Parliament, at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women there was all-party agreement with the recommendations of the pay equity committee and that there was a need for new legislation, yet the Liberals did not deliver on that.

Why did the Liberals not deliver on pay equity legislation that had real teeth, real value and supported women? Maybe from her experience with the Conservatives, she can tell us why the Conservatives refuse to move in that same direction and are now only supporting the old, tired Liberal approach to pay equity in Canada.

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring a little clarity to some of the comments the member opposite has made.

It was the intention of the former ministers of labour and justice to put forward a new bill on pay equity. It is unfortunate that the NDP defeated the government during the last go-round and perhaps many of the members regret it now. We agree with many of these important initiatives such as pay equity, improving the economic status and the rights of women, as well as child care.

It is unfortunate that we are losing ground. We have lost ground. We did all that good work and then it was defeated on the grounds of politics not on principle.

• (1220)

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a quick comment for the member opposite and then a question. The comment she may choose to reply to.

In making her decision to leave this party and join the party opposite, surely that decision could not have been based on the Liberal Party of Canada and the government of the day's record on the status of women and advancing the cause of women and women's rights. The pay equity issue is a perfect example.

*Business of Supply*

Surely the member, in deciding to make that jump, had to realize that the Liberals had 13 long years and did absolutely nothing on this file. That is my comment.

The member has a significant business background. The surplus of \$13.2 billion put toward the debt will save \$650 million annually to go to social programs that will benefit all Canadians: women, seniors, and first nations.

In her experience in the business world, is that a good thing, whether it is a major corporation or a government, to pay off debt and then put that capital toward good things that I just spoke about?

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the floor for giving me the opportunity to say how proud I am to be sitting on this side of the House. It is based on the principles that I crossed the floor. It is the principles in which I believe we give people the opportunity to achieve equality and economic freedom, based on a strong social infrastructure.

The member asked another question about the paydown of the debt versus the cuts. I am the first one to say that any time we can pay down debt, it is a good thing. We then have less interest payments and more money to spend. However, we also have to thoroughly examine the cuts and the impact of them.

The budget of the Status of Women of Canada is \$10 million. That budget was cut by almost 40%. This is the one sole organization in the government that is there to advocate and uphold equal rights for Canadians.

I know some of the members opposite must be feeling pretty uncomfortable. I know they support equality rights for women. I do not know how they can go back to their constituencies and substantiate the cuts to this kind of program, knowing the effects they will have on their communities, women, girls and future generations.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to speak in favour of the Liberal Party motion. The House objects to the government's partisan and discriminatory cuts in federal support for women's programs and services, for one very clear reason: we are not there yet. The real attitude of the very new Conservative government comes through in this week's budget cuts.

Currently, while the rest of the world recognizes the importance of equality for women and young girls in achieving health and quality of life objectives, Canada is going to regress.

We are not there yet, not here in Canada, not anywhere in the world.

It is somewhat ironic to see that the very new Canadian government, which is so proud of the work of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan to promote and protect the rights of women and young girls, wants at the same time to destroy our programs that are essential for doing the same here in Canada.

We are not there yet.

• (1225)

[*English*]

The year 2006 is particularly significant for women in Canada as it marks 25 years since Canada ratified the most comprehensive treaty on women's human rights, the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, CEDAW. By ratifying CEDAW, the federal government has agreed to play a lead role in upholding women's equality rights. Unfortunately, however, without a more concerted effort by the federal government to fulfill its obligations under this UN convention and the Charter of Rights and Freedom, full equality will elude many women in Canada, particularly those of us confronting multiple oppressions.

There were six times as many female victims of sexual assault as male victims in 2004. More than a million women reported that they had been stalked in the past five years in a way that caused them to fear for their lives, safety or the safety of someone known to them. Male violence against women continues as a terrifying daily reality in Canada, preventing the equality of all girls and women. Feminist centres reveal that one in four women endures sexual assault in her lifetime and one in 10 women is beaten. Statistics Canada confirms that 51% of women have been criminally assaulted.

The UN has recommended that Canada ensure that all provinces provide necessary government and non-government services to those who suffer violence. Instead federal dollars have been withdrawn from women's equality driven advocacy groups. Further welfare cuts, disqualifications and workfare force women into dangerous dependencies on abusive men. Cuts to legal aid and legal services leave women without lawyers or advocates in custody and access fights after leaving dangerous men. Cuts to immigration settlement services, education and health services limit women's access to help.

Canadian women have built and developed networks of women's organizations and have worked tirelessly to ensure that women's issues remain on the public agenda at the local level and nationally. Further, women's groups have offered critical direct services to women and children and have sensitized all sectors among the public and the government to women's concerns.

The fact that violence against women and children has become an item on the public policy agenda is just one noteworthy example that shows the extent to which women's opinions and experience have shaped laws, policies and programs. Recognizing that women's participation is essential to the socio-economic and cultural health of Canada, the federal government has supported these groups with core funding.

*Business of Supply*

Cutting funding severely weakens the ability to organize, to lobby, to do research, to offer services to women, in short, all things women need to achieve full participation in society. Given this situation, women's political participation will stagnate and there will be fewer opportunities for women to consult with governments on the many issues that affect their lives.

Since its inception in 1985, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund has intervened in over 140 cases, which have helped establish landmark legal victories for women on a wide range of issues. LEAF has been funded by the court challenges program, which is also being cut by the government.

It is also a bit ironic, as the member for Newmarket—Aurora has said, that the government seems to be listening to special interest groups and have capitulated to their campaign of REAL Women, an organization based on ideology, when Liberals are asking for real research from real women, the single women, the victims of violence, those in the shelters. The motto of REAL Women is “women's rights not at the expense of human rights”. We have a small secret for them. Women's rights are, indeed, human rights or “les droits des femmes sont les droits de la personne”, as the member for Mount Royal has so eloquently said, one of our favourite members of women's caucus.

The Prime Minister refused to come to the 2006 conference on AIDS. Perhaps it was because he would have heard the eloquent words of Stephen Lewis when he said:

Finally, in my view, as delegates doubtless know, the most vexing and intolerable dimension of the pandemic is what is happening to women. It's the one area of HIV/AIDS which leaves me feeling most helpless and most enraged. Gender inequality is driving the pandemic, and we will never subdue the gruesome force of AIDS until the rights of women become paramount in the struggle...

I challenge you, my fellow delegates, to enter the fray against gender inequality. There is no more honourable and productive calling. There is nothing of greater import in this world. All roads lead from women to social change, and that includes subduing the pandemic.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Two weeks ago in *La Presse*, Nathalie Collard wrote:

The fears of feminist groups are fuelled, among other things, by the REAL Women association lobby (an anti-feminist group with deep roots in western Canada that promotes the traditional role of the woman). This association has received subsidies from the very women's program it is denouncing today. It is hard to say whether this group, which could not be more vicious toward feminists, has a real influence in Ottawa.

[English]

In fact, the parliamentary committee on the status of women has asked for these groups to have their funds increased by 25%. Again, the government refuses to understand that the government reports to Parliament and we hope it will understand that next week when this motion passes.

I was once on the member for Mount Royal's cable show. When he asked me what the most important thing was facing the women of Canada, I said gridlock. Everything we care about rests in two or three different government departments, in two or three different jurisdictions, and we have been unable to account for the results. They are not measured in the silos of each government or across jurisdictions.

It is, therefore, extraordinarily important in the issue of the rights of women is that there be organizations that do the real research. As we say in management: if it is measured, it gets noticed; if it gets noticed, it gets done.

The critic for the Conservatives does not understand that gender based equality is not going directly to programs. She keeps asking the same question and she does not understand. The failure to have gender based equality is what the government does, as well as funding programs. She keeps insisting and mixing that up.

In fact, the justice minister has said, “I don't care what the research shows, this is what we are doing”. The government continues to use research like it is a swear word. Even having an understanding of people like Florence Nightingale, surely real women would understand the basic premise that she was a statistician who kept good records and understood the clusters of disease. This is exactly what the Status of Women Canada and all such organizations across Canada do.

It is so important to us, as Liberals, when we look at all the organizations that now compare themselves to the world. Monica Lysack from Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada has said:

When you look at women in Canada and their human rights compared to international standards, we have a long way to go.

[Translation]

We are not there yet.

[English]

We have to get going on all of the things that matter in terms of practice based evidence, and that is the role of government.

In closing, I would like to quote from my friend Nellie McClung. I think some of the members opposite should sit at her little table on the parliamentary precinct. She said:

Disturbers are never popular—nobody ever really loved an alarm clock in action—no matter how grateful they may have been afterwards for its kind services.

She also said:

I am a firm believer in women—in their ability to do things and in their influence and power. Women set the standards for the world, and it is for us, women of Canada, to set the standards high.

Next week, when the motion passes, I hope the government will do the right thing by funding the alarm clocks and those that set for the standards for Canada and for the world, in honour of those great Albertan women, the famous five.

**Hon. Michael Chong (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to serve in a government under a Prime Minister, who believes that all Canadians, men and women, regardless of their race, creed or religion, should be full participants in a good society. I am very proud to be part of a government that is investing in programs to ensure men and women are equal participants in this society, and our government is doing exactly that.



*Business of Supply*

I hear a lot of rhetoric on the opposite side of the aisle, but not a lot of substance. I hear a lot of rhetoric about visible minorities, minority groups and the importance of equality of men and women. I want to focus on the disconnect between the reality of the party opposite and its rhetoric.

In particular, I observed that there are about 23 seats in the city of Toronto. Of those 23 seats, 20 are held by Liberal members of Parliament. I count very few visible minorities among those 20 Liberal members of Parliament. Over 50% of the population of Toronto is not only minority, but it is visible minority. More than one in two people living in the city of Toronto are visible minorities.

How can the member opposite explain the disconnect between the rhetoric opposite and the reality of Liberal members of Parliament from the city of Toronto?

• (1235)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of my colleagues, Ruby Dhalla and Gurbax Malhi—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Please refer to your colleagues by their ridings.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, the members for Brampton—Springdale and Bramalea—Gore—Malton. We deal with the greater Toronto area. I am a very proud member of that caucus. However, I am completely fed up with the kind of distraction that occurs.

This is a debate about women. The government has no interest in protecting the women of Canada. Therefore, we have to put up with that kind of rhetoric, which completely runs around the fact that the government is about to gut the programs for women. We can show the women of Canada how they must vote in the next election.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, if I may have just a moment of latitude here. Today I would like to ask everyone in the House to join me in recognizing the retirement of one of our great civil servants, Mr. Ray Gauthier of the postal services. For almost 35 years Ray has basically provided service and advice to generations of parliamentarians and their staff. In fact, everyone calls him the book of knowledge. On behalf of everyone, I wish Ray a happy retirement.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** That sounded more like an S.O. 31 statement. Maybe the member would like to think of a question for the next speaker.

The hon. member for Davenport.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciated the words expressed by the member for St. Paul's and the member for Newmarket—Aurora. Both of them spoke passionately about their concerns about equality and minorities. Certainly they both have been champions of minorities.

I was pleased to hear the member's statements on the UN convention against all forms of discrimination, which is a very important treaty convention.

On the international front, Canada has always been looked upon as a place with great advancements in terms of human rights and humanity dignity. Yet on so many issues on the international front,

we are in fact going back on these treaties. On the issues of aboriginal women, we do not want to be part of that discussion.

I am very concerned about what direction the government is going with these international treaties and what we are doing at home. It is the cuts that are made specifically when there is a \$13 billion surplus to areas like child care, literacy, women's equality and particularly the court challenges program. It is the types of choices that are being made that really shows that the government is not interested in promoting equality both here at home and abroad.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I too am very concerned, particularly internationally, about the way we will help not only ourselves fulfill the convention around all forms of discrimination but also how we will use CIDA to do the same.

I hope that the minister responsible for CIDA will account to us as to why gender equality seems to have been removed from the website, why groups applying for CIDA funding seem to no longer have to meet this imperative requirement. As Stephen Lewis and others have said in respect of gender equality, if ideology takes over from the reality, research shows that only with programs that deal with gender equality in the way that CIDA insisted will we actually be able to have equality of life and a fair and equitable world.

I also would like to point out to the member that I understand the status of women committee is still waiting for the minister to show up, after eight months of refusing to show up. This is appalling. I hope that the House will insist that the minister show up at committee in order to account for these cuts.

• (1240)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** We have time for a 30-second question and a 30-second response.

The hon. member for Wild Rose.

**Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I hope I can do it in 30 seconds.

The member talked about violence against women and children. Since 1993 I too have been pushing hard in this House to bring in some tough legislation to deal with men in particular, because the majority of them are men, who would dare seriously assault women and children. It makes me very angry when they do that.

I have seen in the last 13 years that we have come to some fairly decent decisions to now where I have seen grain farmers go to jail for selling their grain, an elk poacher go to jail for shooting an elk and in the same week, two cases of serious abuse and assault on a child and one on a woman, and the perpetrators receive house arrest and community service. Out of these cases, a very large majority, it was reported to the justice committee last week, are getting house arrest and community service.

I am suggesting that the member, based on her speech, is prepared to support this government's Bill C-9. Is the member going to support the bill that would put those people in jail? Serious crime deserves serious time.

*Business of Supply*

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his support in the ongoing and very complex problem of violence against women. We know that legal remedies are only a small part of this problem. We need to deal with the root causes of violence against women.

I urge the member opposite to talk to his government about taking the counsel of organizations like REAL Women who continue to denigrate the facts. They still think that half of domestic violence is instigated by women. They are absolutely wrong. All kinds of research has proven this. That kind of lack of policy development is what is driving the government.

**Ms. Helena Guergis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

I am very proud to stand today as a member of this new Conservative government, for it is this government that is ensuring all women have the opportunity to meet their full potential, realize their dreams and aspirations, and to be recognized for the contributions they make to their country.

It is interesting that the party opposite would choose this issue to debate when it has failed so miserably to stand up for the real needs of Canadian women. While the Liberals are busy electioneering and writing the so-called pink book, proving once again that they are completely out of touch with the needs of Canadians, our new government has already taken concrete measures that directly benefit and improve the lives of all Canadians. Over 51% of our population is female. Finally, Canada has a government that appreciates this important fact. This government recognizes that improving the lives of Canadians, ridding government of corruption, and delivering on commitments are what Canadian men and women want, not more empty promises in a pink book.

Women are strengthening our economy, providing for our families, and leading successfully in their communities. That is why this government has put forward new measures to enhance the everyday lives of Canadian women. What have we done?

We have implemented the universal child care benefit, which provides all families with \$100 per month for each child under the age of six. We will create 25,000 new child care spaces a year. This is something that we will deliver on. We will not talk about it for 13 years like the Liberals did. We will deliver it.

We have delivered a budget with more tax cuts than the last four federal budgets combined, including a cut in the one tax, the GST, that every Canadian pays. We have provided tax relief for low income Canadians, pensioners, and families taking care of a child with a disability, not to mention a new tax credit worth up to \$500 to cover eligible fees for physical fitness programs for each child under the age of 16.

We have introduced important legislation that will strengthen our criminal justice laws for serious offenders, thereby creating safer communities for women and their families. We have introduced human trafficking initiatives that will help victims of human trafficking, who are all too often vulnerable women and children, and men as well. We will make available over the course of next year \$1.4 billion for affordable housing across the country. While

respecting cultural tradition, we will set up a new agency to expedite the recognition of foreign credentials so women new to Canada can more quickly contribute to Canadian life.

Canada's new government is committed to advancing equality and to the full and equal participation of all Canadians in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada.

Next month is Women's History Month. On October 18 we will celebrate the lives of the famous five. In 1929, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlyby and Nellie McClung fought for women's rights to be legally recognized as persons. These women are an inspiration to us all. Thanks to them I am not recognized just as a woman, but as a person. One of the famous five, Louise McKinney, said it best when she said, "The purpose of a woman's life is just the same as the purpose of a man's life: that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living".

I have met with a number of women from diverse backgrounds, and what I hear from them is that there is a genuine need for real action and real results. For this reason, each minister is working to improve policies and programs to better the lives of all Canadians. Thus, rather than making more empty promises in an election-style pink book, we are listening to the needs of Canadians and delivering on our priorities and our commitments.

Take for example a recent rant by the member for Beaches—East York who was outraged about the imaginary Conservative slights to women. The House will be interested to know about a very real and recent Liberal slight to women. It was a boys only weekend held by the Liberal leadership candidate who is supported by the member for Beaches—East York. That is right; women were excluded from this event. We do not have that in the Conservative Party. Before Canadians listen to trumped up claims thrown at the government from the other side, they might want to look at the Liberal Party attitude toward women's issues and its record of the last 13 years where there has been no success.

● (1245)

Why should Canadian women so readily trust a party so riddled with scandal and corruption? The Liberals had over a decade to improve the lives of Canadian women, but they did nothing, so why should Canadians depend on them?

The member for Beaches—East York says that she speaks on behalf of all Canadian women. This is just another example of Liberal arrogance. The Liberal Party assumes it speaks for everyone, but just takes the support of Canadian women for granted.

Unlike the Liberals, we know we cannot take women's support for granted. We must work to ensure that every program, every service and every department must use the taxpayers' dollar in the most effective way, because these are taxpayers' dollars for women as well as men.

*Business of Supply*

Unlike the Liberals, we do not characterize our daughters and our granddaughters as weak and vulnerable. Rather, we know that they are confident and full of potential. When I look around the House I see many strong and successful women who worked hard to get where they are today. What I have been hearing from so many women is that they are fed up with being portrayed as victims.

Canada's new government knows that Canadian women are a diverse population. Canadian women are single mothers, stay at home mothers, CEOs of some of the biggest companies, business owners, farmers, caregivers and much, much more. Canada now has a government that recognizes this reality and that this means women need the flexibility of choice that will allow them to meet their full potential.

Women are fed up with broken promises too. Canada's new government was elected to clean up the corruption and scandal that plagued the Liberal Party and still does to this day. We acted. We promised to act on child care; we acted. We promised to create safer communities; we acted. We promised to get rid of corruption and scandal; we acted. The fact of the matter is, the Liberals talk and we act.

Women want to see results rather than listen to more rhetoric and fearmongering. Every day, women more often than not manage the family budget. They ensure that their families and children get the best they can with their budget. They do this every day. They know how to get value for their money and they expect the government to act in the same fiscally responsible manner.

The accusations of the Liberal Party are completely false. In fact, the reality is the exact opposite of what the Liberals claim. We are delivering programs and services, not in a Liberal spending spree fashion, but with careful consideration of what is most effective and what is best for all Canadians, for Canadian women.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first I congratulate the hon. member on her speech. However, the more I listened to her speech, the more it came to mind that if her statements are accurate, every poll shows and research shows that most women do not support the Conservatives. It has always been known in every election that 50% of the population has a serious issue with the Conservative Party. Be it on child care, issues of the environment, social issues, women in general have been very, very suspicious of the Conservative agenda. It will show again in election after election that the vast majority of Conservative Party voters and supporters are male.

If her party, as she stated, is supportive of equality for women, I wonder why so many women out there are just not attracted to the Conservative Party?

• (1250)

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** Mr. Speaker, first I would like to point out to the hon. member that I am a woman, a young woman at that, and I quite frankly could not ask for a stronger leader, a more supportive leader who understands and is there for me as a young woman in politics. The Prime Minister is exceptional. All of my Conservative colleagues are exceptional.

I want to talk a bit about my own personal experience. I have a great deal of experience. I volunteered for eight and a half years at

the rape crisis centre. I was trained in crisis intervention and I was on call. I worked on organizing our first Take Back the Night march back home. I actually walked through four ridings to raise awareness of violence against women and children. Back then the statistics were that one woman out of three would be assaulted at some point in her life, and one out of two men before the age of 18. Those statistics have not changed. After 13 years, the Liberal Party had an opportunity to do something about that and it did nothing. Nothing has changed. We, the Conservative Party, will do something about that.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign her leader had a letter written to a woman named Joyce Carter who is the widow of a deceased veteran. In that letter he promised that immediately upon the election of a Conservative government, we would institute a VIP, veterans independence program, for all widows regardless of the time of death of the veteran.

It is now eight months and counting, and the government still has not acted on that promise. The member says it is a party of action. Here is an opportunity for her to stand up in the House and tell us when is the Conservative government going to honour the promise that her leader made to Joyce Carter and literally thousands of other women in this country?

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** Mr. Speaker, I want to address some of the other issues that we have been talking about today in the House. If the Liberal Party wants to claim that it is standing up for women, we have to stand up for all women.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You ruled me out of order when I did not respond to a particular statement made by a Liberal questioner. I have asked the hon. member a specific question and it would be nice to have a specific answer.

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** Mr. Speaker, as I was trying to explain, and this will be in response directly to him if he will bear with me, if we are going to stand up for all women or at least claim that we are, we have to be considering the women in Afghanistan right now. The Liberals and the NDP want us to pull out of Afghanistan and forget about the women and children there.

I think that is absolutely appalling. We do not just pick one group of women. If we are going to stand up for women, we stand up for all women.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her excellent speech. It was very refreshing to hear about the positive things that are happening for women in this country instead of the constant slander and victimization from the parties opposite.

I would like to point out to my hon. colleague that in Alberta, where we no longer have a provincial debt, we spend more money on social programs per capita than any other province.

*Business of Supply*

I am wondering if the member could bring some sense as to why the Government of Canada just announced its major contribution to bringing down the national debt and what positive effect that is going to have for the future of all Canadians.

• (1255)

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** Mr. Speaker, when we talk about debt repayment, because of the \$13 billion that we will put on the debt, we will see \$650 million more available a year. We can use that to spend on the incredible social programs that Canada has to offer to support not only women but men and very importantly children. We cannot forget that.

I would like to go back to some of the interventions that I heard earlier. We talked about matrimonial rights for aboriginal women. Again, I would like to point out that the previous Liberal government had an opportunity to ensure that aboriginal women would have matrimonial rights and it failed to deliver on that as well. This is of course something that our government will deliver on.

I have one more point. Having looked on the Magna website, if the member for Newmarket—Aurora is such a champion for women, why are there no women on that board of directors?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey, for sharing her time with me. I also congratulate her on her excellent speech.

I am pleased to rise today in this House to reiterate the commitment of our government to supporting not only the equality, but also the emancipation of women, and women's full and entire contribution to the prosperity of this country.

I would also like to disagree with the partisan motion introduced by the hon. member for Beaches—East York, which is contrary to sound management principles and would deprive not only women, but all Canadians, of the funds wisely invested in our social programs.

Let us make this clear. We are talking today about an administrative measure, and no fund for grassroots programs that benefit women will be cut. I can therefore tell the people in my riding, and organizations like Jonction pour elle, which does excellent work, that our government supports their initiatives more than ever.

Our government is entirely committed to supporting the emancipation of women. For example, after 13 years of inaction on the part of the previous government on the question of pay equity, my colleague the Minister of Labour has taken the bull by the horns and has finally taken concrete steps to ensure compliance with pay equity in undertakings under federal jurisdiction. The reason why our minister does not have to propose legislation is that the law already exists. We have the law, but the previous government unfortunately did not enforce it. What we have is therefore a concrete step taken by the Conservative government, which is committed to supporting efforts on the ground to enforce pay equity.

I would like to cite some examples of our government's commitment to ensuring that there is a role for women and for all newcomers in our society. In the riding of Lévis—Bellechasse, where there are workforce shortages, we need workers, to encourage our businesses to continue expanding.

We are therefore aware of the importance of providing all Canadians, women and men, with equal opportunities, and that is what we mean to do. This is why Citizenship and Immigration Canada is required to analyze the impact of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and of the regulations under that act on gender equality, and to report to Parliament on that question. This is a requirement in the act itself, and it is unprecedented in the whole of federal legislation.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is thus the first entry door for immigrants arriving in Canada. Because it is important to uphold the humanitarian tradition of this country, our government's programs place special emphasis on protecting people who have special needs, and in particular women and children.

For example, certain groups of refugees have special needs when they arrive here. Working jointly with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees at the pre-selection stage, we analyze potential problems associated with gender and diversity. In that analysis, we look at women in danger, households led by single women, the risk that family members will be permanently separated, and age issues. All these criteria are examined in order to alleviate problems associated with the resettlement process, with gender and with diversity. Of course, we also look at single women and women heads of household, to assist them in integrating.

I have yet another example. Certain federal government immigration programs deal specifically with the problems of violence against women. For example, the Women at Risk section of the refugee and humanitarian resettlement program is designed to meet the needs of refugee women in situations where it is impossible to guarantee their safety. Since 1988, through Women at Risk, Canada has provided new and safer places to live for thousands of women and children.

• (1300)

As we have mentioned today, the problem of violence against women does not exist only among immigrants. It also exists in our communities. This is why we need community agencies that can provide support to women in need. It is also why I submitted a private bill to help spouses whose lives are threatened by their former spouses. This bill is making its way through the various parliamentary stages. The purpose of this bill is to ensure that, when a woman feels threatened, society is responsible for protecting her. This is extremely important. There are various programs and mechanisms for doing so. The witness protection program, an RCMP program, enables women who request it—and this is the purpose of the bill—to receive protection without their identity being revealed. This is essential to ensuring people's safety.

These measures are necessary to make sure that our country enables women to be properly integrated in our society and to go on playing their exemplary role.

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Another example is human trafficking, which often involves women and children. For anyone wondering what human trafficking is about, it is about people who have had their papers taken away before they arrive in our country. Their legal identity is taken away. They come here under repression and coercion. So it is a woman, a child or any other person who is a victim of human trafficking. It is the third largest illegal market in the world. So it is not insignificant. As a country that sees itself as a defender of democracy and the promotion of women's equality, we have a moral responsibility, not only to people who are victims of trafficking here, in Canada, but also to all countries.

Our government has taken measures to improve Canada's response to the unique needs of victims of human trafficking. They are often women and children. They used to be treated like criminals who had to be detained and deported. It was one humiliation after another.

Our new government has ordered immigration officers to issue short-term temporary resident permits to victims of human trafficking. Thanks to these permits, victims have 120 days to recover from their frightful experiences and decide whether they want to apply to remain in Canada or whether they would rather return to their country of origin. These are important measures that are temporary but directly benefit women and children, who are the most vulnerable. The Canadian Council for Refugees has been requesting this basic change for years and our government has responded.

I would also like to point out that, under the interim federal health program, this government also provides asylum seekers and protected persons—many of whom are women—with basic emergency health coverage for as long as they do not meet the requirements for provincial health insurance. All these people are entitled to receive essential care.

As we know, immigration will pose a major challenge to our country, and in order to ensure that we benefit from what newcomers have to offer, it is important that they be successfully integrated into Canadian society. A lot of work needs to be done here, for example with professional associations as well as with our own values and ways of perceiving newcomers. That is why our government has established integration programs that are essential to provide a helpful environment for newcomers, including women. We also developed a new budget with \$307 million in additional spending over the next two years for new arrivals, including women, so that they can integrate into the system. One specific example is that a woman who comes and settles in Canada will now be able to have day care for her children.

As a francophone, it is very important to me that new immigrants adapt to their surroundings, and that new immigrants speak French if they settle in Quebec or in the francophone minority regions. That is one specific example of action that our government is taking to help newcomers, including of course, women with children.

●(1305)

There are a lot of other examples of this kind. I could go on almost all afternoon, but what I basically want to say is this: it is important for everyone to realize that the savings we are making today on behalf of Canadian taxpayers, whose money we manage,

are not to the detriment of women, for example. Quite the opposite, the money we save will be reinvested in social programs to continue supporting our country's growth.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in his speech, the member opposite talked about various groups, including women, immigrant women, et cetera. He will probably know that the law commission was established by way of an act of this Parliament and was utilized over the years by many groups, including women's groups, to advance their issues and causes, and it was working rather well.

With absolutely no mandate from the House, no mandate whatsoever from the people of Canada, the Minister of Finance has decided to dismantle, cut and terminate the law commission. I would like the member's comments about that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, who is concerned about the government infringing on human rights, for his question. I believe that he has a legitimate concern; however, it is also representative of a certain way of governing shown by the previous government, which practically appropriated taxpayers' money.

The philosophy of this new Conservative government is that we are here to manage taxpayers' money according to the law. When we act within the law, it is not necessary to resort to the courts and to spend taxpayers' money on futile legal proceedings.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I asked a previous Conservative member this question and got an Afghan answer, so I am going to ask this member the same question.

During the election campaign, the member's leader had a letter written on his behalf to Joyce Carter of Cape Breton. She is the widow of a veteran. The letter stated that if the Conservatives formed the government they would immediately invoke the VIP, the veterans independence program, for all widowers, regardless of time of death of the veteran.

It is now eight months into this so-called government. We still do not have the VIP extension, yet the government is swimming in billions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

My question is quite simple. When will the government or this member, on behalf of his leader, stand up and tell Joyce Carter and the thousands of others, mostly women, in this country that the VIP will be extended now?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my honourable colleague for his question. And I thank him also for telling me about this program for veterans.

I can say to him that, as the member for Lévis—Bellechasse, I will be meeting veterans in my office tomorrow to hear their concerns.

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I have already met with them on several occasions, and they have a long list of grievances. The VIP program, as my colleague referred to it, is not the only item that was neglected by the previous government.

These veterans deserve to be honoured and respected for their past contribution to the vitality of democracy in our country.

• (1310)

[*English*]

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to some of the comments the member opposite made earlier with respect to the increased funding for immigrant women and settlement programs and so on, with which I have no problem, obviously.

As someone who spent 35 years in the field of settlement programs and fighting for immigrant women, I understand this very well, but I should tell the hon. member that it was as a result of a charter challenge that we were able to get language training for women in the mid-1980s. There are many other inequalities that still exist for women, such as pay equity and many others. In fact, immigrant women, if we look at the studies, are the most affected in terms of earning the lowest income possible at this point.

Spending on programs for immigrant women and immigrant settlement does not in any way justify the cutting of Status of Women Canada, which is for all Canadian women now and in the future. In fact, it impacts on and hurts the ability of those women to fight for their rights. How can the hon. member justify one with the other?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for her question and I congratulate her on the contribution she has made to furthering the cause of women in our society. Recognizing the rights of women is one of the things that makes this a great country.

I would like to make it clear that my comments should be interpreted in the context of today's motion, which touches on the administrative cuts to the program in question.

Taxpayers and women expect cuts. Women are good managers. We await the day that a woman is minister of finance. We already have good management, but perhaps it could be even better.

Thus, my comments were made in the context of the motion being debated today. Yes, I believe that cutting administrative expenses will enable us to provide better service to Canadian communities.

[*English*]

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Yukon.

I am indeed pleased to speak on the motion that the opposition has put forward today on equality and opportunity for women in this country. While there are many different aspects to speak to on this motion, I am choosing to speak on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, the concerns expressed by women there and what it meant to them, on advocacy, and, because I know the program well and because it is located in Winnipeg, the court challenges program.

Many in this House will know that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women was struck in the fall of 2004. It came about on the initiative of three of the parties in the House and the concurrence of four parties. As an aside, I think it is important to note in the discussion that there was a request by members opposite to eliminate this committee this year, which gives me great cause for concern.

I was pleased to serve as the first chair of this committee. In order to establish its work plan, the committee heard from women from across Canada as to their priorities. Many appeared before the committee. We heard from 38 witnesses representing a wide spectrum of views and priorities. They included the YWCA, the Quebec Native Women, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, REAL Women, and the list goes on.

The committee heard that there was a concern over the lack of attention given by the government to women's issues and to substantive equality. We were urged to look at systemic barriers to women, most particularly those for women of colour, immigrant women and aboriginal women. We heard about racial discrimination. We were challenged to address a number of ways of improving the well-being of women.

Some organizations felt that the interests of women were best served by addressing women in the family unit. Other groups focused on a rights based approach to equality.

We heard much about the concerns of aboriginal women. We heard about the legal and jurisdictional mazes they had to wend their way through. We heard about the issues of particular concern to Métis women.

Four major themes arose from the six weeks of public consultation.

The first overriding theme was the matter of federal funding to women's organizations and the equality-seeking organizations, and their ability to provide service and advocate for equality.

The second theme dealt with poverty, with the incidence of poverty, the lack of access to pension benefits, social assistance, the wage gap, and affordable housing, and the list again goes on.

The third theme was the critical need to increase the capacity of the federal government to deal with the whole issue of gender based analysis, the analysis of policies, programs and budgets put out through federal programs.

Finally, the overriding theme was the issue that we heard about, violence against women, a significant factor in the lives of women from coast to coast to coast.

These women came to the committee in good faith. They spoke in good faith. They commented on the importance of being heard by government. They commented on the fact that all four parties were at the table listening. They spoke of being treated respectfully by government. They spoke of the value of having access to government.

*Business of Supply*

As a consequence, the committee responded and put out several reports recommending an increase in funding to the department for the Status of Women, recommending an increase in funding and core funding. The committee did a report on pay equity. It spoke about parental benefits. Most important, the committee did a major report on gender based analysis, which women's organizations across the country called a landmark document.

Now what do these women have? The budget of the branch of government that responded to them has been slashed by 39% of the operating dollars. Now they have name-calling and are described as marginal by those groups that have access to government.

● (1315)

We hear from members opposite that only the operating dollars have been cut. How do programs come about if there are no operating dollars to make them come about?

Two days ago on a television panel I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board say that the government had no interest in supporting , “lobbyists, lawyers, interest groups and advocates”.

My understanding of advocacy includes actively supporting an ideal or a cause, speaking out on an issue of concern and arguing in favour of an idea or a policy. It also includes meeting with one's member of Parliament to change a law or policy, or simply telling a neighbour or friend about the impact of a law. It is often a clear expression of support for the rights of the individual, whether it is a person with disabilities and their families, an aboriginal woman or a child denied education. Those are the characteristics of the Canada I know.

However, I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board say that his government was out to get those people.

With the cuts proposed to the Status of Women program, we will see an inability to articulate for a whole host of people and a whole host of groups, including women with disabilities, women dealing with spousal violence, Métis and Inuit women, first nations women, immigrant women, migrant sex workers and the list goes on.

Who will speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, either because of lack of means, lack of knowledge, lack of power and often because of a fear of the system, which, in my mind, this week's decision gives them greater fear of the system?

I want to speak to the court challenges program because I know it well. It is located in Winnipeg and it is very much part of the landscape of human rights activity and discussion in my community. Many have and many more will speak to the court challenges program. With an operating budget of less than \$1 million, it was designed to provide the opportunity for groups, members of language minorities, disabled Canadian women and aboriginal peoples, to challenge federal laws, programs or policies that were discriminatory under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Is this program being slashed again because the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, or perhaps the president himself, said that we do not fund programs that we do not believe in?

Is it because REAL Women, who have the ear of the government, point to this program as being made up of “radical leftists, homosexual and feminist groups funding their own activities”, or is it because the court challenges program supported Democracy Watch, which intervened when the Prime Minister was head of the National Citizens Coalition when a challenge was made to the constitutionality of third party spending limits?

Let me tell the House about Mary. Some members may have read about Mary in the newspaper. Mary is a severely disabled young woman for whom the court challenges program made a huge difference in her life and the life of her family. Mary, her sister, Sarah, and her parents live in my riding. I have met with them often and I see them in the community at a whole host of various events.

Mary was born with multiple disabilities and was hospitalized for over a year. When it was time for one of Mary's parents to access the employment insurance program, the parent was denied employment insurance on the basis that the parent could not access it because of time limits. The court challenges program provided the opportunity for Mary and her family to benefit by this program.

For many, the court challenges program has been critical. The case of Lesiuk v. Canada and the EI system; R v. Darrach, the rape shield system; and the case of Doreen Demas, aboriginal women and their concerns.

● (1320)

The court challenges program is important. It provides opportunity for those who cannot otherwise speak out and it is being chastised by the government and being cut off. It is one of the tools of government that allows people to seek redress to the real challenges of equality.

I submit that the decisions of the government are draconian, mean-spirited and deliberately directed at the 60% to 65% of Canadians who do not endorse its agenda.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite has put many years into women's issues but I was rather appalled or surprised to hear two things.

First, I would like the member opposite to clarify something. We on this side of the House are very proud of being a part of the Status of Women. We want to see real money put into action to support all the initiatives that we need to support and around the table we have a vote on what we will be doing. We are very happy with the Status of Women and the direction it has taken.

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However, I believe I heard the inference that members on the other side of the House wanted to do away with Status of Women. I find that very strange because when I was standing in line at the airport ready to get on a plane someone came to me and said that they were told by the Liberals that there would be no Status of Women this year, that it was gone. By virtue of the fact that I just heard that comment in the House today, I find it disquieting because it is misleading and untruthful.

Second, I keep hearing members opposite slam the organization called REAL Women. In a democratic society I feel that organizations can say or do what they want, which is separate from the MPs and the House of Commons. Our job is to listen to all the variety.

Could I please find out, first, who, apparently on our committee, said that he or she wanted to do away with the Status of Women committee; second, when the person said it, because I will look up the documentation; and third, why are members picking on the REAL Women organization?

• (1325)

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I missed the first question, so I would appreciate if the member opposite would repeat it, but I will address the other questions.

I would suggest that the member speak with her House leadership because I am advised that the House leadership on her side proposed folding the Status of Women committee into the heritage committee. It was only the objections of the other parties that sustained the Standing Order for the Status of Women committee to remain in place. This is a committee that women across the country fought hard to maintain and no one was prepared to allow that committee to be subsumed into another committee.

As for the question of REAL Women, I have no problem with REAL Women doing what it wants and saying what it wants. It has every right and opportunity to advocate for what it wishes, as do other organizations. What I do have difficulty with is the fact that this organization has the ear of government in a way that no other organization has. It also resorts to name calling, to putting down other groups, to not acknowledging the diversity of other groups and it sees no importance in allowing a whole continuum of voices to be heard.

**Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while I agree with some of the things in the statement put forward by the Liberal government today, I am interested in the fact that earlier today someone from the Liberal side said that if it had not been for the NDP taking down the government we would have had pay equity. Why did we not have pay equity the year before that or the year before that or the year before that? Mr. Speaker, let me know when I get to the number 12. The Liberals had a significant number of years to bring in pay equity but chose instead to wave it in front of the public as we neared an election. Therefore, I think that is a facile argument to make.

The Liberal opposition says that it wants to help all women and particularly women who are vulnerable. The United Nations report criticized Canada in 2003, which, as I recall, was under a Liberal government, for failing in areas such as providing support to single mothers and first nations women. I cannot think of groups of people

who would be more vulnerable than many single mothers and first nations women.

I was very interested in a comment made earlier by a Conservative member saying that the Conservatives wanted to do things that did not cost money. I would suggest to them that one of the things might be to recruit more candidates since they only ran 38 women candidates with 12% being elected, compared to the NDP running 108 women candidates with 35% being elected. That is something that would cost no money, would increase women's representation in the House and would be a significant—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I apologize to the member but I must allow enough time for a response from the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Mr. Speaker, the member's question on pay equity is a very important question. She is right when she says that it took a long time coming about. It took a long time getting a response from government but it underlined the importance of the Status of Women committee and the enthusiasm and the research done by the committee in promoting pay equity. The minister of labour and the minister of justice had made a firm commitment to bring forward draft legislation on pay equity which was going to come in February or March of 2006.

I say to the member opposite that the legislation in draft form would have been there if the government had not been defeated.

• (1330)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that party has been obviously characterized and demonstrated to be a party that leaves people behind more and more.

We were shocked when we heard the throne speech, with five priorities, leaving the other 95% leaving Canadians out. People were aghast, wondering where the rest of the throne speech was.

Then it came to the budget, when women, aboriginal people, single parents, senior, northerners and students were left out. We were offering \$6,000 to students. What did they get? They got \$40, not even enough for a textbook.

The Conservatives increased income tax to 12% for the poorest in society. They cut historical Canadian programs to help people: the Kelowna accord, \$5 billion; a national day care program, \$10 billion; and climate change that would help people reduce smog, reduce greenhouse gases by hundreds of millions of tonnes. They were criticized constantly for these, so we thought that would have been the end.

It was absolutely astonishing to me and many Canadians that the Conservatives went ahead and made these dramatic and drastic cuts to groups. One would almost think the party has a death wish.

In the throne speech and the budget, they did not fund them. Now they are aggressively cutting funding for the tourism industry, youth, museums, housing, aboriginal people, volunteers and for the people in B.C. and Alberta who are fighting the pine beetle, all with no warning. Members do not have to take from me. I will be spending the rest of my speech giving the voices of Canadians and of people in my riding in Yukon. They have expressed shock and surprise at the cuts along with dismay and anger.



I will start out with our grand chief in the area. When the anti-smoking programs were cut for aboriginal people but no one else, it is very upsetting. He was very dismayed too with the cuts to initiatives to help women, who have been making great progress lately and taking their place in society.

Our volunteer organizations have been cut drastically. As one of the founders of our Yukon Volunteer Bureau, I am very saddened by these cuts. We heard from Volunteer Canada that. It says:

Notwithstanding our efforts to facilitate program renewal, at approximately 4 p.m. today, the Government of Canada announced that its support of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative would be cut as part of its most recent program reviews efforts.

While shocked by the announcement, it goes on to say that hopefully the decision will be reviewed.

It further says:

Support of volunteerism is essential as we work at keeping our communities safe. Volunteers are the driving force behind many community based initiatives such as community policing, addictions treatment, and training and rehabilitation for those in trouble with the law.

How shocking it is that a government, in theory, says that it is fighting crime, but then it cuts all these crime fighting programs. Almost every Yukoner in my riding is a volunteer for something. It is part of the heart of our caring society in Yukon. To cut that is just unconscionable, especially at a time when we are about to host the Canada Winter Games, the first time ever that they have been north of the 60th parallel. We need the biggest percentage of our community as volunteers.

Let me go on to literacy, as a former president of literacy organization. People across Canada are dismayed that the government does not think that literacy is important. Let me quote:

As you can imagine, the Yukon Literacy Coalition is very concerned about the budget cuts announced by the federal government yesterday.

It did projects like literacy community development projects, family literacy initiatives, first nation workplace initiatives. That is the second time that the first nations have been cut, and there will more in my speech. It goes on to say:

Without this federal contribution literacy programs and organizations in the Yukon will suffer tremendously. I hope you will support us in lobbying the government for the reinstatement of these funds.

Identifying literacy as—

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could you find some time to review the objective of the motion today? It is about women's issues, but we seem to be discussing budget cuts. If we could have some relevance on this, I would appreciate your ruling.

• (1335)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I would urge all hon. members speaking to the motion to try to stick as closely as possible to the subject matter of the motion being debated.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite thinks that no women are illiterate in the country, I would be happy to receive that information.

It goes on to say:

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Identifying literacy as of little value is interesting considering that research has shown that improving the literacy rates by 1% would increase the GDP by 1.5 billion dollars; ironically slightly more than the Conservatives' budget cuts...

Ask a learner if the money used to help them read was wasteful. Take a moment and think about how much of your ability to read is worth. Apparently, according to the government it isn't much.

The member just asked to hear about the women's groups. Let me quote from the women's groups:

We are saddened, dismayed and angered that the Conservative government has cut funding to the Status of Women Canada and the Court Challenges Program. These funding cuts will adversely affect the lives of Yukon women....

We are saddened that the Conservative Government has ignored the wishes of northern women and the Expert panel's recommendations that the Status of Women Canada needed to be strengthened in order to provide internal expertise and gender based analysis for government policies. The lives of Yukon women will be adversely affected through policies and programs which are not responsive to their needs and issues here in the north. We are saddened that Mr. Harper has chosen to make dramatic cuts to one of the smallest budgets at the federal government level.

We are dismayed that Mr. Harper—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I remind the hon. member for Yukon, even when we quote letters or articles, we do not refer to hon. members by name but by their riding or title.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

We are dismayed that [the Prime Minister] has gone back on his election promise to "take concrete and immediate measures to ensure Canada fully upholds its commitments to women." Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Children....

We are angry that...[the] Minister of Finance, said that "We won't apologize for our capacity to say no to bad ideas". Does this mean that gender equality is a bad idea? Yukon women do not think that gender equality and economic security is a bad idea....

The Court Challenges Program was set up in 1994 to provide financial assistance for important court cases that advance language and equality rights guaranteed under Canada's Constitution. The Court Challenges Program has made some of Canada's most important Charter cases possible. It has been praised by United Nation bodies.

Treasury Board president...said "I just don't think it made sense for the government to subsidize lawyers to challenge the government's own laws in court" and he cancelled it. The Yukon Status of Women Council thinks it makes sense if you value human rights and fairness. Without the Court Challenges Program, it will be much easier for governments to violate the Constitution. We also do not think that a woman's ability to challenge discrimination is a bad idea.

Let us go on to the museums where there have been cuts. A lot of women either work or volunteer in museums. Just last week, the museums had a meeting with the minister, who announced that the government was going to come out with a new policy. All of a sudden, what is the new policy?

**An hon. member:** Cut them.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** It is to cut them dramatically. No wonder the executive director of the CMA was shocked, puzzled and felt betrayed by these cuts.

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There are three projects in Yukon, and I have a list of hundreds of projects. Three projects were approved in my riding last year, two of them are for aboriginal museum cultural sites, another cut for aboriginal people.

A letter from Yukon's largest museum states:

MAP is [the] only federal program dedicated exclusively to museums. [It is] one of the few places we can go to get money to do collection work. Collection work is the backbone of museum work—without we cannot do the exhibition, programming, education roles...

Ed in the Yukon writes:

—it is hard to see how the Federal Museums' Assistance program is a "wasteful" program. This is an insult to all hard working museum workers who have worked for years for very little money in the preservation of our heritage....

—cuts to the Youth Employment programs is the very back bone of summer operations for small and large museums, especially during the summer season... GST rebates for tourists to Canada will help dampen visitations (especially conventions) at a time when other pressure on tourism, a strong Canadian dollar, the passport issue and terrorism...[have] already made this the worst tourism year...

Brent writes:

As you can appreciate, the museums folk here are very unhappy...that MAP is being cut...

I think the cuts to adult literacy, youth international programs, museums and other social programs indicate a government that will alienate Canadians sooner rather than later. To call these initiatives wasteful and not priorities of Canadians is particularly offensive.

It is not just all these groups that are writing. There are individuals.

Alejandro writes:

According to Treasury Board president...the \$50-million program will not receive its last \$10.8 million under the excuse that it is not effective enough and that you are saving Canadians money.

This is the—

• (1340)

**Mr. John Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have listened to these continuous quotes by the member for Yukon. These are unattributed quotes that do not appear in any publication.

We are having a debate, but he is trotting out these unattributed quotes that we cannot follow up to find out if they are genuine or otherwise. If he has a problem with the issue or if he is supporting the motion on the floor, let him speak to it rather than come out with this stuff that we cannot understand and have no idea whether it is factual or otherwise.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The hon. member for Yukon has about 45 seconds left.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Mr. Speaker, it shows that we listen to our constituents and the government does not really care what the constituents have to say, nor the groups across Canada.

I wanted to comment on the law commission, tourism and cutting affordable housing, but in conclusion, as the representatives who provide services to millions of Canadians have indicated, these are heartless cuts. By targeting the most vulnerable in our society, it is striking a blow to the very essence of our very caring, inclusive nation.

We will not forget and the minorities, the women, the youth, the aboriginal people and the vulnerable of the greatest nation on earth will not forget. We will stand by them all the way.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I had trouble sifting through the comments of the member. The motion on the floor today has to do with the Status of Women and with the budget around it. We were talking also a little earlier about other issues around that.

Is the member aware that the program funding for women will not be cut? I heard him list different organizations. The administrative savings for the Status of Women, the \$5 million costs savings, were necessary. Those savings can be used in different areas to directly impact on women's issues, like combating violence against women and girls and contributing to the economic well-being of women across our nation.

Would the member please answer the question and tell me whether he is aware that this program funding for women will not be cut?

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member would love us to talk about the things that are not being cut, which are very few things. I will not be speaking on behalf of Yukon women, so let me just read what they had to say:

The lives of Yukon women will be adversely affected through policies and programs which are not responsive to their needs and issues here in the north. We are saddened that [the Prime Minister] has chosen to make dramatic cuts...

I would like at this time to pay tribute to Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards and Louise McKinny, the famous five who fought for women's rights. They would roll over in their graves if they heard what the Conservative government did this week in cutting back the advancement of those rights through the law commission, through the charter challenge program and through cuts to the status of women.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as we know, women provide most of the caregiving. A situation of which the member is aware is families with children with autism and the stress that puts on families. In some of cases, with which I have been dealing, the pressure has been so great that the marriage breaks up and the child is usually left with the woman.

There is no national health care plan for children with autism. It is up to the provinces to devise their own plans in this regard. Alberta has cared for children with autism up till age 18. In Ontario it is age six. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have pilot programs. It is simply not good enough that families and women with children with autism have to suffer such great financial and emotional burdens brought about by this neurological disorder.

*Business of Supply*

Will the hon. member, the good Yukoner that he is, support a national autism plan that would fall under medicare, where the federal government would work with the provinces and territories to develop a national plan that would benefit all families with children with autism? We then would have a uniform strategy across the country so people would not have to move to other areas to get it. It would help stabilize the families and provide those children, and especially the caregivers, the women who provide the care, some immediate help and respite in the future.

• (1345)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Mr. Speaker, that is a wonderful question because just a few hours ago I replied to a letter from some children at a school in New Brunswick asking for a national autism strategy. I told them I was totally supportive of this and I congratulated them for their efforts at such young ages. I also sent them all Yukon pins.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Laurentides—Labelle.

The Bloc Québécois will support the Liberal motion, because we believe that the cuts to Status of Women Canada that have been announced are symptomatic and provide disturbing evidence of how important women are in the mind of this government.

The Bloc Québécois calls on the government to take a step back, because we believe that this cut is being made not in the spirit of budget rationalization—because we know that this government has surpluses—but rather from an ideological perspective, one that is contrary to the values of Quebecers. We think that women in Quebec are being judged based on how Status of Women Canada's programs are being managed.

The Conservative government has announced cuts of \$5 million over two years to the secretariat of Status of Women Canada, whose budget is only just over \$24 million. That means a cut of 20% of its budget, a budget that it was allocated after heated battle.

I would like to remind this House of the tough battles that were fought, with the Bloc Québécois among those leading the charge, to have the Standing Committee on the Status of Women created. For more than 10 years, we had to call for this committee and demand that it be created, and it finally happened in October 2004. I was among the first group of members who took part in that committee's work. At those parliamentary committee meetings, where we heard ordinary people, experts and ministers, but most importantly many representatives of groups and organizations, we saw that the needs and the problems are enormous.

That is why I find it absolutely incomprehensible that today the organization that manages those programs is having its budget cut, when women are barely starting to get access to services and the needs are growing.

That committee was given the authority to review all issues arising from the mandate, management, organization and operation of Status of Women Canada, and also to hold an inquiry. If we make cuts to the management of Status of Women Canada, however, who will deal with that committee's reports? The Standing Committee on the Status of Women is important.

Let us recall that five reports have been submitted. There was a report on maternity benefits, employment insurance parental benefits, that talked about the exclusion of self-employed women—and that is still the case.

A very important report on pay equity was submitted. We know that the pay equity problem is a grave injustice, and that it is very difficult to deal with it. In Quebec, we have made significant progress, but here in Canada women's wages are still much lower than men's.

A third report about funding by the women's program was also submitted. The question was what the women of Canada thought about it.

Of course a report on increased funding for equality-seeking organizations was also submitted. The organizations are underfunded. We have identified a lot of flaws, particularly recently, when Women and the Law had to close down because the minister dragged her feet on providing the funding it needed.

Another report dealt with gender analysis. When we are dealing with discrimination against women, it is important to understand that we have to have an analysis, department by department, to be able to prove what is being argued and prove what women need.

We are concerned that if Status of Women Canada's budget is cut, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, an essential committee, will have few respondents and few responses.

Yet the Conservative government may well need the expertise of Status of Women Canada—this was abundantly clear in the child care agreement. The Conservative government's decision to cancel the child care agreement, which was signed by the governments of Canada and Quebec on October 28, 2005, was anything but unremarkable.

• (1350)

That legally binding contract, which took months to prepare and was announced with great fanfare, was cancelled the following year by the Conservatives. It is this failure to follow through on promises that women in Canada and Quebec find so discouraging. I would like to remind the House that this cancelled contract represents a loss of over \$800 million for child care centres in Quebec.

In its place, the government is offering a \$1,200 annual, taxable allowance. This shows just how out of touch this government is with women's needs. It would have been wiser to listen to the Bloc Québécois' suggestion and grant a refundable tax credit, but the government refused to do so.

As further evidence of their obsession with making sure everyone knows about their ideas, it seems that for the first two months, the minister sent parents their \$100 cheques through the mail rather than electronically. The cost to taxpayers: \$2 million. This is a great injustice.

So when the government comes back to tell us about accountable financial management, that raises more than a few eyebrows.

*Statements by Members*

What about attempts to get preventive withdrawal for female federal employees who work under conditions that could pose a risk to their children's safety, whether at border crossings or elsewhere? Preventive withdrawal for pregnant women is still not the norm.

As for work-life balance, it is clear that the government has no vision about this. We should have a vision about child care, in order to develop a solid network of child care centres for the future so that we can have a safe place for our children and avoid health and dropout problems later on.

Yet, the minister responsible posted this on the Status of Women Canada website. Yesterday, September 27, 2006, we could read this:

As a member of the Canadian Heritage Portfolio, Status of Women Canada plays an important role in the life of Canadians.

Status of Women Canada is responsible for promoting gender equality, and over the next year it will work to achieve the objective of supporting the full participation of Canadian women in all aspects of society. I am pleased that particular attention will be given to those challenges that are currently faced by Canadian women. I look forward to working with them on such issues as the economic stability of women and the situation of Aboriginal women.

Given the circumstances and given the quote from the minister, how could she have written and approved that after announcing a 20% cut in the organization's funding?

Often, when we talk about the economic stability of women, what we are really mean is poverty. Children are living in poverty in Canada because families are poor, and we know that the poorest families in our society are single-parent families, most of which are mother-led families.

Although the Canadian economy grew by 62% between 1994 and 2004, which produced nearly \$480 billion more each year in market value during those ten years, more and more women saw their salaries stagnate or barely change, while hard costs such as housing, tuition fees, child care and public transit have increased, which has had an impact on family economies.

In conclusion, it is important that we continue to fight to stop the cutbacks that have been announced. We demand that the government reverse its decision and cancel the cutbacks.

It is important to understand that these cuts are not the result of rational thinking, rather they result from an ideological approach that completely opposes the values of Quebecers and everything defended by the Bloc Québécois.

• (1355)

We can only conclude that this government is reactionary and, unfortunately, misogynous. We in the Bloc Québécois will continue to rise and defend the women of Quebec and ensure equality in all areas for Quebec's women.

**The Speaker:** I do not wish to proceed immediately to the question and comment period that would normally follow the speech given by the hon. member for Trois-Rivières. This would take too long and statements by members must take place at 2 p.m.

We will therefore proceed immediately to statements by members.

The hon. member for Winnipeg South.

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

[English]

**MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after 13 years of waiting and broken promises, the residents of Winnipeg South were finally able to drive through Kenaston Boulevard without suffering at the mercy of train schedules.

This past Friday afternoon I, along with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, cut the ribbon on the Kenaston Boulevard underpass. The federal government contributed \$13 million toward the cost of construction and was on hand to celebrate the completion of this project.

The immediate benefit of the Kenaston underpass includes less traffic and reduced idling, thus giving cleaner air. For the fastest growing area in Winnipeg this underpass will ease traffic congestion and reduce travel time.

The government is committed to achieving results. With a population boom of 40,000 new residents in Waverly West expected in my riding, more investment infrastructure will be needed for the new roads and underpasses.

I am committed to working tirelessly to ensure that these needs and all the needs of Winnipeg South are met in the future.

\* \* \*

**YOUTH**

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's meanspirited cuts took over \$10 million out of the international youth internship program, abandoning our young people.

This great employment program provides underemployed or unemployed Canadians with the opportunity to gain viable international development work experience.

Through CIDA Canada sponsors internships that help unemployed college and university graduates between the ages of 19 and 30 from all provinces gain international development experience.

Roughly 65% of the youth who benefit are young women and 98.4% of the interns completed their program. Of the 550 who completed their internship during the first year 71% were successful in finding employment within six months. An additional 19% returned to school and only 9% reported being unemployed.

Why has this government chosen to target Canada's unemployed youth?

*Statements by Members*

[Translation]

**CULTURE DAYS**

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, September 29 and 30 and October 1 mark the 10th anniversary of Quebec's culture days. More than 1,800 free activities in 289 municipalities will bring together the general public and artists and creators.

Quebec's culture days provide me with another opportunity to remind this government of the vital importance of culture in the lives of people and societies.

To attack our culture the way the Conservative government does is to break up the foundation of our social connection, to destroy what makes sense in our existence and our identity.

What lack of concern, what thoughtlessness.

\* \* \*

• (1400)

[English]

**GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the government announced that it was cutting vital community programs so that it could reallocate that money to the real priorities of Canadians. All told, those cuts amounted to over \$1 billion.

Where do we find that money going? Why, into subsidies to the oil and gas industry in the Prime Minister's own province.

I have to say that is not the priority of families in Hamilton Mountain. They are already being gouged at the pumps and certainly would not agree to have more of their hard-earned tax dollars go to the oil and gas industry through government subsidies.

No, the real priority for Canadians is health care. In fact, the Conservatives recognized that during the election campaign when they promised to make health care one of their five priorities. Once elected, they dropped health care completely from their list of must do items.

New Democrats are not going to let the government get away with that.

I say to the Prime Minister that he has a \$13 billion surplus. Cut wait times and improve care by hiring more doctors and nurses, expand home care and long term care programs, and bring in national pharmacare. The surplus belongs to Canadians. Spend it to meet their needs.

\* \* \*

**ROBERT MACISAAC**

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I want to honour Mayor Robert MacIsaac of the city of Burlington. The mayor has announced he will not seek re-election this fall. This loss is a loss for my community.

Mayor MacIsaac has been a true municipal leader in Burlington, in Ontario and in our country. He has had nine very successful years as mayor. He understands the balance between a growing urban

community and a city with more than half of its land mass being rural.

Mayor MacIsaac has pursued smart growth principles, formed the mayor's transit caucus, and chaired Ontario's greenbelt task force. He established team Burlington to promote all aspects of economic development and led the revitalization of the downtown and the waterfront. His mayor's gala has raised over \$1 million for the community foundation.

We have not always agreed, but I have always admired his clear vision and his great contribution to the quality of life for the citizens of Burlington.

Mayor MacIsaac has done a great job for our community and the people of Burlington thank him. He will be missed.

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**GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

**Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on Monday the minority Conservative government cut the commercial heritage property incentive program and \$7.6 million in other grants and contributions given out by Environment Canada. This continues this government's long string of needless cuts to environment programs, cuts we know are needless because its own officials say so.

In February the Minister of Natural Resources was told that EnerGuide ranked among the most efficient and effective GHG reduction programs in the country. What was the government's response? It cut EnerGuide.

The minority Conservative government was told in February that over half of Canadians learned about global warming through the one tonne challenge and six million of them took action to reduce their energy consumption. What was the government's response? It cut the one tonne challenge.

This government was also told in February by its own officials that renewable energy projects were reducing more GHGs at a lower cost than had been anticipated. What was the government's response? It cut the renewable power reduction initiative.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development submitted her report. We had a chance to learn that the former Liberal government had invested nearly a billion dollars in various programs. The result, and that is what matters here, is that a one megatonne reduction, in other words one half of one per cent of the Kyoto objectives, cost the Canadian government nearly a billion dollars.

*Statements by Members*

Lucky thing our new Minister of the Environment has taken matters in hand and that the Canadian government will be able to come up with concrete cost-saving measures, including the use of fuel containing 5% methanol and various types of support for public transit.

\* \* \*

**HYDROELECTRICITY**

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, during a media scrum last Wednesday, the premier of Newfoundland stated that it was in Canada's best interest to give greater support to hydroelectric projects in Labrador rather than those of Quebec because he believes that the political climate in Quebec is unstable. Furthermore, the premier is urging Ontario to not buy its electricity. Quebec has every right to sell its electricity to whoever wishes to buy it, including the United States.

Nothing in Quebec suggests an unstable political climate. The Quebec government is fully responsible for developing its hydroelectric potential within its territory, which it will continue to do. Once Quebec becomes a country, it could then develop and sell its electricity to whomever it likes. One province's thin skin will not change anything.

As the Governor General would say, the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador is completely out of touch.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

[English]

**HIV-AIDS**

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, September 24, I had the privilege of taking part in Edmonton's 15th annual HIV-AIDS Walk for Life. I am proud that this event is held in my constituency and I want to salute the organizers, the donors and all the people who took part in this phenomenal fundraiser.

I am happy to report that due to the support of people in Edmonton, Ottawa and many communities across the country, I was able to personally raise \$3,600, and Edmonton as a city contributed \$37,000.

This is a sign of our commitment to improving the resources, support and care for people suffering from this terrible affliction. This is also a coast to coast initiative and I know that many of the members in this House also took part in events in their own communities.

I encourage all Canadians to get involved with the local organizations that are making a difference in so many lives. All of us know someone whose family has been touched by the tragedy of HIV-AIDS. Events like Walk for Life mean we can look forward with hope in the future in the fight for a cure.

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**JUSTICE**

**Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this minority government takes great pride in portraying itself as a

government of law and order. However, its idea of law and order is becoming more and more clear all the time. There is more money for jails, less money and fewer regulations for gun control, taking conditional sentencing away from our experienced judges, and arbitrarily increasing mandatory minimums.

That is certainly not something to applaud because its concept of law and order means three things: more guns, more jails and longer sentences.

This week the government has cut over \$14 million from the national crime prevention program, a program which actually endeavoured to reduce crime and victimization. This is yet another example of all its cuts and talking about safe communities but doing absolutely nothing.

Constituents in Brampton—Springdale and Canadians deserve safe communities. The most vulnerable among us, women, minority groups, francophones and families living in poverty, all demand safe communities.

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**GEORGE BOLTON**

**Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, George Lawheed Bolton, a D-Day veteran with the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, died this past Monday in his 87th year. He was a resident of Elmvalle and a member of the Elmvalle Legion.

In 1939 he joined the Queen's Own Rifles Reserve, trained at Camp Borden, and was shipped out to Gander, Newfoundland. After a year in Gander as an operator-mechanic, he was assigned to the Bren Gun Carriers. He was shipped to Britain in 1940. After several assignments he became involved in the preparation for the Normandy invasion of June 6, 1944.

George hit the beach during the first assault wave on D-Day. Seasickness, deep water and intense enemy fire did not keep him from reaching the seawall. Despite leg wounds he continued on to Falaise suffering shell shock from a bomb hit. George remained in Holland until the war's end and then completed his tour in Germany before returning to Toronto.

Canada has lost another fine soldier and hero. Let us never forget his courage and that of the brave men and women who have and continue to serve our country.

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**CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD**

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my dismay on behalf of the thousands of western Canadian farmers who are distressed by the government's attacks on the Canadian Wheat Board.

The multinational grain corporations have found another government willing to do their dirty work, remove a formidable competitor, and then capture the price advantage of our superior Canadian wheat.

Bundles of letters are coming in expressing this outrage and demanding that farmers themselves decide the future of the Wheat Board at the grassroots level. This is not a time for big government, whether new or old, to be dictating the future of the family farm.

[*Translation*]

Let us be clear: if the government successfully undermines our Canadian Wheat Board today, this will be the beginning of the end for our supply management system, which should very much please the large multinational companies.

It is time that our federal government support our Canadian and Quebec farmers in their fight for the survival of rural communities.

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●(1410)

#### WOMEN

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, women make up approximately 52% of the Canadian population. It is a proven fact that they are often at a disadvantage, and even discriminated against, in most fields.

To cut programs that support their financial security and equality is categorically unfair.

We have been working to improve our situation for years, and I feel we have been very successful. These cuts send a very negative message from the Conservative government.

When the Conservatives gain ground, Canadian women lose ground.

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#### QUEBEC CITY

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, according to the annual ranking by *Canadian Business* magazine, Quebec City is the best city for business, as already pointed out by KPMG and the Conference Board in recent months. Quebec City has a comfortable lead over Charlottetown, Saguenay, Laval, St. John's—Newfoundland, Calgary, Montreal and Toronto.

Quebec City is one of 40 cities ranked for establishing a business in Canada and had the best ranking based on the criteria of construction of commercial buildings, employment rate, cost of living, operating costs for a business, and crime rate. Quebec City is experiencing an economic boom with 60,000 jobs created since 1999. It is reaping the benefits of economic diversification undertaken 15 years ago by local decision-makers.

All Quebecers are pleased with this first place ranking and the Bloc Québécois applauds the results of the efforts undertaken 15 years ago.

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[*English*]

#### COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

**Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this minority Conservative government struck a blow against human rights in Canada by cutting the court challenges program. This

#### *Statements by Members*

important program provides funding to help minority, women's and other disadvantaged groups to challenge laws that may violate their human rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The cutting of the court challenges program as well as the cuts to Status of Women Canada shows that the government has no interest in advancing the rights of minorities and women.

This minority Conservative government had a \$13 billion surplus, yet it chose to cut a \$5.6 million program that helped disadvantaged people. This was not only meanspirited and petty, but it was an ideological cut.

Now, the only Canadians who will have access to the courts are those with deep pockets. The government is muzzling the voices of less advantaged Canadians who only seek to protect their rights under Canada's Constitution.

On behalf of all those Canadians, I call on the Conservative government to reinstate the court challenges program.

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#### AFGHANISTAN

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is playing a crucial role in Afghanistan as the country rebuilds after years of oppression. In addition to our military role, Canada is leading the way by cooperating with dedicated and experienced NGOs to provide needed development, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.

Our new government is working with NGOs like the Aga Khan Foundation Canada to provide support for programs that are making life better for the people of Afghanistan as they move forward to a peaceful and more hopeful future.

With CIDA's support, the foundation is working to provide viable economic alternatives to poppy production in several Afghan provinces. The project works closely with the Afghan government to enhance livelihoods by spurring entrepreneurship and rehabilitating the country's economy.

This government is also proud to support projects enhancing democratic participation among ordinary Afghans.

This government's support for the positive work being done by NGOs like the Aga Khan Foundation is just one way Canada is stepping up to provide real leadership in Afghanistan.

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[*Translation*]

#### PHIL LATULIPPE

**Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on September 24 Mr. Phil Latulippe died at the age of 87. He was known for his many running feats that benefited charities and the foundation bearing his name.

Born in Cabano, Témiscouata, Mr. Latulippe was a member of the Order of Canada and a knight of the Ordre du Québec. These honours are a testament to his determination, altruism, courage and generosity.

*Oral Questions*

Mr. Latulippe crossed Canada twice on foot, when he was 62 and 70, and once by bicycle at the age of 80. He took up these challenges to help the disabled, youth, and seniors in Canada and Quebec.

I pay tribute to Mr. Latulippe for inspiring his fellow citizens and for his remarkable life. I extend my sincere condolences to his spouse and family.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1415)

[*Translation*]

### MAHER ARAR

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Commissioner of the RCMP did an honourable thing. He apologized to Maher Arar, his wife and children for the injustice that they suffered. Last week, this House also offered an apology, but Mr. Arar and his family are still waiting for a formal apology from the government.

More than a week after the publication of the O'Connor report, why has the government still not apologized to Maher Arar? An apology is not sufficient, but it is necessary.

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government agrees that Mr. Arar was the victim of a great injustice. That is the reason the government has accepted, without reserve, all the recommendations in Mr. Justice O'Connor's report, as the Commissioner of the RCMP did this morning before the Parliamentary committee.

However, we have a responsibility to arrive at a fair and honourable solution for Mr. Arar, and to represent the taxpayers' interests. That will be done in a responsible and timely manner through discussions between government lawyers and those representing Mr. Arar.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when he was in opposition, the Minister of Public Safety preferred to undermine Maher Arar's reputation rather than supporting the appointment of the O'Connor commission, which enabled us to get to the bottom of this matter. Without that commission, we would never have known that Mr. Arar's wife and two young children were on a security watch list.

Ten days after the publication of the clear conclusions of Mr. Justice O'Connor, why are Ms. Mazigh and her children still waiting for a formal apology from the government?

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, quite simply because as the government we have a responsibility to the taxpayers to ensure that the result is responsible in financial terms. We are proceeding with discussions between lawyers for the government and lawyers for Mr. Arar to reach a conclusion that is honourable, fair and financially responsible.

The Minister of Public safety emphasized this morning that he had questioned the previous government about its failure to accept responsibility concerning Mr. Arar.

[*English*]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada owes a moral debt to Maher Arar, his wife, and their children. Our Liberal government took the first step in establishing the O'Connor inquiry. We followed up when we supported the motion in this House apologizing to the Arar family. Commissioner Zaccardelli has apologized. Only the Conservative government has yet to apologize.

Why has the government not done the honourable thing? Surely compassion is not a matter of negotiation. An apology is not sufficient, but surely it is necessary.

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, how ironic that a representative of the Liberal Party should say they took the first step with respect to Mr. Arar. They did by taking actions which ended up putting him in a Syrian jail.

I find it peculiar that the Leader of the Opposition has not asked questions in this regard. After all, it was the Leader of the Opposition who denied that Mr. Arar was facing torture. It was the solicitor general of the previous government who refused to take action.

We have taken responsibility on behalf of the Government of Canada, which is our obligation. It would be nice to see the Liberals take some of that responsibility too.

• (1420)

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that was a willing misrepresentation in this House and it behooves all of us to convince the government not to peddle that kind of stuff.

Given that the public safety minister has admitted that he had several conversations with the RCMP commissioner over the past few days, does the minister still claim that the commissioner never received any direction from any agent of the government saying not to comment on the Arar report to the media until today?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague makes it sound like I admitted that I talked with the commissioner. I talk with the commissioner on a regular basis. It is my duty to do that.

As a matter of fact, last Wednesday and Friday we had discussions. That is certainly no secret at all. The commissioner had indicated to me that his officials, just like other government officials, were taking the time to look at the recommendations. Then he indicated to me they were going to accept all of the recommendations pertinent to the RCMP.

He also indicated that he was going to be having a public discussion with the media or otherwise. He was the one who told me that. He also indicated that he would indeed appear before the committee. So it was a good—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the Commissioner of the RCMP has the full confidence of this government, why were media inquiries to the RCMP directed to the minister's office?



*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as any hard-working journalist does, and there are those in our midst, when they are pursuing a story they phone a variety of departments. I am sure they called the RCMP. I know that other colleagues of mine were getting requests at their departments related to the Arar report.

If the member is asking questions about the media, should she not be meeting with the media and asking them why they are making calls to different places?

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in her report, the environment commissioner issued a warning to the government. She described as “too little, too slow” the government's efforts to achieve the Kyoto protocol objectives. She also mentioned the urgency for setting targets for substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Will the Minister of the Environment finally listen to reason and ensure that her government implements measures to meet the Kyoto protocol objectives?

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that this government is going to seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This year we will introduce the first Canadian clean air act.

It is a difficult task because we have inherited the Liberal's record, under which greenhouse gas emissions increased by over 30%. It is not easy for us to resolve the environmental problems that were created by the Liberals.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in an interview the environment commissioner said that a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must absolutely target the oil companies or it would likely be ineffective.

My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources this time. Will he apply the commissioner's recommendation and target the oil companies in his plan? Could this minister, or the Minister of the Environment respond?

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will act in a responsible manner in the interest of Canada on environmental matters. We will not target just any Canadians, Canadian groups or regions of Canada. We do not want to attack Canadians to find solutions to our environmental problems.

We will take action. It is clear that the Liberals did not do anything on this. In 13 years under the Liberal government, greenhouse gas emissions increased by more than 30%. That is shameful.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, both ministers seem to be hiding today. The environment commissioner told the committee that working with the provinces—including Quebec—was of utmost importance, and that the territorial approach clearly had its advantages.

Will the government finally listen to reason and accept that a territorial approach is a much better way to reach the Kyoto protocol targets than its ideological approach that helps big oil while taking a toll on environmental protection?

• (1425)

[English]

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we agree with the recommendations of the commissioner. Those recommendations were that the previous Liberal government did too little and too slow and it was poorly managed.

This government is a government of action. Our action will provide clean air and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the biggest greenhouse gas emitters are oil companies, especially those in Alberta, that are significantly increasing their emissions as they boost their petroleum production.

How can the government keep giving tax breaks to big oil without imposing severe restrictions forcing them to significantly reduce their greenhouse gas emissions? Can the government set aside its ideological approach, which panders to oil companies, in favour of a more constructive approach to the Kyoto protocol?

[English]

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member across is so excited about our plan, but unfortunately I am not going to be providing details on that plan today. He is going to have to wait.

Also, the commissioner said that the Kyoto target was not achievable and that is to the blame of the previous Liberal government. She has asked and recommended that we set targets. We agree with those recommendations and our targets will be achievable.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Prime Minister is disputing climate change. He says it is too complicated.

The environment commissioner says it is not really that complicated. Greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and natural gas sectors have risen 51% in 16 years. The tar sands will double that within nine years.

When will the government impose a moratorium on tar sands development?

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government has a responsibility to Canadians to implement an accountable, sustainable energy and environment policy. That is what we will do. We will act far more responsibly than our predecessors, who did nothing at all for the environment.

We will pursue an energy policy that works well for all Canadians.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the commissioner of the environment has delivered a stinging indictment on Liberal inaction on climate change. No mandatory standards, no action on—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor. The House will want to hear his question.

**Hon. Jack Layton:** Mr. Speaker, this stinging indictment of Liberal inaction included no mandatory standards, no big polluters, no action on the oil sands, and five climate change plans that amounted to nothing more than hot air from over there.

For years we had a government that was missing in action, and now we have a minister missing in action. Looking at this government's record over the last eight months, how can Canadians have any confidence at all that this government is going to be any better on climate change than the previous one?

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, he was doing so well at the beginning of his question.

Let me just reinforce what he was saying in the words of a Liberal member of Parliament, who said recently, “We had one smog day in 1993 and 48 last year...Smog costs us in indirect health care costs and also absenteeism”. That was said by the member for St. Paul's, former Liberal leadership candidate.

Let us guess what happened in 1993. The Liberal government was elected.

\* \* \*

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP member himself is adept at blowing hot air.

Canadians who lost sons—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. We will have a little order. The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville has the floor. We must have a little order to hear this question.

**Hon. Albina Guarnieri:** Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have lost sons and daughters in Afghanistan were themselves wounded by the remarks of Pakistan's President Musharraf who belittled their sacrifice and ridiculed their courage and resolve. Amazingly, our Prime Minister responded with flattery for Mr. Musharraf.

When will the Conservative Prime Minister defend the honour of our troops and, for once, actually stand up for Canada?

• (1430)

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is standing up very strongly for Canadians and for the Afghan people in Afghanistan today.

With respect to these comments, clearly President Musharraf and our own Prime Minister understand that we have to work collectively. We have to work constructively and collaboratively in

this mission in Afghanistan with 37 other NATO countries in a UN backed mission to help the people of Afghanistan stand on their own two feet.

Then, and only then, can we get on with the important development and good governance needed for the Afghan people.

**Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the copyright for “Stand up for Canada” ran out during the election.

Earlier this summer, the Prime Minister responded to the death of a Canadian soldier on UN duty by defending those who killed him and questioning why he was even there. Why does the Prime Minister trumpet our military's effort and then fall silent when their courage and competence is challenged?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised to hear this type of rhetoric coming from that hon. member.

The reality is that we are working with 37 other countries in an important mission, an important effort to bring dignity and humanitarian efforts and rights to the people of Afghanistan. It is important to bring about good governance and democracy for the people of Afghanistan.

The member knows full well that Canada is there doing important work on behalf of this country, on behalf of Afghanistan, because she voted for it when she was a member of the previous government that sent our soldiers there.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the comments by President Musharraf represent a diplomatic failure by the government. The president of Pakistan, a key player in this region, seemed to be oblivious to both the sacrifices that Canadians are making and the legitimate concerns we have with respect to the flow of arms and insurgents across the Pakistani border.

Why is the government undermining Canada's commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan by not putting the necessary resources into the diplomatic component of our mission?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that President Musharraf's remarks were incorrect. We have lost 36 soldiers. We have lost one diplomat from my own department.

It is absolutely untenable for that member or any member opposite to suggest that we do not have to work with Pakistan in our effort to secure the south. This important region is critical to the fight against terrorism.

That is why we have to work in a constructive way with all countries to see that this work can continue so we can get on with the important development, the humanitarian work and the stability that will bring about a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the real question is whether or not the minister told him about how many soldiers we lost.

*Oral Questions*

Earlier this month, we saw the Minister of National Defence publically musing about the possibility of Canadian troops patrolling the Pakistani border. Now we see the President of Pakistan demonstrating that he is not even aware of our concerns in this respect.

Where is the foreign affairs minister in all of this? Why has the government all but abandoned the diplomatic component of our efforts in Afghanistan? Does the Prime Minister truly believe that our efforts can be successful only by military force?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House where the foreign affairs minister was. He was speaking directly with President Musharraf last week in New York. We had discussions about Canada's role. We had an important discussion about the need to secure the area in the south of Afghanistan. We talked about the sensitivity around the issue of Canadian soldiers and the effort that is being put forward on behalf of the Afghan people to bring about stability.

I do not expect the member to get that, but we are not going to take any lectures from a member who would stand with her government in sending soldiers into harm's way to do important work and then back away, slink off and suggest we should come home and simply abandon the cause.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE**

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, to our astonishment, the Minister of Public Safety is proclaiming publicly that the government has full confidence in Mr. Zaccardelli, even before he has testified before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Yet the commissioner has admitted that while Mr. Arar was rotting in Syrian prisons, the victim of false information from the RCMP, he himself was convinced of Mr. Arar's innocence.

How can the government have full confidence in someone who can find nothing better to do than congratulate his officers whose mistakes and false information had such disastrous consequences for Maher Arar?

• (1435)

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as we have already said, we are going to accept all the recommendations in Justice O'Connor's report. RCMP commissioner Zaccardelli has also said that he will accept all the recommendations made to the RCMP. I think that 11 concern the RCMP directly. There are others as well.

In light of his answer, we are confident that the RCMP will make changes to improve the process.

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, RCMP officers made false reports, passed on false information that meant that an honest man was tortured and incarcerated for an extended period in squalid prisons. They created doubt in the minds of the public and even of some ministers about Mr. Arar's relationships with terrorists. As punishment for what they did, some

were promoted and now are being congratulated by the RCMP boss, Mr. Zaccardelli.

Does the minister realize that by placing his confidence so readily in Mr. Zaccardelli, he is sanctioning what was done and joining in the congratulations to those who are responsible for this tragedy?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, no one has applauded the misdeeds of officials of the former government or RCMP officers. In addition, the commissioner said this morning that he did not accept the damaging or improper actions. He said it was unacceptable. He is going to improve the situation and the entire process in the RCMP system.

\* \* \*

**MAHER ARAR**

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government reiterated its trust in Mr. Zaccardelli, the RCMP chief who knew about the mistakes made in Maher Arar's case, but did nothing about it.

How can the government refuse to officially apologize to Mr. Arar, as the O'Connor report asks it to do, knowing that he was abandoned to his fate, even though the RCMP Commissioner knew about the error made in his case?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as far as an apology is concerned, Justice O'Connor was clear. I have the report here in English and I will read what it says specifically.

[*English*]

Justice O'Connor was very clear on the item of apology, saying that "if the Government of Canada chooses to negotiate with Mr. Arar"—which we do—"negotiated arrangements can be more creative than a mere damage award. A compensation agreement could involve anything from an apology to an offer of employment or assistance in obtaining employment".

We want to satisfy Mr. Arar and his family and we are going to do it according to the guidelines laid out by Justice O'Connor.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the O'Connor report asks that the government file an official complaint with the U.S. and Syrian authorities concerning the Arar affair, but the government still refuses to tell us when it will do so.

Can the government confirm that such a complaint will be filed as early as next week?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are not looking at next week, but last week. I have sent a letter to Michael Chertoff, the United States Secretary of Homeland Security. I indicated that we have cleared Mr. Arar and his family. I also indicated that we would appreciate it if the United States did the same and took the same measures.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is no longer just the opposition in this House that is accusing the Prime Minister of going back on his promise to fix the fiscal imbalance. The Prime Minister has brushed aside his December promise and is now saying that he does not have any intention of addressing the fiscal imbalance in his next budget.

Will the Prime Minister of Canada finally admit that he never intended to honour a promise made for base electoral reasons and designed to mislead Quebecers?

• (1440)

[*English*]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we firmly intend to fulfill our election commitments with respect to equalization and restoring the fiscal balance in Canada.

Not only do we intend to keep the commitments, we already have started, by putting forward the paper with the budget, by going ahead with the consultations with our provincial and territorial colleagues, and by working toward the fall statement and of course toward the plan for 2007, which will be set out in budget 2007.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, these are still just words. Rarely do we see the government party follow up on its words with concrete deeds. The Premier of Quebec stated that there would have to be significant progress in the next federal budget. What we have just heard from the Minister of Finance does not indicate significant progress concerning the fiscal imbalance.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he has postponed his commitment indefinitely? Is it because, in the end, there is no solution?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in case the hon. member did not clearly understand my colleague's answer, I will clarify.

My colleague said that, since the recent budget, we have begun to restore the fiscal balance within the federation. A clear plan has been submitted. Moreover I wish this political party had recognized that there is a problem of fiscal imbalance within the federation. We recognized it. We will solve it, just as we have solved other issues to which we are committed.

[*English*]

**Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minority Conservative government has not delivered a penny on the fiscal imbalance despite its election promises. Even worse, by cancelling the Liberal child care agreement and the labour market partnership agreement, it has actually taken more than \$6 billion from provincial coffers.

Last, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board said that the federal government already shares more than enough with the provinces.

Let us just cut to the chase here. Does the Prime Minister really have a plan to deal with the fiscal imbalance, and if so, what is it and when?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred my honourable colleague to congratulate us on following up on Bill C-48. Particularly for Quebec, \$670 million has flowed from this act. And we have already begun to restore the fiscal balance within the federation.

I invite my colleague to read the budget speech and also to await my colleague's next budget.

[*English*]

**Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that party voted against Bill C-48. It is so obvious that it is all over the map. It promised different things to different premiers and now it cannot deliver them.

The fiscal imbalance has 10 different definitions, one for each province. The Prime Minister has called on the provinces to raise taxes to fix the fiscal imbalance even though the premiers unanimously rejected that a long time ago.

Is this really the Prime Minister's strategy to fix the fiscal imbalance, to force the provinces to raise their taxes?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is surprising to hear that kind of suggestion from a member of a party that does not even acknowledge that there is a fiscal imbalance in Canada. How can that party complain about a government today that is actually doing something about the fiscal imbalance in Canada, recognizes it and is committed to it, unlike the Liberals opposite who deny the existence of any imbalance in the Canadian federation?

We are addressing it. We are working on it. We have a plan and we will take care of it.

\* \* \*

• (1445)

**CANADA POST**

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last year, many of my rural constituents temporarily lost their rural mail service. After years of having their needs ignored and abandoned by the Liberals, rural Canadians now need and deserve real and effective services.

Could the minister responsible for the post office tell us what the government is doing to ensure real good service for rural delivery in all of Canada, wherever it is needed, including Colchester county?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House and all Canadians that the government is strongly committed to rural Canada and that we will take any and all means necessary to ensure the quality of rural mail delivery and to ensure that quality continues from coast to coast to coast.

I met recently with the chairman of the board and with the president of Canada Post to ensure that message was clearly understood.

*Oral Questions***MAHER ARAR**

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today the commissioner of the RCMP finally apologized to the Arar family. The House has apologized to the Arar family and yet all we hear from the Conservative government is an old cliched line about this being an injustice.

Injustice is a grave understatement. What happened to Mr. Arar is unconscionable and it is unbelievable that the Prime Minister has not yet apologized on behalf of all Canadians.

How much longer does Maher Arar and his family have to wait for an apology from the Prime Minister?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, right from the outset the Prime Minister has indicated clearly his regrets that the Arar family went through this awful time of injustice under the previous administration.

Opposition members are asking us to follow the recommendations of Mr. O'Connor and so we are doing that. He says:

If the Government of Canada chooses to negotiate with Mr. Arar—

—and we are—

—negotiated arrangements can be more creative than a mere damage award. A compensation agreement could involve anything from an apology to an offer of employment or assistance in obtaining employment.

We will follow the directions of Justice O'Connor.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is exactly that legalistic approach that Justice O'Connor recommended against. Maybe the minister should read the rest of the report.

I believe the Prime Minister does want to apologize and say that he is sorry but the lawyers will not let him do it. They are following this negotiation plan of using the apology as a negotiating chip.

It is very clear that the government is responsible to Mr. Arar for compensation. The government should take the apology out of that negotiation stage, make it unconditional and do it now.

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we want to do what is right for Mr. Arar and his family. We want to follow Justice O'Connor's approach. Justice O'Connor did take a legal approach to this and we appreciate that.

We are taking all 23 recommendations. We are taking the recommendation that the justice has given us related to the apology. Now the NDP members, and perhaps others, are saying that they want to pick and choose which recommendations we should follow.

We are following all the recommendations, including looking at the question of an apology and the question of compensation for Mr. Arar. We respect him enough to do that within the context of his lawyers and the government lawyers following this.

\* \* \*

**GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

**Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Prime Minister and his wife are reading from different pages these days.

This week the Prime Minister took money away from programs that help people learn to read. This morning his wife was out on the streets of Ottawa raising money for literacy programs.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Oakville has the floor and members will want to hear the question.

**Ms. Bonnie Brown:** Mr. Speaker, we agree that we should applaud her efforts.

However, now that the Prime Minister's wife has publicly demonstrated the error of her husband's government's ways, will the Prime Minister immediately restore funding to literacy programs?

● (1450)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, hypocrisy has a new spelling. It is L-i-b-e-r-a-l.

In 1995 the previous Liberal government froze settlement funding, money that was used to help new Canadians become literate.

In budget 2006, Canada's new government put \$307 million of new money into these programs. Why did the Liberals vote against it?

**Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on International Literacy Day, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development praised the adult learning and literacy program. Today, the President of the Treasury Board, who cut the money, said that helping adults learn to read was a waste of money. He said that Canada was wasting money on trying to do repair work after the fact.

Will the Prime Minister promise today to spend less time with his Treasury Board president and spend a little more time listening to his wife?

**Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I said absolutely no such thing. What I did hear a member opposite on the front benches of the Liberal Party say was that in his party he faced bigotry and discrimination as a new Canadian.

Why has not one member of the Liberal Party stood up for the comments made by the member for Eglinton—Lawrence?

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the meanspirited cuts announced this week by the Conservative government may appeal to its social conservative friends but they hurt so many other Canadians, especially women and aboriginal peoples.

The Prime Minister has cut 39% of the operating budget from Status of Women Canada and the court challenges program.

During the election the Prime Minister signed a pledge to uphold Canada's commitments to women. Is drastically slashing their budget his idea of upholding a commitment?

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again we see the party opposite, the former Liberal government that did nothing, continuing to talk and use inaccurate information. In fact, the Liberals talk while we act and we have acted in seven months.

*Oral Questions*

We have delivered on child care with \$100 a month and new spaces coming next year. We have delivered on justice to uphold the safety of communities and women. We have also introduced guidelines for human trafficking so that victims are no longer treated as victims but are supported.

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in addition to cuts to funding for women, the Prime Minister has also eliminated the first nations and Inuit tobacco control strategy. This is yet another addition to a long list of decisions by the government to cut funding for aboriginal peoples.

First the Conservatives cancelled Kelowna and then they opposed the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people. It is a trend so disturbing that the grand chief of the Assembly of First Nations characterized it as discriminatory.

Why has the Minister of Health cut a program that saves the lives of first nations, Inuit and Métis people?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence for the contentions of the hon. member.

When we look at programs we look at them to deliver results and that they are delivered effectively, responsibly and accountably. In this particular case, there is no evidence of that. However, if there is any member of any first nation or any citizen of Canada who has a better plan to deliver real results for the reduction of tobacco use by first nations people, we are all ears.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made an unconditional promise to correct the fiscal imbalance. He therefore must meet the expectations of Jean Charest, who wants significant progress with the next budget. According to his spokesperson, that means a series of concrete measures and a specific timetable for fully correcting the fiscal imbalance.

Will the Prime Minister clear up the uncertainty about the fiscal imbalance, and does he plan to make good on his original promise and clearly identify the solutions he intends to apply to correct the fiscal imbalance, in the next budget?

• (1455)

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first, we did acknowledge the fiscal balance during the election campaign and we continue to say that.

Second, we put out the paper on restoring fiscal balance with the budget. We said in the paper and I said in the budget speech that we would proceed with consultations. We have proceeded with consultations, not only by me in my job in finance, but also with respect to post-secondary education, skills training, infrastructure and other challenges that we have between levels of government in Canada.

The next stage is to move forward toward budget 2007 where we will be able to announce the changes that will be made.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when he made his promise, the Prime Minister never said he was tying the correction of the fiscal imbalance to any consensus between the provinces and Quebec. What we expect from the Prime Minister is a full, permanent solution to a problem that he promised to solve.

Does the Prime Minister plan to use the upcoming budget, as his counterpart in Quebec City is calling for, to outline the permanent solutions he intends to apply to correct the fiscal imbalance once and for all? Yes or no?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes.

\* \* \*

[English]

**GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS**

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the \$4.6 million that has been cut from the museums assistance program is threatening the existence of regional museums across the country. When asked about the cuts yesterday, the minister responded that two museums were in the parliamentary secretary's riding, the member for Kootenay—Columbia, who supports these cuts.

Could the minister confirm that these were the only two museums that were consulted before scrapping this program? Were these the only museums that deserved a privileged heads-up?

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's new government will spend \$245 million for museums across the country.

After more than a decade of neglect, all museums are facing challenges. We recognize that. That is why we are going to develop a new museums policy that will serve all museums, national, regional and local, in every community across the country.

\* \* \*

**FOREST INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government has clearly demonstrated its commitment and support for Canada's forests and its forest industry.

This is National Forestry Week in Canada. I would like to ask the Minister of Natural Resources to update the House on the progress made with Canada's forests since forestry measures were confirmed in our budget.

*Privilege*

[Translation]

**Mr. Christian Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Unlike the previous government, the current government announced significant measures in the 2006 budget.

We are working with the provinces and the industry to develop a long-term strategy to make the industry as competitive as possible.

That is delivering the goods.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today's environment commissioner's report is a stinging indictment of 13 years of Liberal inaction on climate change.

The Liberals cannot account for more than \$1 billion that was intended for the environment. They do not have a clue where it went, or at least they are not telling us.

Will the government take this report as what it is, a wake-up call? Will it do whatever it takes to find every last penny that was intended for the environment and may have ended up in the pockets of Liberal cronies?

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the good question. We agree with the commissioner's recommendations, as I said previously. She said that the previous Liberal government lacked leadership, direction and planning on the climate change issue.

It is no wonder Canadians are asking why the Liberals did nothing for 13 years. Listen to this quote, "I will be part of Kyoto but I say to the world, I don't think I can make it". Who was that? It was the former environment minister.

● (1500)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Canadians now know that while the Liberals dithered and feigned concern about climate change, money went missing and pollution went through the roof.

Will the Minister of the Environment make the effort to finally show up and tell Canadians what her plan is to fix the problem? Will she set a real target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050? And will she tell her oil company buddies in Calgary today that the oil subsidy gravy train is over, that she is going to do her job and fight for the environment?

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our new government recognizes that climate change is an issue that must be dealt with. That is why our plan focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and cleaning the air that Canada breathes.

Our plan will go far beyond Kyoto and will improve the health of Canadians and the environment.

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, despite the Dawson College tragedy, this minority government has cut \$6 million from the Canada Firearms Centre. Gun control is supported by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Professional Police Association, and victims organizations among many others.

Police officers use it at least 5,000 times a day. The government is not prepared to put Canadian interests above its own narrow partisan ideology.

How can the minister claim that cutting gun control will keep our streets safe?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first I congratulate the Canada Firearms Centre for having achieved savings, not cuts, but savings, savings that can go to programs that make a difference.

Quite rightly my hon. colleague points out that there are differences in opinion. Shelley Marshall, a board member with the Manitoba Organization of Victim Advocates, said, "Why would we want to see funds going somewhere that is not beneficial to preventing homicides?" Loren Schinkel, president of the Winnipeg Police Association, said, "The Winnipeg Police Association has never supported the long gun registry". Brian Ford, the former chief of police in Ottawa, said that he was upset. In referring to the former Liberal government, he said, "They were lying. It bothers me. I was talking to people that I believed were telling the truth". We want to see gun crime reduced.

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**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** Order. I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2006 Governor General's Awards for Excellence in Teaching History. They are: Mr. Antony Caruso; Ms. Kim Chagnon; Ms. Mary Scott; Ms. Jennifer Johnson-George; Ms. Julie-Catherine Mercadier; Mr. Greg Miyanaga; and Mr. Blake Seward.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** The Chair has notice of a couple of points of order and questions of privilege that arose out of that rather enthusiastic question period. We will begin with the hon. Leader of the Opposition on a question of privilege.

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**PRIVILEGE**

COMMENTS MADE BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

**Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege arising out of a wilful misrepresentation during question period by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

*Privilege*

It has been my privilege to serve in the House for 13 years. It is the first time in my life here that I have ever felt called upon to stand on a matter of personal privilege because of what happened in the House today, which I think brings into doubt the conduct of the House and the nature of our parliamentary democracy.

The parliamentary secretary said in response to a question about the terrible events around the torture and rendition of Maher Arar to Syria by American authorities that they—the Liberals—took actions “which ended up putting him in a Syrian jail”. This is from the representative of a party whose prime minister at the time accused me of being in high level consultations to defend a suspected terrorist.

The member for Calgary—Nose Hill accused Liberals also of the government's screening system failure to find its al-Qaeda list and the present Minister of Public Safety called for—and wait for this—a public inquiry, not a public inquiry to find out what happened to Maher Arar but a public inquiry to determine why the Liberals were defending a man suspected of links to al-Qaeda.

Mr. Justice O'Connor has specifically said that the actions that we took in order to get Mr. Maher Arar a release from jail were correct, that they were the right things to do in the circumstances.

Either the hon. parliamentary secretary should withdraw his remarks, as he did previously for misleading the House, or it is incumbent upon him to identify in the House those Liberals that he smeared by his comment, attacking them for specifically being involved in one of the worst human rights tragedies Canada has ever been involved in. It is a disgrace to Parliament and he is a disgrace to the House.

• (1505)

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I should probably first rise on a point of order for the closing remarks of the Leader of the Opposition, but I do not want to waste the House's time because I think it is clear to your honour that this ostensible point of privilege is in fact a point of debate.

My recollection is, and I believe the blues will confirm it, that I said it was the previous government that took the first steps that ended up with Mr. Arar in a Syrian prison. I further noted that it was peculiar that the Leader of the Opposition was not posing questions on this issue and I asked if it had anything to do with the fact that he had claimed that Mr. Arar was not being tortured.

What I find peculiar about this and the reason why I consider this a prima facie point of debate is that the context was that the official opposition was asking questions, demanding an—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has raised a point. The hon. parliamentary secretary has the right to reply, and I expect to be able to hear his remarks. I would ask for order in the House while he delivers the reply he is making to the point that was raised by the Leader of the Opposition. We will now hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Jason Kenney:** Mr. Speaker, speaking of apologies, members of the opposition were asking the government for an official

government apology to Mr. Arar, presumably because they believe the Government of Canada is responsible for what occurred to Mr. Arar. If not, why would they be asking for an apology?

The last I checked, the Government of Canada at the time was made up of members of the party opposite. Perhaps they do not want to accept any responsibility. We, as the current Government of Canada, do accept our responsibilities. We understand that there are responsibilities that flow from Mr. O'Connor's report and from the incidents which occurred under the previous Liberal government. I find it passing strange that they should demand an apology and assert a corporate government responsibility for what happened in the agencies of the Government of Canada during that period, but they themselves deny any responsibility. It is logically incoherent.

With respect to my claim that the Leader of the Opposition denied that Mr. Arar was the victim of torture, I would refer him and yourself, Mr. Speaker, to page 240 of the report on the events relating to Maher Arar by Justice O'Connor which says:

Some of the Minister's statements were inaccurate. Mr. Arar had not been interviewed independently. Syrian officials—

It carries on and says:

The minister's inaccurate statements, which appear to have resulted largely from some inaccurate information he was given about the consular visit, were very unfortunate. While there might have been no immediate consequence, statements like the Minister's create perceptions in the public mind, particularly in newsworthy cases such as Mr. Arar's. The perception that Mr. Arar had not been tortured was wrong and, no doubt, the Minister's statements planted the seeds of that misperception in the minds of some.

Those are not my words. Those are the words of Justice O'Connor, which I believe I fairly and accurately summarized.

I think this is clearly a point of debate. I am sorry to see that apparently the official opposition now wants us to forget who was government when this unfortunate incident happened.

• (1510)

**The Speaker:** The question of privilege that has been raised is one that I will regard. I will take a look at the statements that both members have made and come back to the House with a decision in respect of the matter. Off the top of my head, it sounds like a matter of debate, but I will look at the issues raised by both hon. members. I thank them for their submissions on this point.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Windsor West.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Mr. Speaker, it is not the Liberals or the Conservatives who deserve an apology, it is Mr. Arar and his family who deserve an apology.

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, also on a point of order.



[English]

## POINTS OF ORDER

### COMMENTS DURING ORAL QUESTIONS

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment will agree that he misquoted me. In fact I said that in 2008 Canada will not be able to meet its target if we assume, unfortunately, an additional year of Conservative inaction on climate change.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. The quote that I used is, "In 2008, I will be part of Kyoto, but I say to the world I don't think I can make it". He also went on to say "which is simply unachievable" in referring to it. He is quite correct.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River is rising on a point of order.

### USE OF BLACKBERRYS IN CHAMBER

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during the course of debate on question of privilege, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister was clearly reading and quoting from his BlackBerry. Do the rules require him to table the BlackBerry as a document?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River is, as I recall, a member of the procedure and House affairs committee. Perhaps he can raise the issue there. With a report from the committee, we can decide whether it is something that ought to be tabled.

I suspect the interest of most hon. members would be that we not have BlackBerrys on the table; they do ring.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, documents on BlackBerrys can easily be printed. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister was clearly reading from a document within the software of his BlackBerry. He can print it out and table it in the House.

The rules are clear. Any member reading from a document has to table that document. We have requested it be tabled. All he has—

**The Speaker:** What the hon. member was reading was the blues from today's question period. That is what it sounded like. He was quoting exactly what somebody else had said. He had the blues on his BlackBerry. If it was not that, I am sure he can print it and table it. However, if it is the blues, there is no need for him to print it because everybody has access to this.

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for the sake of clarification, as it seems to be a matter that has caused some disquiet in the House, I can report that what I was reading were simply notes I had written immediately after my question so I could best recall what I had said.

If the members opposite would like to begin a practice of tabling BlackBerrys, Mr. Speaker, I will leave that in your capable hands.

• (1515)

**The Speaker:** I think we will leave that in the hands of the committee. However, perhaps the hon. member could print the

## Business of the House

document, if he sees fit, and table it. I am sure it would delight all hon. members.

\* \* \*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the issue just discussed, having to do with technology in the House, is perhaps one that deserves some attention. In bygone eras everybody dealt with physical pieces of paper and notes written on those pieces of paper.

We are in a much different age and era now with electronic communications devices. When they are used for quotations in the House, it may be a case that our rules are a little behind the times. I very strongly recommend that the matter be taken up because this may become a more frequent occurrence.

Specifically on the business of the House, could the government House leader indicate to us what his priorities will be for the rest of this week and next? Also, it would be appreciated if he could give us some indication of how the government intends to at least begin the week following the Thanksgiving recess.

Second, I would ask him if he would be in a position today to specifically designate a date for the take note debate, which has been requested on Darfur. We have made that request in all good faith, and I know the government House leader has had it under consideration. I would appreciate his confirmation of when he intends to proceed.

Third, could give us, again, some indication of what specific evenings he would intend to designate for the special examination in the House of the estimates of two departments, which are part of the estimates process? We will need to deal with that in the weeks immediately ahead, and one of those weeks is occupied by the Thanksgiving break. The sooner we could know those dates the better.

Finally, as I have mentioned in the House before, it would be appreciated if the government House leader could indicate the government's plan and timing with respect to any motions pertaining to same sex marriage.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the hon. gentleman would like us to table everything we are going to do for the whole fall, right up to Christmas. Usually, the Thursday question is just for the week ahead, but it seems to have expanded.

Today, for sure, we will continue with the debate on the opposition motion of his party.

Tomorrow, we hope to complete Bill C-24, the softwood lumber agreement, which will be followed by Bill S-2, hazardous materials, and Bill C-6, the Aeronautics Act.

[Translation]

Tomorrow, I intend to ask the House to approve the appointment of Graham Fraser as Commissioner of Official Languages for Canada for a term of seven years.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

Depending on progress on the softwood lumber bill, it is my intention to call three justice bills next week as follows: Bill C-19, street racing; Bill C-18, DNA; and Bill C-23, Criminal Code efficiency and effectiveness.

Next Thursday will be an allotted day.

The answers to the hon. member's other questions he will know in good time.

Finally, there have been consultations and there is an agreement to have a take note debate on the situation in Sudan. Therefore, I think you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That a take note debate on the subject of the Situation in Sudan take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Tuesday, October 3.

• (1520)

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study on democratic development, 8 members of the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee be authorized to travel to London, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen from October 7 to 14, 2006, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to seek unanimous consent to waive the notice provision to allow me to move the following motion: That notwithstanding section 28(10) of appendage 1 of the Standing Orders, I move that the report of the Ethics Commissioner, entitled the Gallant inquiry, not be concurred in at this time, but that the report be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for its consideration.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Trois-Rivières had the floor before question period. Five minutes remain for questions and comments.

Since there are no questions or comments, debate is resumed.

The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ)** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to the Liberal party motion on the Conservative government cuts affecting Quebec women. These cuts are made with disregard for the role of women in our society and the importance of giving them equal opportunities.

Since coming to power, this Conservative government has refused to accept any responsibility for the social problems affecting our society. The Bloc Québécois is opposed to the cuts that the Conservatives are preparing to make at the expense of Quebec women. I would like to dedicate my comments today to all women who fight inequality, poverty, violence, isolation and prejudice against women. Women are directly affected by the \$5 million, or 20%, reduction in the budget of the Status of Women Canada announced by the Minister of Finance on Monday.

How can such an attitude be justified? There is only one word that applies in this case: irresponsibility. This government, which no later than Monday was telling us about its billions in surpluses, has the nerve—at the same time—to cut what it has also the gall to call fat. The President of the Treasury Board took this affront so far as to say that his government has adopted a strategy for saving a billion dollars, this year and next year. Those savings will be made on the backs of the most vulnerable among us because of the women's programs and services that are being eliminated.

In the riding of Laurentides—Labelle, the Réseau des femmes des Laurentides and the organization La Passe-R-Elle, two organizations dedicated to women's welfare, will have their efforts stymied by the Conservative decisions. The way that organizations funded under the Women's Program have been treated in recent months provides eloquent evidence of what the Conservatives think about the status of women. The fact is that the work done by these organizations helps dozens of women, every day, who have been victims of violence or intimidation. These organizations cannot believe the government's withdrawal undertaken by the Conservatives.

The reduction in funding for literacy programs means that Griffe d'alpha in Mont-Laurier will no longer be able to provide the French language integration courses that it offered free of charge to new immigrants in the region. This is going to make it more difficult for these newcomers to integrate.

Our society will have to rely even more on the generosity of volunteers to make up for the irresponsibility of this government.

*Business of Supply*

But there is more. The government eliminated both the volunteer support program and the court challenges program that helps minority language groups exercise their rights in the courts.

After eight months in power, the Conservatives are finally showing their true face, and it is the face of a party that gets its ideas from the ideology of right-wing groups that could not care less about the problems and concerns of minorities and of the disadvantaged in our society. This kind of management has nothing to do with the values and priorities of Quebeckers.

Since January 23, Quebeckers have been having to deal with a government that does not keep its election promises. In fact, I would like to remind this minority government that in the recent federal election, the Prime Minister himself acknowledged, and I quote, “—that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality”.

He also committed himself to taking concrete and immediate measures to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women on the international scene.

In October 2004, after an agreement was reached among the parties in the House of Commons, and at the initiative of the Bloc Québécois, the first Standing Committee on the Status of Women, composed of representatives of the political parties in the House, was created. The attitude of the Conservative government is an affront and negates all the efforts at consultation that this committee has made since it was created.

One by one, groups have appeared before the committee to testify that they are worried about how less and less importance is being placed on women's concerns in the government's decisions. Many of them were of the opinion that government action to fund women's rights groups is a priority, and suggested that underfunding would make it more difficult to promote women's rights.

●(1525)

Some witnesses were also heard on the need to re-examine the allocation of funds.

One of the chief concerns is the assurance of core funding for front line agencies, such as support centres for victims of sexual assault and spousal violence, as well as women's networks.

Other witnesses have also talked about the importance of encouraging the federal government, when it is preparing policies and budgets, to take into account the effects these will have on women, suggesting that the role of Status of Women Canada be strengthened.

What do the Conservatives really think about the status of women? Not very much, if we look at their electoral platform, where the word “woman” can be found only twice. This shows that the Conservatives are not interested in the specificity of women's lives.

The Conservative government has cut away the fat. It has slashed the assistance allocated to programs and services for women.

Poverty is a major issue for women, who are overrepresented in this respect, particularly mothers in single-parent families, older women, immigrants and aboriginal women.

The expression “low income” does not appear once in the Conservative Party's electoral platform. This is upsetting, when we know that one in six women in Canada is poor.

The birth of children, the breakup of a conjugal relationship and illness are all reasons that may cause women to end up with low incomes over a long period.

Four single-parent families out of five are headed by a woman. Meanwhile the wage gap between female and male graduates goes on widening. Female graduates make only 71% of the earnings of male graduates.

Pay equity, maternity benefits and parental leave are not part of the Conservative platform.

As for public housing, the Conservatives basically emphasize tax incentives for builders in the private sector. There is nothing to help women regarding public housing or for dealing with violence against women.

While they acknowledge that there is violence in the streets and that no woman should have to live in fear, the Conservatives do not have anything to say about the thousands of women who seek refuge in safe houses and transition houses as a result of conjugal violence. They do not recognize the merits of these services and do not propose any investment to support them. Cutting away the fat—that is how they propose to deal with women's problems.

In conclusion, the government preferred to take the approach of REAL Women of Canada, that conservative group that asks for nothing other than the abolition of Status of Women Canada.

An article that appeared in *The Canadian Press* is particularly eloquent:

The minister responsible for the status of women is not ruling out the possibility that this file [Status of Women] will be put on the chopping block of Conservative cuts, but she maintains that her government will continue to fight against inequality and the obstacles facing Canadian women.

This may not be enough to ease the fears of certain women's groups, but her comments contradict the position of organizations, such as REAL Women of Canada, which maintain that women no longer need help from the government to achieve equality.

The Bloc Québécois is very concerned about the cuts announced regarding Status of Women Canada and the position of women in the Conservative ideology, which supports an approach contrary to the values of Quebeckers. This government is reactionary and misogynous.

The Bloc Québécois team will continue to rise and defend the rights of women, the principles defended by the Beijing conference, and equity. Quebec will always strive to achieve the freedom of action and financial resources it deserves, in order to achieve the full powers that will allow it to develop alongside all other nations.

*Business of Supply*

•(1530)

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to raise one question that appears to be completely ignored by the Conservatives, that is the representation of women and other minority groups in the government. To judge by their numbers, this is not very important to the Conservatives. Yet, giving women access to power is a question of justice, a condition of democracy and it is not by slashing programs that seek to assist women in the pursuit of equality in various fields of our society that we will have more women in Parliament.

I wonder if my colleague has any remarks to make on this subject.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague for having raised this question.

This is just another example of the manipulations that we are now faced with from this Conservative government which has just slashed its budget to achieve savings on the backs of women.

I believe that more and more we can see the true profile of this government, its right-wing ideology. It is also distancing itself from the commitments that it made during the last election campaign.

I remember the charm campaign they presented to women and workers in Quebec about the fiscal imbalance and Quebec's role on the international stage. They also wanted to take charge of the concerns of workers and the unemployed.

Soon, the House will be debating Bill C-269, which seeks to improve the employment insurance system, a system that no longer meets the expectations of Canadian workers. Often, those workers are women. In some regions of Quebec, between 70% and 75% of women are employed in seasonal jobs. At every level and in every way, the government is backing down from the commitments it made during the election campaign.

•(1535)

[English]

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question about political representation here in the House of Commons.

We know that in this Parliament the NDP has the largest representation of women among political parties in the House at 41%. In the last election, the statistics are pretty interesting: the NDP had 108 women candidates, which was 35% of the total; the Liberals had 79 for a total of 26%; the Conservatives had 38 women for 12%; and the Bloc had 23 women candidates in Quebec ridings for a total of 30.6%.

In the NDP we have a process that encourages women and minorities to seek nominations in the party. In fact, we cannot go ahead with an NDP nomination meeting until there is a representative of a minority community or a woman standing for the nomination. That is part of the process that our party engages in and this has resulted in our better record of representation of women, not that it is where we want to be. We want to ensure that we are at least 50% in the not too distant future. Tomorrow would be best. Today would be even better, but we are constantly working toward that.

I wonder if she could talk about what the Bloc is doing to encourage the participation of women in the political process in Quebec.

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I can readily answer my NDP colleague.

Within our party structure we have a citizenship committee, which considers this reality that the Bloc Québécois has also always put in the forefront. The Bloc has always acted to make sure that there is a strong representation of women within our party.

That is certainly not the case on the Conservative side. Proportionally, they have the smallest number of women members of any party in this House. One has to wonder what place women have in that party. What is the place of women on their scale of priorities? What is the role of women in this government?

This morning, the Prime Minister's wife was promoting a literacy event. In the course of things, she was questioned by journalists, who asked her whether the government led by her husband had cut \$18 million. She replied that in her opinion it is very important to be able to read. We see the paradox that is unfolding. Worse still, during this ceremony, she was accompanied by the President of the Treasury Board, who had the nerve to tell the journalists that he would be devoting his energies to teaching children to read, rather than to helping—

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Don Valley East.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for York West.

In the wake of the \$1 billion that the Conservatives recently cut from the programs aimed at helping people, such as jobless youth, illiterate adults, first nations, women, and those people requiring legal assistance through the court challenges program, I am pleased to rise today and speak to the motion before us. It reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government fails to recognize the many roles of women in Canadian society and the importance of providing all Canadian women with equal opportunity; and the House objects to the government's partisan and discriminatory cuts in federal support for women's programs and services.

Let us take a look at some of these cuts. There is \$5 million cut from Status of Women Canada, or about half of its operating budget; \$45 million cut from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, for affordable housing programs; \$55 million cut from the youth employment initiatives; \$18 million cut from the literacy skills program; \$10 million cut from the Canadian volunteer initiatives; \$10 million cut from the international youth internship program; \$6 million cut from the court challenges program; and \$78 million cut from the visitor's GST rebate.

*Business of Supply*

Canadians have experienced cuts in public service throughout our history when government piled up huge fiscal deficits. As an accountant by trade, I would always recommend restraint through tough economic times, to spend within our means, and to always pay off debt.

In fact, the former Liberal government recognized this in 1995 when we inherited a record \$42 billion deficit from the Mulroney government. Tough decisions were made and eventually, when the Liberals turned the situation around, we made debt reduction a priority in concert with zero deficit policy.

Yet, that was a decade ago. Through sound Liberal economic policies, we now have an economy that is the envy of the world. The unemployment rate is at a record low and the deficit is history. The Conservative minority government, which has been in power for less than nine months, can hardly take credit for the Liberal record over the past 12 years of fiscal prudence and management.

That is why Canadians are perplexed by the fact that the government recently used a \$13.2 billion surplus to pay down the national debt, yet the minority Conservative government found it necessary to cut \$1 billion further in programs and services, and this to the most vulnerable in our society.

This smacks as nothing less than a meanspirited ideological agenda by the Conservatives. It is regressive, indeed an aggressive right-wing attack on our social services and national institutions. Even museums and libraries are a target as the finance minister carries out an ideological witch hunt through each federal department in Ottawa.

According to Wendy Desbrisay, executive director of the Canadian Literacy Movement, "This is a black day for us...we did not see this coming". Neither did the Canadian people.

There are as many as nine million Canadians between the ages of 16 and 25 who do not have the literacy skills needed for today's workforce. This is morally reprehensible and it is reprehensible to simply abandon these people. It is economically irresponsible to cut Canadians loose simply because they cannot read. How can the baby boom generation retire with confidence when the productivity of succeeding generations will sink to all-time lows?

Indeed, it may interest members to know that the Prime Minister's wife was out today promoting literacy programs on the streets of Ottawa and mentioned the following: "You can't succeed in life unless you read...that's the number one thing". Perhaps the Prime Minister should explain to his wife that he cut \$18 million from the literacy skills program this week.

• (1540)

I am quite sure, therefore, that dinner conversation at 24 Sussex will be quite interesting this evening. For the Prime Minister's sake, I hope construction of the new doghouse has been completed on the grounds of the official residence.

Here is another meanspirited cost-cutting measure: \$55 million in cuts to the youth employment initiative. Thousands of employers depend on this program to hire summer students every year. These are small and medium sized businesses that cannot afford to hire students otherwise. These cuts boggle the mind.

Even the tourism industry, which has still not recovered from the SARS crisis, was not spared. Eliminating \$78 million from the visitor GST rebate program will discourage thousands of people from spending their vacation in Canada. This is especially perplexing when most other countries are enhancing their programs to attract visitors, in an international and highly competitive industry.

Here is another cut that lacks all wisdom: \$45 million from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation that would have gone toward affordable housing. Again, the target is the most vulnerable people in this society.

The same applies to women. The mandate of Status of Women Canada is to enhance the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the country.

What message is the government sending? What are the priorities of the minority Conservatives? What is their secret agenda?

The Prime Minister prides himself on his unique communication strategy, that is, avoid journalists at all costs, but he does not in fact rule a majority. Sooner or later, this shaky minority government will buckle under the weight of a growing list of scandals and the disillusionment of the Canadian people. When that happens, the Liberal Party will be there to pick up the pieces and repair the damage to our national institutions and our international reputation.

• (1545)

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this important debate today.

I would like to begin my remarks by reminding all hon. members of the continuing good work of Status of Women Canada. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to work with all of my colleagues from all parties as we advance the issues of women's equality that are so important.

I would like to outline a bit of the background of Status of Women Canada. It is a federal government agency that promotes women's equality and the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the country, something that we all want to see continued. Status of Women Canada focuses its work in three areas: improving women's economic autonomy and well-being, eliminating systemic violence against women and children, and advancing women's rights.

Status of Women Canada works to provide Canadians with strengthened and more equitable public policy by conducting gender based analysis and promoting its application throughout the federal government. It also supports research that brings the gender dimensions of policy issues into the public agenda.

*Business of Supply*

Status of Women Canada also plays a vital role in supporting the work of women's and other equality-seeking organizations. It promotes women's equality in collaboration with organizations from the non-governmental, voluntary and private sectors. In promoting women's equality globally, Status of Women Canada works with other countries and international organizations and has a history of doing a substantive amount of very good work. We intend to continue working together to ensure that this continues.

Yet on Monday the government announced it would slash in half funding from the Status of Women's operating budget. The Conservatives, as a result of the excellent administration of our Liberal government, had a huge surplus and yet chose to make cuts to programs that have proven effective and necessary tools to help individuals and communities.

These funding cuts directly target women, aboriginals, those in need of affordable housing, and other groups for which the Conservatives have traditionally shown little concern or little respect, and for sure this is only the beginning of many cuts to come.

When it comes to improving the everyday lives of women in this country, the Conservative Party at best has simply chosen to ignore the serious and fundamental challenges facing gender equality issues today, and at worst has deliberately targeted cuts to turn back the clock on ensuring progress for women and upholding women's rights.

Instead of consultation, women's organizations received sudden and drastic cuts that appear to eerily mirror the goals of the radical radical-right lobby movements in this country, like REAL Women. Is this a coincidence? I think not.

Let us be clear. These cuts affect organizations that have been funded by the federal government for decades and affect large portions of their operational costs. The cuts target women and will have a sustained and negative impact on progress for women in this country. To say otherwise is a gross misrepresentation of the facts.

Perhaps this is why the Minister of Canadian Heritage refused to come clean on these cuts when she was first asked about them. Perhaps this explains the months of apathy, subterfuge and denial from the minister to many of these groups that she refused to give an answer to.

Why, when asked about these cuts to grants, did the minister mislead these stakeholders, making promises she had no intention of keeping?

Why has the minister ignored the advice of her staff and internal reports in order to pursue a small-minded and vindictive agenda that speaks to the party's core anti-women base?

Let us look at who is affected by these cuts and ask what Canadians are to conclude from this so-called fat-trimming exercise. The issue is about much more than just money.

With a \$13 billion surplus in hand, these cuts were deliberate and ideologically based. All Canadians have to do is look at the mandates of the organizations that were slapped in the face by these heartless acts: protecting and ensuring women's access to legal counsel; the protection of minority rights; the promotion of the social

economy; enhancing efforts of community organizations dealing with poverty and abuse, and the list goes on.

• (1550)

Is this not the kind of work a national government should support? These callous cuts make it clear that advancing equality rights is not a priority for the new minority Conservative government, and to turn one's back on 52% of Canada's population is not standing up for Canada either.

Let us talk about the cuts to the adult literacy programs, another heartless act by the government. Literacy reaches far and wide. To foster a healthy, vibrant economy, we must ensure that our population has strong literacy skills. A recent adult literacy and skills survey revealed that 42% of Canadian citizens do not have the literacy skills to cope with the demands of our knowledge based economy and society.

If Canada is to maintain its place in the world, we must improve our literacy skills, especially for our most vulnerable citizens. How can the Conservative government justify cutting \$17 million in funding from the adult learning and literacy skills program? It makes no sense. If we were in a very desperate situation and had to make the cuts we had to make in 1993 when we came in and had a \$42 billion debt, it would be a different issue. We had to bite the bullet. That is not the case right now. We should be reinvesting that surplus.

The Conservatives' first budget also clearly demonstrated their complete disregard for women. Most women need early learning and child care to be able to enter the workforce. I am not talking about babysitting. There is great evidence to prove that early learning contributes immensely to the development of children and helps give children a better start in life. My government committed to giving every child a good start in life. Canada needs a high quality early learning and child care system.

The previous Liberal government invested \$5 billion over five years for the creation of a Canada-wide system of early learning and child care, based on the principles of quality, universal inclusiveness and accessibility and with the developmental principle.

Ten provinces actually signed bilateral agreements to increase investments in early learning and child care. As a nation, we were moving forward with our plans to create a new national system. Sadly, the Conservative government has cancelled those agreements and has undone all of that good work.

*Business of Supply*

Let us talk about the economic security. That is at the heart of women's equality. There is much more to be done. Almost half of our single, widowed or divorced women over the age of 65 live in poverty and 51.6% of lone parent families headed by women are below the poverty line. Women are still earning only 71¢ to the dollar of what a man earns. Women are clearly economically disadvantaged and it is time to continue to equal that out. We must work together to ensure a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I stand here today I am rather shocked at the speech of the chair of the status of women committee, with its accusations and rhetoric. Clearly the chair herself has to know that Status of Women Canada continues to deliver results to Canadian women, with a budget of \$23.4 million, \$10.8 million of which is dedicated to women's programs. The program funding for women will not be and is not cut. To mislead the House in this way, to suggest that as soon as a Conservative government came in everything disintegrated, is an irresponsible move.

As vice-chair of the committee, I have to state in the House that I believe we need to be very respectful of all women, very respectful of making sure that we are accurate in what we say. Also, there is no mention in the House today of the 13 years of Liberal opportunity that was set out before the Liberal Party. The Liberals could have done all these things that today they are complaining about only a few months after the Conservative Party has become the government.

Clearly, those programs should have been implemented. Also, as a mother of six children and a teacher for 22 years, I know very well what it takes to develop small children in terms of their reading. It takes much more than the status of women committee. It takes people who are committed to the betterment of women and Canadians all across this nation.

I have a clear question for the chair of the status of women committee. All day I have heard criticisms of an organization called REAL Women. I do not know this organization and I have not spoken to people in this organization, but does the chair of the status of women committee not believe that every organization in our nation has an opportunity to voice its views and to be welcome to do that?

•(1555)

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, I think it is extremely important. In fact, the group the hon. member mentioned, REAL Women, is on a list of people who will come before us. I look forward to hearing from that group. Clearly its objective is to promote not the equality issues that we are talking about. Its status is to promote feminist policies, and that is what it is worried about.

Let me mention what we did as Liberals in some of those years when we were in office. Parliament established the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in September 2004. In October 2005, an expert panel, not a partisan panel, was created and provided advice that we needed to increase the funding for the standing committee. In 2000, parental benefits were extended to families for an extra year. We created the centres of excellence for women's health and the gender and health institute to work on health policy issues unique to women. We committed \$32 million on an annual

basis for the national crime prevention initiative and another \$7 million for the family violence initiative.

The Liberals did many things to make sure that we were standing up for family values, to make sure there was sufficient money invested in families and women's issues and in making sure that our country had the skills needed to move it forward.

For the new Conservative minority government to put its marker down on issues like this by cutting the budget in half, regardless of whether it is \$46 million or \$23 million, is not the point. The point is, it was doing some good work. The message it sends is clearly, that is not the Canada that I want.

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government obviously believes, along with its advisers REAL Women, that the work on equity is done.

I thank my Liberal colleague for her comments on Status of Women Canada. I am aware in my community of the work it has done through networking and supporting women's groups.

The Conservative government does not seem to be aware that many women in Canada work full time and earn 71% of what men earn. Women are more likely to have precarious jobs that offer no security or pension. Women are disproportionately represented among the poor in Canada. There is a lot more work to be done to achieve equity in Canada.

In light of the comments of the President of the Treasury Board this morning pitting children against adults, I am wondering if the hon. member thinks the President of the Treasury Board should take a literacy course on illiteracy.

•(1600)

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, I suggest the hon. member ask that question of him and get his answer.

Clearly, investing in literacy is investing in the people of Canada. It is an extremely important program. I find it quite alarming that 42% of adult Canadians suffer from literacy problems. If we are to make sure that people can get into the workforce so they can have a successful life, we have to invest in those kinds of programs. That is part of the reason I find the cut to the adult literacy issue the most difficult one. It really does say that the new minority government does not honestly care about people who are not up in the \$100,000 income bracket. Its focus will always be on people with a lot of money and it will abandon those who are the most vulnerable in society.

**Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Palliser.

I am pleased to speak to the motion put forward by my colleague opposite, the member for Beaches—East York.

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The opposition has been very vocal about the recent expenditure review conducted by my colleagues the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance that will reduce government spending and give Canadians value for their hard-earned tax dollars. They are saying that with some of the spending we have eliminated that we have hurt Status of Women Canada. I can say that contrary to the theme that is being argued in the House today, the Canadian government is helping women in many ways.

One important way that Canada's new government is helping is by providing assistance to women entrepreneurs. A recurring theme that has been put forward by my colleague the Minister of International Trade is that Canada is a nation of entrepreneurs.

Ninety-seven per cent of Canadian businesses are small and medium size businesses. The coffee shop where one might buy a coffee each morning is a small business. The neighbourhood store, the consultant's office, the local restaurant are all small businesses. Women are leading the charge starting businesses in growing numbers.

Indeed the facts show that women are taking the risks and reaping the rewards of entrepreneurship now more than ever before. Since 1997, on average, women have started medium and small businesses at twice the rate of men. Nearly half of all Canadian small and medium size enterprises have at least one woman owner and according to the most recent statistics, women hold the majority ownership in 18% of Canadian small and medium size enterprises. The most recent statistics available suggest that the number of women entrepreneurs has increased 200% since 1984.

What do women entrepreneurs mean to the Canadian economy? They mean everything. Recent statistics indicate that 570,000 people were employed by a majority of women owned businesses, and another 404,000 were hired on contract. In 2000 these women owned small and medium size enterprises brought in combined annual revenues of \$72 billion, approximately 8% of all revenue from Canadian SMEs, small and medium size enterprises.

Simply put, women entrepreneurs are a force in Canada's economy and they are helping to drive growth and prosperity. I would like to take the opportunity to explain just how that is happening.

This government is helping small businesses by clearing some of the hurdles that have been placed in their path. In budget 2006 we took action to ensure that Canada's small businesses could grow and prosper. We will be raising the threshold for small business income eligible for the reduced federal tax rate from \$300,000 to \$400,000. We will be reducing the 12% tax rate for eligible small business income to 11.5% in 2008 and 11% in 2009.

We have added new tax credits to encourage small and medium size enterprises to hire apprentices and offer on the job training for employees. We have brought forward a tax credit to help tradespeople acquire tools for their trades, something that was long overdue. These measures will not only help women entrepreneurs, they will help all small businesses.

Given the importance of women entrepreneurs to the Canadian economy, it is vitally important that we help them to reach their business goals. We understand the challenges that they face. The

Government of Canada has a number of initiatives in place in every region of Canada to help women entrepreneurs to achieve and succeed and take their business from an idea to a successful enterprise.

The community based Canada business service centres provided information and advice to 74,000 women across Canada in fiscal 2005-06. This amounts to 44% of the total number of entrepreneurs and small business clients they serve. This is proof that when women want to become entrepreneurs, they are doing a great job. They are exploring opportunities. If they already own businesses, they want them to grow. These centres offer information on Government of Canada services to business as well as assistance and access to an extensive collection of business related publications, directories and electronic databases.

• (1605)

For example, in western Canada the women's enterprise initiative, WEI, which is funded through a contribution from Western Economic Diversification Canada, provides business information and services specifically aimed at women entrepreneurs. Each western province has an established WEI organization under this initiative. These not for profit groups offer access to a loan fund, advisory services, pathfinding to existing services plus a host of unique products and services tailored to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs in their provinces.

In 2005-06 the four WEIs responded to over 30,500 business information inquiries and provided 11,000 business advisory appointments. They provided training services for over 5,300 clients and approved 167 loans totalling \$4.7 million, loans that created and maintained 452 jobs. And there is more.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, ACOA, operates a women in business initiative, WBI, providing women with the tools they need to overcome challenges, to grow their businesses, to be competitive and strong. Promoting and enhancing cooperation among economic development partners, the WBI is working to enhance and expand programs and services available to women in business. Since 2003, WBI investments in Atlantic Canada have given 548 women business owners access to financing in excess of \$20.4 million.

In Quebec, Fonds AFER Canada offers women in rural areas financial assistance to start their own businesses. This assistance is being offered by the Réseau des SADC du Québec in collaboration with Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions. It is designed to help these women meet any entrepreneurial challenges they may face.

In my home province of Ontario the Network for Women Entrepreneurs provides women with the information they need to start, sustain and grow their businesses. It provides women with access to a wide variety of business information as well as the resources at all stages of their business cycle. The network provides direct referrals to local organizations that focus on women entrepreneurs.



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Available to women entrepreneurs across Canada is the Business Development Bank of Canada's \$25 million fund that is targeted to increase availability of financing for fast growing, women owned firms in Canada. This fund primarily offers women entrepreneurs subordinate financing, a kind of hybrid facility that brings together both debt financing as well as equity financing.

Through these programs the government is helping women to become successful in business and make the important economic contributions that only small and medium size enterprises can make. Because we recognize the importance of SMEs to Canada's communities, the government offers many programs for all small businesses. We want to give all of these businesses practical and efficient information that they can use.

For example, the Canada small business financing program works in partnership with lending institutions across Canada. They help businesses to get that first loan they need to get started or to buy an important new piece of equipment.

The canadabusiness.ca website offers access to a full breadth of the Government of Canada's information for business, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This makes it easier for all entrepreneurs to deal with the different levels of government, to get information to help start or grow a business.

If members of Parliament were to take a walk down the main street of the towns or cities in their ridings, they would see women entrepreneurs in all sectors of the Canadian economy making a tremendous contribution to their communities and to Canada's future.

Through these Government of Canada programs and services, this government is helping to make this contribution possible. We will continue to help women entrepreneurs as they work to achieve their goals and take a lead role in the growth, creativity and vibrancy of Canada's small and medium enterprises.

• (1610)

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not think anybody in the House is questioning the fact that there are a lot of successful women in our country, and that is great. We encouraged it. We established the entrepreneurship program in the Department of Industry when we were there, as well as the export-import assistance for women entrepreneurs. It is fantastic, there is no question about it.

However, the hon. member must also remember that he seems to have focused only on one group of women, as if women are just one element. We are talking about 51% of Canada's population. Many women in our country, regardless of their university degrees, are still only earning 70¢ on the dollar. They live in poverty, cannot access housing and do not have proper rights. Self-employed women, for instance, who are not part of the other group the hon. member talked about, have been lobbying for some time to receive EI.

I appreciate that this one group of women, who are entrepreneurs, are probably doing well. It was not too long ago, by the way, that the banks were not giving them any assistance, and that was fought because we had mechanisms.

The Status of Women has existed since 1971. It was instrumental in getting the Charter of Rights in the Constitution. The issues are not over. A lot of other women in still need equality rights.

Is he content to say that this one group of Canadian women is doing okay, so the heck with the rest of them?

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** Mr. Speaker, there is no question, and I think we would agree, that we have seen remarkable growth in the degree to which women in Canadian society have taken up the challenge and have brought new energy to the life that small and medium enterprises provide to our important economy.

As we look at those success stories, it occurs to me that these are remarkable examples, not just for women but for Canadians as a whole, that they can have access. I firmly believe that part of the answer for us in government is to ensure we tailor the kinds of policies and programs that will give this kind of access to Canadian women.

I indicated right from the beginning that this is one part of what the Government of Canada provides for women in Canadian society. Both of us, as colleagues, sit on the status of women committee, and there is a myriad of issues faced by the kinds of issues we deal with in that committee and by women in society. The government is committed to continue to work on those important programs. However, I felt it was very important to ensure that we remind ourselves that we have an important success story for women in Canadian society.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member about the performance of the Conservative Party in terms of encouraging women to be part of the political process in Canada.

Only 11% of current members of the Conservative caucus are women. In the last federal election only 12% of candidates for the Conservative Party were women. It is a pretty miserable record. It is the worst record of any party in the House.

In the NDP 41% of our members in the House are women, and that is not good enough for us. We have a plan in place that encourages the participation of women in seeking nominations in our party, in a process that has to be acted on before a nomination can be held.

Why is the Conservative record is so miserable on this accord? What is the Conservative Party doing to improve that record? Why, for instance, did the Conservative Party chose only men to be chairs of standing committees of the House of Commons, that no woman has been nominated for that position by the Conservative Party?

• (1615)

**Mr. Bruce Stanton:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member may know that the Conservative Party of Canada does not operate by a quota system per se, that the decisions about the candidates who run for our party are made at the local level. We leave it with the membership of the riding, across 308 ridings, that those decisions are made there.

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However, the example that is being set by the women in this government is an example to be seen by women across the whole country. As they tune in and see the kinds of excellent results of our women members, I can be sure that there will be more women interested in fulfilling the kinds of roles we see of our members in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to the motion by the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

There has been much criticism regarding the cuts to government expenditures announced this week. Hon. members from across the floor have attacked these measures as unfairly targeting certain groups, including women, women's programs and services. This is not true. The spending decisions were fair and distributed broadly over a number of program areas. They were aimed at improving efficiency and getting value for money.

Don Drummond, chief economist of TD Bank, predicted that Canada's new government would face baseless, unfounded criticism when he said, "critics charge the choice of spending cuts was 'political'. This is utter silliness".

We are focusing on our priorities and getting value for money for Canadian taxpayers, for Canadian women.

I ask all hon. members, what could be more of a priority than our children? Without a doubt, they represent the future of our country and we must provide them with every opportunity to succeed. Canada's new government recognizes that one of the most important investments a government can make is to support families as they raise their children. We have taken quick and decisive action to help those families, as promised in the last campaign.

Strong families are the cornerstone of a sound and prosperous society and are key to ensuring a bright future for Canada. Canada's new government knows that no two families are alike and that parents, not the government, are in the best position to make the right choices for their children.

We also recognize that Canadian families are changing and facing many new challenges. Work arrangements for both men and women are more complex and varied than ever before. In particular, families with young children must strike a difficult balance between work and family life. Any of my hon. colleagues with young children, and I look at you, Mr. Speaker, as I make that statement, are very aware that the availability of quality child care is a challenge for many working parents.

In budget 2006 Canada's new government helped these families by offering them a real choice in child care. Just look at what we did.

Budget 2006 introduced the new universal child care benefit. Starting this past July 1, Canada Day, this new benefit provides all families with \$100 per month for each child under the age of six. That has been warmly received in Palliser. This benefit helps parents to choose the child care option that best suits their family's needs. That could be in formal child care, informal child care through neighbours or relatives or by a parent staying at home. The most important point is that parents and women and men now have a choice.

The universal child care benefit is, as the name implies, available to all families. However, and in response to the hon. member's motion, it will provide direct financial support to low income families with young children without reducing the federal income tested benefits such as the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement for low and middle income families. As I have just outlined, the universal child care benefit illustrates how Canada's new government has chosen to focus on the priorities of Canadians.

What about low income Canadians and seniors? One of the priorities for this new government was to reduce taxes for Canadians. Our first tax reduction, as promised, was the reduction in the GST from 7% to 6%. This is a real tax cut for all Canadians, a tax cut that people can see in action whenever they buy something. This tax cut will save all Canadians money every time they go to the store. This will benefit all Canadians by almost \$9 billion over two years, even those who do not pay income tax.

The GST cut is an important step in the right direction, but it is only one part of the government's plan to reduce taxes. In every way that the government takes money from Canadians, under Canada's new government, it will take less of it. That is a great news story for all Canadians. That is why budget 2006 reduced personal income taxes for all taxpayers. In fact, over 90% of the tax savings in this budget will go to individual Canadians and their families.

• (1620)

Our tax cut plan leaves substantially more money in the pockets of Canadians than the previous government's proposals. In fact, about 655,000 Canadians, many of them senior women, will be removed from the tax rolls entirely. Also for Canada's seniors, budget 2006 doubled to \$2,000 the maximum amount of eligible pension income that can be claimed under the pension income credit. Effective for the 2006 and subsequent taxation years, this measure will benefit nearly 2.7 million taxpayers receiving eligible pension income, providing up to \$155 per year, per pensioner, and will remove approximately 85,000 pensioners from the tax rolls.

Canada's new government recognizes the difficulties faced by Canadians with a disability. That is why in budget 2006 we fully implemented the recommendations of the technical advisory committee on tax measures for persons with disabilities, which was established to provide advice on tax measures for persons with disabilities.

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We went beyond the committee's recommendations. For example, in the new government's first budget we increased the maximum annual child disability benefit effective July 2006. This benefit is a supplement of the Canadian child tax benefit for children in low and modest income families who meet the eligibility criteria for the disability tax credit. Effective July 2006, the budget extended eligibility for the child disability benefit to middle and higher income families caring for a child who was eligible for the disability tax credit, including virtually all families that are currently eligible for the Canada child tax base benefit.

Budget 2006 also increased the maximum amount of the refundable medical expense supplement for the 2006 taxation year. This supplement improves work incentives for Canadians with disabilities, by helping to offset the loss of coverage for medical and disability related expenses under social assistance when recipients move into the labour force.

In addition, the new government understands that parents are concerned with how best to ensure the financial security of a child with a severe disability when they are no longer able to provide support. That is why the Minister of Finance has appointed an expert panel to examine ways to help parents save for the long term financial security of a child with a severe disability. The panel has been asked to report its recommendations to the minister by November 9.

Canada's new government has taken real action to help those in our society who need help the most. We have moved to help families with children by providing choice in child care. We have moved to reduce taxes. We have moved to support Canadians with disabilities. The list goes on.

The new government has also taken action on very important issues of concern to all Canadians, aboriginal, immigrant, student issues, all of which include women.

In short, the expenditure cuts announced this week will help eliminate wasteful spending and allow Canada's new government to keep moving ahead, ensuring a strong and prosperous future for Canada. All the money that the government will spend will have to meet the criteria tests. It will have to meet two standards. It has to provide value for money and produce results for Canadians.

I am very proud to be part of this government that sticks by that creed. The finance minister brought in a fantastic budget. We are not only standing firmly behind Canadian women, that is very clear, but all Canadians.

• (1625)

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the hon. member about the political wisdom of the government's narrow ideological meanspirited cuts which clearly played exclusively to its own political base.

I notice on the Conservative blogs many were rejoicing in these cuts because they appealed to the biases of the hard right Conservative base.

However, if it is the object of the government to reach out and expand its electorate, to get a stronger showing in the next election,

why would it wish to have such narrowly focused cuts playing only to those who would vote for the government and alienating the majority of those whose votes it needs?

The \$13 billion surplus first of all is a Liberal surplus because it was produced in a year when the Liberal Party was the government for 90% of that year. This was our legacy to the new Conservative government, just as its legacy to us back in 1993 was a \$42 billion deficit.

My question is in terms of political intelligence related to the first. Why would the government choose to announce cuts on precisely the same day that it announced this huge surplus giving Canadians the impression it had absolutely no need to make these narrow ideologically based cuts that played only to its own base and alienated most Canadians?

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of riding the bus with the member on the way over here today. I was kidding him about how he likes to repeat the phrase "meanspirited". I know he does not mean that. He was chuckling when he said it to me.

The member opposite talks about how we are making decisions that would appeal to our political base, that being the Conservative political base. I just talked at length about tax cuts for all Canadians, about the universal child care benefit which will benefit everyone with children, and money that will go to all families with children under the age of six. I talked about how the budget will improve the lives for people with disabilities.

If our traditional base of support is all Canadians who pay taxes, everyone who has children, everyone who is disabled, need I go on, for that member it is going to be tough sledding in the next campaign if that is the case.

The member talked about the Liberal Party's surplus. We saw the member for Wascana stand up the other day really out of turn, and it was quite something, and state that he wanted his surplus back. Then we saw the President of the Treasury Board remind the member for Wascana that it was not his money. It does not belong to the Liberal Party of Canada. It belongs to the Canadian taxpayer.

That is the reason why we have a new government in power that understands who this money belongs to.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, hearing the comments like meanspirited, if the Liberals were in government they would raise the GST back up because they voted against that. They voted against providing parents the choice in child care. They want to take back that \$100 a month for children. That would be meanspirited.

I have a question that relates to the comments that have been made about REAL Women. REAL Women is going to be coming to the committee. I am looking for some wisdom from the member who just spoke. I have been on committees for many years. My understanding is that when a delegation is coming to a committee that the committee is open-minded and the committee is prepared to listen to delegates that come and dialogue in order to learn.

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However, when we have the chairperson of a committee publicly ridiculing a delegation that is about to come, like REAL Women, I have real concerns that democracy may be under attack. We hear rhetoric now and heckling. Is that a good approach for a delegation coming? I would like to hear an answer.

• (1630)

**Mr. Dave Batters:** Mr. Speaker, for the chair of that committee to make such statements is just crazy. These are Canadians. These are Canadian taxpayers. The beauty of our system is the fact that we live in a parliamentary democracy. We should welcome everyone's input.

I do have to take issue with one of my colleague's comments. He talked about how members opposite voted against our budget. The member for Markham—Unionville knows that the budget was unanimously adopted for the first time in the history of British parliamentary tradition, and we are very proud of that. It was unanimously adopted because of the great things that are in it.

The motion before us today talks about recognizing “the many roles of women in Canadian society and the importance of providing all Canadian women with equal opportunity”. I could not agree more. That is the goal.

Our government has done exactly that. Our government has given women choices. The choice is easier for women who have children and choose to go back to work. Money is available for child care, for women who choose to stay home, or men for that matter, with their children. The budget provides opportunities to all Canadian parents. We could not be more proud.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and pleased to rise this afternoon to support this Liberal motion.

First, I would like to discuss the economic aspect of the issue. I would then like to address the importance of applying a gender lens to these political issues.

I would like to begin by talking about women and the economy. Not because the economic aspect is more important than any other—it is not—but because I am an economist. I therefore have some ideas on the subject.

It is in society's best interest to eliminate all barriers blocking members of any group from participating fully in the economy and the labour market.

[*English*]

In other words, we want to break through the glass ceiling in the case of women, or we want to end racial discrimination in the case of visible minorities.

From a purely economic point of view, if we do not do that, then clearly society is the poorer for it because systemic barriers will prevent people from making their maximum contribution to the economy and to society. Not only the individuals in question will be the poorer for it but so will their family and so will society at large.

I saw recently an interesting case of this on television where the principal of a school in Afghanistan was being interviewed. This was a school in which girls were to be educated. His answer was purely

in terms of economics. He said that Afghanistan needed girls, who would grow up later to be women, to become productive members of the Afghanistan economy because it is a desperately poor country today and if it does not have the full participation of half of its population in that economy, it will remain desperately poor for a long time.

I am certainly not trying to say that there is a close parallel between the state of Afghanistan and the state of Canada, but the point of principle is the same one. In the extreme case of Afghanistan, if it does not get those women educated and into the labour force, Afghanistan will remain poor.

On a much smaller scale in this country, if we do not ensure the full participation and the right to participate of all women, of all minority groups, of all members of any group in our society, then Canada will be the poorer. From an economic point of view, then, this is the case for breaking down the barriers, breaking through the glass ceiling to ensure the full participation of women and other groups in society.

Just to be clear, I am not saying this is the most important element at all. I think considerations of fairness and social justice are primary, but I think it is nevertheless an element that is worth mentioning.

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Laval—Les Îles.

My second theme is the importance of this gender lens. My comments are based partly on my experience in government, which I will come to in just a minute.

It seems to me that one of the most important reasons to preserve and promote Status of Women Canada is the advocacy and educational role that is played by the minister responsible for the status of women.

If only because a large majority of cabinet and caucus members is male, we need an advocate with some clout to educate all of us and to ensure that all policies are seen through a gender lens as well, of course, as two other lenses.

To illustrate this, I would like to take the example of a different kind of lens, a rural lens. I have a keen memory of endless lectures by a former colleague, Andy Mitchell, now the chief of staff of the Leader of the Opposition, who had responsibility for rural Canada. I remember his lectures on the importance of rural Canada and the importance of seeing everything we did through a rural lens. While the lectures may have been a bit repetitive, they certainly affected my thinking and helped me to understand the importance of rural issues.

It is not that I or any of my urban colleagues were anti-rural, not in the slightest, but all of us parliamentarians are busy people. We do not always study every issue from every angle at every moment. It helps to have that voice reminding us of our rural responsibilities.

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I would argue that exactly the same principle applies in the case of women, just as most of our caucus is urban, so, too, the majority is male. I have equally vivid memories of Lisa Frulla as the former minister responsible for the status of women, along with many of her colleagues, reminding us incessantly that everything we do had to be seen through a gender lens as well as through other kinds of lenses.

• (1635)

I would submit that if we in the Liberal Party had need of someone to focus on the gender lens, the need of the Conservative Party for such a person is far more pressing. Only 13% of the government's caucus is female. We would have to go back to the last Conservative government of Brian Mulroney, more than 10 years ago, to find a government caucus where the percentage of females was as low as the government's percentage is today.

If any government in Canada, for at least a dozen years, if not for a century, had the need for a gender lens and the need for a number of people to remind the cabinet and the caucus of the importance of that lens, it is the government sitting over there.

That is why, as chair of the expenditure review committee when we were in government, I said no right away when the bureaucracy proposed that we abolish Status of Women Canada. My committee colleagues immediately concurred with my feeling on this subject. When we were presented with this idea, just as the government has been, we immediately said no but the present government leapt at the opportunity and said yes.

This need for a gender lens is also why we in government, when we were doing our expenditure review, applied gender based analysis to all the issues that came before the expenditure review committee.

Sadly, the minority Conservative government has decided to go the other way. It has cut \$5 million from the budget of Status of Women Canada. To the extent it applied any gender based analysis at all, it seems that the lens was focused in the wrong direction, that is to say that it was directed against women rather than in their favour. Why else would the government have cut this flagship program dedicated to improving the status of women?

I might say that this is not the only cut that the Conservatives announced yesterday, which had a distinctly anti-women bias. In general, I do not think Canadians have ever witnessed such meanspirited, ideological cuts, juxtaposed on the same day that the government announced it was swimming in a \$13 billion surplus.

Among those other cuts that were specifically hurting women more than men, I would mention a number of others other than Status of Women: women's access to legal rights, the protection of minority rights, the protection of the social economy and cuts in funding to community organizations dealing with poverty and abuse. These organizations affect not only women. They affect women and men but in many cases, disproportionately, these cuts will have a negative impact on women.

These cuts, partly biased against women, were clearly ideological cuts playing to the narrowest of bases, rather than government actions designed to promote the well-being of all Canadians.

I will end with a question. Is it not high time that the government focused on doing what is right for all Canadians, and particularly for Canadian women, rather than focusing exclusively on doing what is right for the Conservative Party?

• (1640)

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the hon. member's speech and I listened quite attentively. I think, quite frankly, the opposition is beating a drum that Canadian society is not dancing to at this particular time.

We have read articles in the newspapers and we have certainly heard the TD chief economist, Dale Orr, and another gentleman speak quite positively about the measures the government has taken. Quite frankly, the new government wants to spend funds effectively, efficiently and accountably because it is the taxpayers' money, which is really what we are talking about here.

In fact, we know the government has taken measures that allows us to save \$48 million a year just in the operations of government by having a smaller cabinet. That is 20 times what we are talking about here today.

I think what we are really talking about is that the Liberal benches cannot understand how a government that may go to another election is prepared to do so on a banner of effective, efficient and accountable spending and not trying to buy votes. Perhaps the member might comment on that.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to comment on that. We are not talking about cuts that the government needs to make to balance the budget. We are not talking about cuts that are very large in dollar terms.

When I was chair of expenditure review we had savings of \$11 billion over five years, far larger than the Conservative government has done, so it should not really boast about how much money it has saved.

The main point is the nature of those cuts. Contrary to our cuts, which were focused on government efficiencies and doing things more efficiently, not hurting individuals in need, not hurting depressed regions and all of the job implications suffered by attrition, these cuts are against those who are not part of the Conservative base. They target the most vulnerable, whether they be adults needing literacy training, youth needing employment opportunities or status of women, and I could go on.

However, it is not the amount of the cuts, it is the ideological nature of those cuts which the Conservatives are directing toward the most vulnerable in society. Canadians will stand up against these cuts because, by and large, Canadians are a fair-minded people. They appreciate the need for cuts when the government has a fiscal problem but they do not appreciate a government single-mindedly going after the most vulnerable in our society.

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•(1645)

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member was part of a government that also saw surpluses in recent years. He also says that he was part of a government that took into account gender based analysis when it was making its decision. Why then did that government do so miserably when it came to addressing poverty and the women who live in poverty in Canada?

We know that one in five Canadian women live in poverty, that is 2.8 million women. We know that 56% of lone parent families headed by women are poor; that 49% of single, widowed and divorced women over the age of 65 are poor; that 23.9% of women 65 and older are poor, which is twice the rate of men over 65; that 46% of women in shelters are of aboriginal descent; and that in 2000 the median income for aboriginal women was \$12,300, about \$5,000 less than their non-aboriginal female counterparts.

Given all of that, given that there were surpluses, given that gender based analysis was apparently being applied, why is the Liberals' record still so bad when it comes to poverty? Why did the Liberals not manage to address that issue?

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, there is a double problem with those sanctimonious kinds of interventions by the NDP. The first is that the NDP has no sense of fiscal responsibility. The NDP has never been government and never will be government so it can tell us to spend money in absolutely unlimited quantities, by the hundreds or the tens of billions.

The second problem is that the NDP has itself brought about these cuts by siding with the Conservative government and helping to bring it into existence.

The other answer I would give is that I am proud of the Liberal record. If we look over the post-war period, yes, there is always more work to be done, yes, nothing is perfect, but over the last decade the Liberal government and preceding Liberal governments have made enormous progress in dealing with the poverty of the elderly and have made enormous progress in dealing with child poverty through child tax credits now coming to \$10 billion plus per year.

We are proud of our record, even though at the same time we understand there will always be more work to do and more challenges out there. However, unlike the NDP, we also must look at the nation's finances and phase in those reforms as the funds become available.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to take part in the debate and to lend my support to women's rights to equality in Canada.

I hope that by the end of this debate, the House will not only recognize the Conservative government's failure to provide all Canadians equal opportunity, but will also categorically oppose the government's partisan and discriminatory cuts to federal funding of women's programs and services.

These cuts that the Conservative government have just announced to us and to Canada as a whole represent nearly 50% of the operating budget for Status of Women Canada.

Women make up 52% of our society. Women are more than just mothers, sisters, spouses and the conscience of our nation; they are the reason this nation survived the great difficulties of past few centuries and the reason it continues to exist.

These cuts by the Conservative government ignore the fact that women's rights are human rights. "Women's rights are human rights" are not my words. I did not make this up. This quote came from the global community of women at the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. That is why the Liberal government supported the Native Women's Association of Canada. The Liberal government gave the association \$5 million over five years to be used to end violence against aboriginal women.

I have decided in this part of my speech to focus on concrete examples to illustrate how this Conservative government's cuts will affect very specific groups of women. I just mentioned the Native Women's Association of Canada. In addition to the \$5 million over five years for that association there are other cuts, \$2.1 billion over five years for improving financial assistance for students and \$1.3 billion over five years to improve services for setting up and integrating new immigrants to Canada. These groups are often at the bottom of the social scale and at the bottom of the socio-financial scale—if I can put it that way. These are the groups that will suffer and are already cruelly suffering because of the Conservative government's cuts.

The Liberal government's support for the National Association of Women and the Law gave that organization the impetus it needed for its recent and effective campaign against Sharia law, an arbitrary process based on religion, when it was thought that it might be incorporated into the legal fabric of this country. That was one of a number of recommendations made by Marion Boyd, a former Ontario Minister of Justice during the very short-lived reign of the NDP government.

The financial support provided by our government gave voice to women across Canada. Muslim women, Christian women, Jewish women, women of every other religion, worked with NAWL to ensure that women's rights continue to be an integral and fundamental part of women's equality in Canada. Once again, a coalition of women, of spouses, mothers, sisters and daughters, of every religion and from every political party, came together and were able to do that thanks to the funding provided by the former Liberal government. They will no longer be able to come together, because this new Conservative government, in its opposite, contrary and negative way, is not providing the funding.

By cutting funding for status of women organizations, this government is trying to ensure that women do not have an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process in this country, because they will no longer have access to any funding. Why say that? Because this government is sending a clear message to women, saying that we, women, have no place at the table when decisions are made, that our place, women's place, is in the kitchen, once again.

What century is this? The 21st century, or the first century, or the second?

• (1650)

While the Prime Minister and his government are busy reducing women's opportunity to sit at the table where the decisions are made, rather than standing up doing the housework and cooking 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the Prime Minister's wife—she being a woman—is distributing one of our national newspapers to encourage women to improve their reading skills. This is a woman who knows what needs to be done. In spite of the negative things that the government led by her husband is doing, she believes that literacy levels among women, women's independence, the ability to make a choice and to be able to make choices, are truly and essentially something to which all women have a right.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again I listened with great interest to what the hon. member had to say.

I have to admit that the hypocrisy from the Liberal benches never ceases to amaze me. We hear comments about being meanspirited. We hear comments about cuts.

I would like the hon. member to comment on the cuts made to provincial transfers, enormous cuts on the back of health care, on the back of welfare, cuts that indeed bled down to the municipalities. Were they meanspirited or were they kind cuts? Was that a kind way to cut from the Canadian public?

I think that finding efficient, effective and accountable spending practices here in Ottawa is what the taxpayers want. I would like to hear what she has to say.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, Canadians, and Canadian women in particular, know very well that there is a huge difference between the budget cuts made today by the Conservative government and the unfortunate budget cuts of our Liberal government.

I do not need to remind the public, both here in the House and elsewhere in Canada, that our budget cuts had to be made because when we took power in 1993, there was a huge budget deficit. The only way to deal with it was to pay it off as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Since my hon. colleague for Peterborough has not been here very long, I would like to point out to him that these cuts were due to the deficit run by the Government of Canada, a deficit that all Canadians had to shoulder and pay for with their

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taxes every year. It was the deficit left by a Conservative government that spent too much and on the wrong things.

Unfortunately, we had to make cuts in some places because we had no other choice. It was because of the Conservatives' deficit, though, that we were forced to do it.

**Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Laval—Les Îles for all the figures she provided.

I would like to go back to one of the figures she mentioned. I think the figure of \$1.5 billion for the integration of women immigrants is a bit high. Did she say million or billion? In addition, over how many years was this money spread and how was it distributed geographically?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I am quoting the figures I have in front of me and that I read earlier: an additional grant of \$1.3 billion over five years to improve settlement and integration services for new immigrants.

If the hon. member wants more information, I will gladly forward the exact amount of this grant, but those are the figures I have in front of me.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I know that the member has a keen interest in immigration policies. I want to ask her about the situation of women who, after sponsoring a spouse for permanent residence, find that the spouse had entered into marriage only to gain permanent resident status in Canada.

Often this situation leads to the end of a marriage and family breakdown, which is not surprising, and often domestic violence was a part of the relationship. However, the sponsorship agreement with the federal government means that the Canadian spouse, the woman, remains financially responsible for the ex-spouse for years. Provincial governments are going after those victimized women for social service payments, for instance, to their ex-spouses, often ruining these women financially and victimizing them again. They are victimized once by the offending spouse and once by the government.

Why did the Liberal government not take any initiative to address the hardship caused by the enforcement of sponsorship agreements in situations of family breakdown and domestic violence? Could the hon. member comment?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important question. However, before I answer, I would just like to say that what the Liberal government was able to do for years is not what we are discussing today. We are discussing the budget cuts that this Conservative government is making, to the detriment of women. I would just like to point that out.

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I understand my colleague's question, but I do not understand why he is placing emphasis on women, when we know that the vast majority of people who are sponsored across this country are women sponsored by men, and not the reverse. I acknowledge that some women sponsor men, but for the most part, it is men who immigrate here and then send for their wives or spouses.

That said, it is true that a person who agrees to sponsor his or her spouse has a financial responsibility. Our government has always wanted that responsibility to be the same whether the sponsor is a woman or a man, because that person has signed and accepted that responsibility.

• (1700)

[English]

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in today's important debate.

[Translation]

The women in my riding are worried because of the actions of this government. Unfortunately, some of our worst fears have been confirmed. This government wants to do away with the progress we have made on women's rights.

But it is not surprising that millions of dollars are being cut from essential programs and that Status of Women Canada is also at risk. It is not surprising because this government, which only recently came to power, has done everything it can to hit important programs and policies that help women and their families in Canada.

[English]

This is not surprising from a government that killed the meagre beginnings of a national child care program.

Year after year and election after election, we were promised that such a program would be created. In 1993, 1997 and 2000, the former Liberal governments promised us help and failed to deliver in spite of majority governments and surplus budgets. Finally, after enough pressure from more New Democrat MPs, we were seeing the beginning of such a national program.

It was not surprising that we would see a cut to women's programs from a Conservative government whose committee chairs are all men and whose caucus is made up of just 11% women MPs. I am proud to stand on this side of the House with strong women's voices in the NDP caucus, more than 40%, and we will do even better next time.

It is not surprising that these Conservatives would cut programs to some of the most vulnerable in our society. It is not surprising from a party that believes our foreign policy should move so drastically away from our proud peacekeeping tradition and move closer to that of George W. Bush.

[Translation]

This anti-insurrection war, with its search-and-destroy operations in southern Afghanistan, is a bad mission for Canada. There is no resolution in sight, and this mission is not bringing peace to Afghanistan.

It came as no surprise this week that the government announced millions of dollars in cuts to women's programs.

We have a Prime Minister who prefers war to dialogue and political solutions.

[English]

That is why I speak in favour of the motion presented today. The motion is important because of the work of Status of Women Canada.

Status of Women Canada promotes gender equality and the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of Canada. It focuses on improving women's economic autonomy and well-being, eliminating systemic violence against women and children, and advancing women's human rights. It works to provide Canadians with strengthened and more equitable public policy by conducting gender based analysis and promoting its application throughout the federal government. It supports the work of women's organizations and other equality-seeking organizations.

I agree with all of these goals and so do women I speak with in my riding. My question to government members is this: which of these goals do they not support? How many of these priorities are expendable to the Conservative caucus here in the House?

[Translation]

This government plans to cut 40% of Status of Women Canada's budget. These funds would have been used to develop policies, communicate with Canadians, and provide vital subsidies to volunteer organizations that lack funds.

Apparently, there is no money for Status of Women Canada and the important work it does, even though there is a \$13 billion surplus and even though we are giving over a billion dollars in subsidies to the oil industry, which has more money than it knows what to do with. If this government really wanted to cut the fat, that is where it would start.

This motion is ironic, perhaps even cynical, because it was put forward by the Liberals. During their three majority mandates, the Liberals never kept their promises about daycare, and they categorically refused to legislate pay equity.

• (1705)

[English]

This motion comes from the same Liberal Party which, when in power, delivered the biggest cutbacks in history to transfer payments for health and education.

It left Canadians without a national housing program, the only industrialized country in the world without one; and of course this continues with the current government.

It reduced eligibility for employment insurance and saw child poverty rise under its watch.

Oh, yes, we know the Liberals were going to do it, but 13 years just was not enough, and if they had only had another chance. I do not buy that and Canadians did not buy it either.



That betrayal meant that we live in a country in which, despite its great wealth, despite its natural abundance in human capacity, we still see one in five Canadian women living in poverty. That is 2.8 million women who are struggling to get by and struggling to feed and clothe their children.

[Translation]

During a briefing for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, Status of Women Canada discussed two important areas in which Canada is not making enough progress.

Women are more likely to be poor because of a number of factors, including single parenthood, disabilities, immigration and racial discrimination. In Toronto, in my riding, the poorest people are often women. They show great courage in their daily struggle to survive.

Nevertheless, despite the important information that Status of Women Canada provided to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, she said, and I quote, "Our government is not a government that keeps institutions alive just for the sake of keeping them alive".

[English]

Perhaps it should not be surprising that an institution which is providing such sobering facts about women and poverty should be threatened with silence, this from a Prime Minister who made these cuts with no consultation and no debate and from a government that has cut the court challenges program that helps women and others, such as linguistic minorities, access funding to test equality cases.

As I stated in this House yesterday, what arrogance. It is this controlling nature that deeply disturbs us.

I urge this House to support the motion before us today, which rightfully chides the new government for failing to recognize the importance of women in Canadian society, in spite of the fact that it is presented by a party that so often failed Canadian women when it was in power.

Still, we must stand together today and stand up to a government that is rolling back the clock on women's equality even before we fully got there, a government that is clearly taking this country in the wrong direction.

**Ms. Helena Guergis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, having been a member of the Standing Committee for Status of Women since 2004, I heard, as did many other members participating on that committee, from many witnesses and many advocacy groups, all of whom had very different opinions of the work of Status of Women Canada.

Of course we did hear some comments that Status of Women Canada was doing some very good work. We did hear that at committee. We also heard a different opinion. We heard from, as I said, some advocacy groups who were not pleased with the work of Status of Women Canada and expressed some serious concerns. They were not sure about its mandate. They were not pleased.

Why does the hon. member choose to ignore these facts? In fact, if she wanted to check *Hansard*, the testimony and the evidence are there. Perhaps she would care to comment on that.

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I would also like to remind her I am a woman as well, and I and many women in the Conservative caucus are concerned to hear other women in this House who believe they can speak on our behalf. They cannot speak on my behalf.

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that Margaret Thatcher was a woman. It did not mean that she believed in women's equality. The issue we are talking about are organizations that are feminist in nature, that believe in women's equality, that promote and want to advance women's equality. That is where the majority of women in this country are at. They believe that we should be moving further along toward women's equality.

There are so many women and men in my riding who tell me about the difficulties they have finding child care. Even if they could find their way to the top of a list of 300 people waiting for child care in their neighbourhood, they cannot afford the \$1,300 plus that it would cost to pay for child care every month. These are the very real bread and butter issues that women and indeed families across Canada are concerned about.

Does it mean that every family, every woman in fact, believes the same thing? Of course not. In a democracy there is a diversity of opinion.

The facts speak for themselves when we see where women place their votes in elections. Generally, they tend to vote less for Conservative parties. That is borne out in election after election because they want a party that stands for women's rights and women's equality.

● (1710)

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find it rather ingenuous that we keep talking about the early education and child care promise of the Liberals that never came to be.

Actually, the hon. member knows full well that there was an agreement with the province of Ontario on health care with a very major agreement on child care. There was an historic agreement on child care. It was on the front page of the *Toronto Star*. There is no point for the member to shake her head. It is true. She can go to the Internet herself. We wanted to start a national child care program and we could not get the provinces to agree to anything.

In fact, she will recall the premier of Ontario insisted on cherry picking. The mistake the Liberals made, and I will admit it, was to back off and allow that to happen. It should not have happened. The premier created what was called the early years program.

We went back again to negotiate with the provinces because the program has to be delivered by the provinces. We again negotiated and ended up with an agreement with all the provinces, except for New Brunswick which had a Conservative government and was not interested. There was \$5 billion on the table and the program was in fact pretty much on its way.

The funding was there. This is what we are talking about. We are all so upset about the funds being cut by the government in February 2007, which is money that was already flowing to the provinces. The program was there, but the NDP chose to knock the government down and that is something for which it has to accept responsibility.

*Private Members' Business*

On pay equity of course, it could have been done sooner. I would like to have done it 10 years ago. It was not done, but as a response to the report of the standing committee we said that there would be legislation tabled in the fall. In the fall we were not in an election, but I can tell—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I understand that the hon. member opposite may feel some frustration that the people of Canada exercised their democratic right to vote her party out of government, but I think her real frustration should be with her party, who after 13 years of majority governments and surplus budgets reneged on promises that it had made to Canadians year after year after year. That should be her real frustration.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings. Pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put, and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 3 at 3 p.m.

• (1715)

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

### ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.)** moved that C-290, An Act to amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act (Northern Ontario), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill comes as a result of some of the problems that we have experienced in northern Ontario.

I will tell the House right away that it deals with northern Ontario. I know though that the problem exists in other parts of the country. I would advise my hon. colleagues that if they wish they could also bring forward the same kind of bill to deal with the same challenges. However, I know northern Ontario well. Therefore, I thought I would start with that particular section.

In the last 10 years northern Ontario has lost two ridings which is a lot when we consider that northern Ontario goes all the way down to the Muskokas and is a very defined area. There is both provincial and federal programming to address the particular issues of northern Ontario, but when we consider that particular part of the province covers 90% of the land mass of Ontario, members will understand the difficulties that we face in servicing that kind of a land mass with only 10 MPs.

My bill purports that we would amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act to ensure that northern Ontario maintains a minimum of 10 ridings. This would allow us to continue with a fair representation for northern Ontario.

[*Translation*]

Northern Ontario, which has many francophone communities, was greatly affected by the last redistribution of federal electoral boundaries, which reduced the number of ridings from 11 to 10. Four or five years prior to that, the number of ridings had been reduced from 12 to 11. This is beginning to pose a major challenge.

It represents a loss of political power that is not negligible and that is attributable to the declining population in the northern part of the province. However, that is only one aspect of the problem; the other is that there has been a very significant increase in the population of the large province of Ontario, particularly in the south.

[*English*]

As the size of rural ridings increase, the task for even the most conscientious and hard working representatives, MPs, of staying in touch with the needs, desires and aspirations of their far flung constituents becomes extremely difficult. The people of any rural or regional area associate themselves with a particular city or town and it is often where they go for different services, where they get the newspapers, and watch the news coverage. This is especially true of the francophone community.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Dyane Adam, Official Languages Commissioner, said, and I quote:

To summarize, official language communities should not have their vitality weakened by the decisions of federal institutions that are required to comply with the government's commitment to support their development and enhance their vitality under Part VII of the Official Languages Act. The commissions, by failing to give due regard to the networks of relationships that exist in official language communities as a result of their ongoing efforts, are contributing in varying degrees to weakening official language communities and marginalizing them from both the economic and social standpoints.

The Official Languages Commissioner recommended that government make certain improvements to the Electoral Boundaries Act to ensure that the electoral boundaries commissions honour the commitment to enhance the vitality of official language communities and support their development.

In 1980, as a result of boundary readjustment, one of the only ridings with a francophone majority, Cochrane North, was adjusted to include a large part of Northern Ontario. The result was that the francophones in the new riding of Cochrane—Superior were lost in the anglophone majority of the northeast portion of the riding. We should point out that the riding has been redefined since then. This is only one of the examples. It is imperative that we ensure these communities have representation that gives them a voice.

• (1720)

[*English*]

The increase in Canada's population in the past 10 years has necessitated a change to the total number of electoral districts and the House of Commons in the last one has gone from 301 seats to 308 seats. The number of electoral districts in the House of Commons is derived from a formula and rules that are set out in sections 51 and 51A of the Constitution Act, 1867. The formula takes into account changes to provincial populations as reflected in the decennial census.

*Private Members' Business*

Between the census of 1991 and 2001, the population of Ontario increased from 10,084,885 to 11,410,046. The number of electoral districts in Ontario was increased from 103 to 106.

When readjusting electoral boundaries, a commission is required to apply the principles contained in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. The act directs the commission to ensure that each electoral district in the province shall, as close as reasonably possible, correspond to the electoral quotient for the province. Therefore, the electoral quotient for districts in Ontario is a population of 107,742, which is established by dividing the population of Ontario by the number of electoral districts assigned to the province.

However, the commission may depart from the quotient where necessary or desirable to, first, respect the community of interest or community of identity in the province or the historical pattern of an electoral district in the province, or ensure a manageable geographic size for electoral districts in sparsely populated rural or northern regions of the province.

The fact that northern Ontario's 10 ridings account for 90% of the province's geographic area, as I stated earlier, it is very difficult for some of the MPs. I am not speaking here for myself because I represent a largely urban area but I thought it best, as one who is not as affected by this as some of my colleagues, to take their case in hand and to speak as a whole for all of northern Ontario.

Some of my colleagues cannot get to their ridings without chartering a plane, a helicopter or waiting for the ice roads to come in so they can get to it. There are many ridings in northern Ontario where driving 10 hours to get to just one part of the riding is nothing. Northern Ontario, in many places, does not have cell phone service nor high speed Internet and they do not have a lot of the transportation infrastructure that would be needed. It, therefore, is very difficult to represent these groups of people.

Northern Ontario has many aboriginal communities, francophone communities and communities of all sorts that are vastly different one from the other. There are huge mining communities, softwood lumber communities, agricultural communities and communities that rely a fair bit on tourism.

How can we get the attention of government when one's voice keeps being weakened all the time? Our newspapers are not what they used to be. Our television coverage is not what it used to be. We tend to get basically the news from Toronto and Ottawa, which removes some of the clout that we might have.

• (1725)

I will give members a recent example. I was watching a television program one morning and it was showing beautiful pictures of a huge forest fire in California. While I was watching the program, I knew a massive forest fire was going on in northwestern Ontario that was so bad that no one was even trying to do anything but to get the people out. I did not hear on word mentioned of that. The station knew about the fire in California because it could get the feed from there. Did anybody ever know about the fire in northwestern Ontario? We only found out about it when the smoke from that fire ended up in New Brunswick. Somebody finally woke up and realized that a fire was burning in northwestern Ontario. It is

important for people in the regions to have some kind of a voice, which is where the MP comes in.

As well, the regions have seen a decline in the services offered by the federal government. There are very few offices in the regions across the country. If someone in Timmins, for example, needs an urgent passport they must drive to Toronto or Ottawa, which is a 10 hour drive. People tell us that we should develop our tourism. Recently we were able to convince some airlines to fly people directly from our Sudbury airport to sun vacation spots. However, we were told that if they needed an emergency passport that they should stop by the closest office to the Sudbury airport. There is no passport office close to the Sudbury airport. The nearest ones are in Toronto and Ottawa.

All of those things make it very difficult for the people of northern Ontario. We supply a lot of the wealth that is generated in this country. We just have to look at the mining companies as an example. Northern Ontario faces challenges every day.

I ask the House to consider what we are asking, which is that we allow Ontario to give us a minimum of 10 ridings. They can be redistributed among the 10, which is fine. A number of provinces already have that guarantee so it is not an unusual request. Some of these provinces have smaller populations than northern Ontario and a smaller land mass. Our challenge in northern Ontario is that we belong to Ontario. We do not want to separate from Ontario but we think it might be a nice idea that we be given a bit of consideration so that we too can have a strong voice, a strong presence and be able represent our people well.

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for raising this important issue, an issue of particular importance for northern Ontario which is a huge geographic area and needs strong representation. Our economy has deteriorated over the last 10 to 15 years due to the free trade agreement. Capital has been refocused on some of the new economy that is out there. We have been moving away from the resource base that has served this country for so long.

A commission was set up a couple of years ago to look at the redistribution of seats. I spoke at a session of that commission in Sault Ste. Marie and told the commission of my concern as it looked at dropping the number of seats.

When the member was part of government she watched her government allow the number of seats in northern Ontario to deteriorate. Why did she not speak up then as passionately as she is speaking up today?

• (1730)

**Hon. Diane Marleau:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that we were passionate in our defence. The commission had its hands tied because of the way the act is written. Now is the time to make those changes. At the time, it happened so suddenly that by the time we realized we were losing seats, it was already a done deal and we could not retroactively change the law. Now is the time to do it.

*Private Members' Business*

I am telling the member this because I know the challenges we all face. We tend to go through tough times and good times. Things are good in my region right now. Mining is hot and the price of metal is high. However, because we live in this boom or bust economy, it is always important to have our concerns listened to.

We are in many ways supplying the wealth for the rest of the country. I can speak to mining. A lot of tax dollars are generated from the mining profits but our municipality does not get its fair share of those tax dollars because all the mining is done underground and there is not much to tax above ground. I use this example, not to complain, but to show the impact of what is produced in our area.

I was born and raised in a small town in northern Ontario. When I moved to Sudbury I said that I was moving south, which I was, but it is still part of northern Ontario. I have lived my whole life in the area and it never ceases to amaze me at how strong and resilient the people are. I know that with the help of this House we can continue to ably represent and speak to the challenges of living in northern Ontario.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing the bill before the House but, based on the answer she just gave to the previous question, I am led to believe that somehow, if someone makes a lot of money and contributes more to the economy, that person's vote is worth more than the vote of someone who does not.

In keeping with the reasoning of her logic, I believe 6% of the gross domestic product of this country comes from Fort McMurray which has a population of 80,000. Based on that, perhaps Fort McMurray should have 6% of the vote of this country.

I would like her to elaborate on why it is that the money being generated from mineral resources is worth more than the individual person. It comes down to one person, one vote, equal representation across the country. I just cannot reconcile the member's logic in justifying the bill.

**Hon. Diane Marleau:** Mr. Speaker, I spoke of mining but northern Ontario has a lot more than mining. Northern Ontario faces many huge challenges. Mining right now is good but softwood lumber, as we know, is not great right now. Many other communities out there need a voice and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act does tell the commissioners to take that into consideration.

It is not just about money generated. I gave that example because we are a great part of what keeps fueling the economy, just as Fort McMurray is, and I would want Fort McMurray to have as much recognition as possible because it is also part of the engine that fuels what we do here.

Not to take away from what happens in those parts of the country, but there are other parts of the country that are not as lucky or may not have quite the same assets. I speak of places in northern Ontario, such as Fort Albany, which no one can get to without a plane. Canada has many communities like that. How do we expect one person to travel thousands of miles and properly represent all of these divergent interests?

There has to be some consideration, and there is, because some provinces are guaranteed a minimum number of seats, knowing full

well that they need that. All we are saying is that we would like that same consideration.

● (1735)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to be back here with you presiding in the chair again. It is also wonderful to be speaking to Bill C-290. I thank my hon. colleague from Sudbury, who introduced the bill. I also want to thank her for her passionate words. I believe she is extremely sincere in offering the bill up for consideration to this place.

At the outset, I am here to oppose the bill. Most parliamentarians, if they really thought about what we need to do to ensure effective representation for all Canadians, would oppose the bill as well.

One of the tenets of our democratic society, and it has been this way since Confederation, has been representation by population. We have consistently, for well over 100 years, recognized the fact that all Canadians need to have a voice in Parliament. All Canadians need to be represented by their federal governments. That is the reason why representation by population has been such an effective mechanism to guide us in determining how many parliamentarians actually represent and service citizens in each region of the province.

However, the member is suggesting that we guarantee a certain region of this province, not a province in itself but a certain region within a province, a minimum amount of seats. While I can appreciate the member's passion for this, to try to represent members or citizens of northern Ontario, I must point out that this would have a very detrimental effect on our democracy and our democratic institutions.

As the member well knows, currently provinces, through the Electoral Boundary Readjustment Act, have the ability every 10 years to readjust boundaries within their own province based on population shifts and a number of other contributing factors. The member, however, is suggesting that we do away with that process and legislate a firm, unassailable amount of seats to be guaranteed to a region within the province of Ontario. This is unacceptable. Once we start legislating and preventing independent commissions from doing their work to represent average Canadians, we are on the start of a very slippery slope, and it is one that we should all, as parliamentarians, take very seriously.

Over the course of the last 100 years, the system we have now, representation by population, has served our country very well. In her speech the member talked about the need to ensure that the citizens of northern Ontario were represented well by parliamentarians. She has noted that there is a huge land mass in northern Ontario and it takes an inordinate amount of time to get from one town or one community to another.

*Private Members' Business*

These factors are all taken into consideration by the Boundaries Commission in Ontario every 10 years when it re-examines if changes should be made to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. These are the considerations that an independent Boundaries Commission takes into effect when determining exactly where the boundaries should be placed and whether there should be any readjustment or tweaking.

The member also made some interesting comments on the fact that over the course of the last number of years, population in Canada as a whole had actually increased. I am glad for that and I think that will be a continuing trend, not only in Ontario but I hope in every province.

I come from the province of Saskatchewan where we are only one of four provinces in the last number of years that has seen our population decline. I will not get into a debate on that matter in the House because it has a lot of other implications and it has more to do with, I believe, the provincial government in Saskatchewan than anything we do federally. My point is if, generally speaking, the population is increasing in every region in the country, including Ontario and hopefully including northern Ontario, then we really do not need to guarantee that a minimum of 10 seats is set into any kind of a legislative act. The mere fact that the population will increase will ensure that northern Ontario is well represented. I suggest that it will never go below 10 seats because the population, particularly in Ontario, will not decline.

• (1740)

Again, that is something I can assume. The member may not agree with me. However, to take it to the point where the member is saying we must enact, by legislation, that northern Ontario has a right that no other region within a province of Canada has, would be a serious blow to our democratic institution. This is where the slippery slope starts to kick in.

Who is to say that other provinces will not say they have regions within provinces that, for all of the same reasons as Bill C-290 addresses, they must be guaranteed a minimum amount of seats. This is something we should not tolerate.

Again, while I appreciate the member's comments, we have a system in place. On a regular basis every 10 years after a census, electoral boundaries across this great land examine the population trends, communities of interest and other factors that influence the representation by population, in effective representation arguments, and make determinations, and only then after widespread consultations with citizens at large, parliamentarians and local municipal officials. A final decision, having addressed many boundaries commissions in past years, always seems to be in the best interest of the citizens at large in the province in which that commission has been established.

The member seems to want to circumvent that very authority. It appears she wants to take the independence away from these commissions and start to make arbitrary decisions, legislative decisions in this place. While I have said on many occasions in the past that I firmly believe all members have the best interests of their constituents at heart, it is not surprising and it is certainly not a secret to most Canadians that at times discussions in this place get not only heated but very partisan. I would hate to see political

agendas take over from the fundamental rights of citizens, and that is what would happen.

This is the danger the member has in trying to promote her bill. She is taking the independence away from boundaries commissions across Canada and making it a legislative act that would guarantee a region of the province of Ontario X amount of seats. This is not something that we should accept, even though I know the member has what she believes are the best interests of northern Ontarians at heart.

We have to let the system as we currently see it and know it continue. It has served us well. It reflects the basic tenets of our democratic society, which we have come to know and appreciate: effective representation, representation in other words by population. It deals with the fact that legislative assemblies should not interfere with the work of independent boundary commissions that have been set up for the very purpose of addressing the issues of which the member spoke. It takes away any possible political involvement of making decisions based on partisanship rather than the public good.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-290, which proposes to amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. The purpose of this bill is to ensure that Northern Ontario maintains a minimum of 10 electoral districts despite its dwindling population.

My colleague, the member for Sudbury, has honourable intentions in this matter. Northern Ontario lost two ridings between 1997 and 2003. Nevertheless, I must inform the House that the Bloc Québécois does not support this bill. In the next few minutes, I would like to explain why.

Setting electoral boundaries is an important part of our parliamentary system. This process determines how many people each member represents in the House of Commons. Our electoral system has a number of advantages. Among the most important of these is a strong representational connection between voters and the people they elect.

An underlying principle of this system is that every vote cast in Quebec and in Canada has the same weight. Unfortunately, Bill C-290 would undermine this principle. The makeup of the House of Commons is determined according to the principle of representation by population. This means that, in theory, one person's vote should be equal to that of any other person.

Over the years, however, a certain degree of geographic, cultural, political and demographic diversity has been recognized, in Quebec and other provinces of Canada. Population size as well as rural and urban characteristics have also been recognized. Thus, it is accepted that some large rural ridings have fewer voters than certain urban ridings.

*Private Members' Business*

I understand the goal of the hon. member for Sudbury in introducing this bill, but, in our opinion, she is not taking the right path. The Bloc Québécois believes that electoral boundaries cannot be changed one by one. Quebec also has problems similar to those raised by the hon. member for Sudbury. To resolve them, we believe that submissions must be made to the right authorities, that is, to the federal electoral boundaries commissions.

The hon. member proposing Bill C-290 should therefore make her submissions to the federal electoral boundaries commission of Ontario.

The proportional representation system is flexible enough to take into account the concerns raised by Bill C-290. A summary of the ten-year readjustment process for representation is needed to illustrate this notion. The process is complicated, I am aware, but it is flexible enough to take into account regional sensitivities.

Representation in the House of Commons is readjusted after every ten-year census, to account for population changes and movement in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. The process is governed by the Constitution and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. There are ten independent commissions that review and report on the boundaries of federal ridings.

They publish their proposals in *The Canada Gazette* and hold public hearings to allow the public to participate in the adjustment process. Public participation in the review of electoral boundaries is, without a doubt, a cornerstone of the exercise.

After determining if modifications are necessary and feasible, each commission must prepare a report and send it to the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, who will then submit the report to the Speaker of the House of Commons for tabling in the House.

The members have 30 days to review the reports and indicate their objections to the committee designated by the House of Commons. That committee then has 30 sitting days to review the objections intended for each commission. The objections, minutes from the committee discussions and all testimony received are sent to the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, who then forwards them to the appropriate commission.

When they receive the committee's report, the commissions have 30 days to study the members' objections and make a final decision, without having to report to the chief electoral officer or Parliament.

• (1745)

The final decision is always up to the commissions.

The chief electoral officer then forwards the commissions' final reports to the Speaker of the House of Commons and prepares a draft representation order that sets the number of federal members of Parliament to elect in each province, indicates how each province is to be divided into ridings, describes the boundaries of each riding and gives the population and the name of the riding.

Throughout this process, there are means and forums for making arguments and raising objections. Members of the public can take part in the public hearings, and their member of Parliament can make representations before a committee of the House of Commons.

This approach should be favoured, rather than having a private member's bill introduced every time an electoral map needs to be revised. Riding boundaries should not be revised piecemeal, in the House of Commons.

In the riding of Drummond, which I have represented since 1993, we contested that commission's most recent proposal. Through our arguments, we succeeded in reversing the proposal and keeping our riding boundaries intact. We used several arguments that were similar to those made by the member for Sudbury to justify our challenge. I can therefore understand her intentions, but we made our representations in the right place and at the right time.

We were defending the idea of a riding that reflects our reality. For example, we insisted that communities of interest be taken into account. The commissions's proposal no longer favoured strong representation.

It would have created an artificial riding with a risk to true representation of the community. The proposed change could not be justified and was thus unacceptable.

The member for Sudbury should take the same approach to solve Northern Ontario's problem. A piecemeal approach, as proposed by this bill, would lead Quebec to follow suit. We have also experienced problems similar to those raised by my colleague, that is, seeing the regions lose their electoral weight.

For example, as a result of the last electoral boundary redistribution, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean lost one of its four seats. The North Shore also lost one of its seats and the member for Manicouagan now represents a riding of 252,365 square kilometres, an area 58 times the size of Prince Edward Island, which nonetheless has four seats in the House of Commons.

We do not believe that new legislation would correct this situation. All that is needed is for the electoral commissions to listen carefully to citizens. They need only apply the principles of the act.

The member for Sudbury is proposing that we stop one region, Northern Ontario, from losing too much electoral weight. I repeat that the same problem, on the same scale, exists in Quebec.

In 1867, the electoral weight of Quebec was 36%, with 65 seats out of 181 seats for all of Canada. A century later, in 1967, the electoral weight of Quebec had dropped to 28%, with 74 out of 264 seats in the House of Commons. Today Quebec has 75 seats out of 308, which gives us 24%. This does not take into account that some of Quebec's seats are not really being used to defend the interests of Quebec, but that is for another debate.

In closing, I will remind the House that the Bloc Québécois is not in favour of Bill C-290. Using a piecemeal approach would not promote democracy. A mechanism is already in place for this type of problem and that is where our complaints should be directed.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1750)

[English]

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to an issue that is very important and relevant to the people of northern Ontario. I thank the member for Sudbury for bringing it forward. She and other members of this place who represent northern Ontario understand the real challenges we face in that part of this wonderful country and the need for a strong voice, for good representation, for equal representation in this place if we are going to continue to take our place in this country's economy.

I speak this afternoon on behalf of my colleague from Timmins—James Bay who feels passionately about this issue as well. He would want me to say to the House that we are certainly going to be supporting this bill as it goes forward.

At the moment northern Ontario is experiencing a very high degree of alienation from the rest of Ontario and the country in general. We are facing some really difficult economic challenges. We do not seem to be able to get the attention of the governments of the day to actually fix those problems. The answers are relatively simple, if we look at what is happening in other jurisdictions across the country, but we do not seem to be able to get the ear of government in a way that responds and actually fixes those problems.

I suggest that there too many Liberals representing those ridings, at the federal level anyway, and not enough New Democrats. If there were more New Democrats, we might not be having this debate this afternoon, because northern Ontario would have many strong and effective voices championing the causes of the very important ridings of northern Ontario. Perhaps we would be getting more action.

Having said that, I want to present to the House an argument that I presented to the electoral boundaries readjustment committee when it came to Sault Ste. Marie a couple of years ago. We lost two ridings under the stewardship of the Liberal government of the day. The argument is that we have to go beyond simply representation by population.

We in this caucus have been asking for electoral reform for quite some time. Let us consider the results of elections, and this is just the way the deck is stacked at the moment. The NDP got some two and a half million votes in an election and 29 members in the House. The Bloc Québécois got about a million and a half votes and 50 members in the House. There is something wrong somewhere with this system. It feeds into the argument that needs to be made regarding the bill before us today.

We have to look at ways to get more effective representation in this place so that jurisdictions like northern Ontario feel confident that they have a voice, that they are being heard, that their issues will be addressed. When we do not address the issues of jurisdictions like northern Ontario, with its very exciting resource based economic sector, then the whole country suffers.

Over the last 10 or 15 years many things have had an impact on the economy of northern Ontario. The free trade agreements have had an impact, as has the refocusing of the economy and capital on the new economy. Some of the telecommunication centred

companies began to be established around Ottawa, Oshawa and other places in Ontario and across the country. It affected very dramatically and radically the ability of northern Ontario to get the capital it needed to stay current in the global economy we have now entered into and the free trade agreements that we are now part of.

• (1755)

We have been hammered seriously by all of those economic forces. Because of that, we lost population. Because we lost population, we lost representation. It has a domino effect. If we lose the representation, we lose our ability to get in there and talk to government about the kinds of things that are needed. The economy does not return when good times are to be had; it is in a state of constant decline.

In governments in the past, such as in Ontario, there were five more seats than there are now. Ontario has had governments that understood the cyclical nature of the northern economy and the impact it had on the stability of communities in that part of the country. These governments put in place vehicles that we all use. Provincially there was the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, the Northern Ontario Development Corporation, the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission and ultimately, the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. These were all vehicles put in place by government in response to the strong voices in Parliament at that time.

There were people like Elie Martel, Bud Wildman, Bud Germa and Jack Stokes, all good, strong New Democrat members of provincial parliament. They asked the Conservative government of the day to work with them to make sure that we not only stabilized the northern economy, but that we gave it the potential to grow and survive and to actually thrive.

I believe the member for Sudbury is asking that we take into account the very fragile nature of the northern economy when we make decisions about how many members represent us in Parliament, both in the Ontario legislature, and particularly because we are here in Ottawa speaking to this, in the Parliament of Canada, in the federal government.

Northern Ontario still represents one of the most exciting and unique opportunities for this country to take advantage of a resource based economy to drive all the other sectors that that economy drives. We really need to give it special consideration. We need to look at it in the same way as we look at, say, P.E.I. with its population and the number of seats that it has, and New Brunswick.

Northern Ontario does not fit logically, economically and in other significant ways with southern Ontario because of the nature of that economy and the growing population in that area. Actually, if we look at common interests, northern Ontario would fit better with Manitoba, but that is not going to happen, although there is a move afoot by some folks in northern Ontario to separate and form our own province, but we do not want to go there.

*Private Members' Business*

In this place we have dealt with some of the alienation we have seen in Quebec by giving special consideration and looking at things we might do to make sure that people get what they need to live up to their potential. When we looked at Alberta and some of the western alienation that exists, we sat down and tried to find ways to work within the structure of the system. We made sure that they had enough voice in Ottawa. Even when representation by population did not quite work, we made special provisions to make sure that that voice was heard.

I am saying that this House must get serious about the challenges faced by our resource based economy and the wonderful communities that exist in northern Ontario. We must be willing to roll up our sleeves and do the work, as did members of Parliament from northern Ontario over the years, such as, John Rodriguez, Cyril Symes, Steve Butland, Ernie Epp and Iain Angus, and I have missed a few, but all of those people. Unless we get that kind of voice back here in larger numbers or protect the numbers that we have and all of us together fight for the interests of northern Ontario, northern Ontario will continue to struggle and diminish. As our population declines, northern Ontario will lose more seats and pretty soon there will be no voice at all.

• (1800)

**Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity speak on this bill to maintain 10 seats in northern Ontario.

I have to politely disagree with my colleague, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, on the makeup of the political scene in northern Ontario. There are 10 seats there now. Somehow the NDP managed to confuse a few of the voters so a couple of them are held by NDP members. We are going to correct that in the future. At the same time, we made a very big mistake and we now have a Conservative representing one of the ridings, which has not happened too often, and we are going to correct that also. Mistakes made in the past can always be corrected and I think it is important for us to do so.

There has been a lot of talk about Bill C-290. In my speech, I am going to try to put a face on the bill.

Many provinces already have a guarantee of a minimum number of seats. It is very easy to do this, but when we consider the size of northern Ontario, which I will explain during my speech, it would be a big mistake for us to lose any representation, for us to actually have fewer MPs representing this huge land mass.

Northern Ontario is larger than many provinces. In fact, it is larger than many provinces put together. We have to be careful about what we do. We have to think about the people we are trying to serve.

I will explain some of the distances. In driving from Ottawa to my riding, for example, huge distances are involved. Many parts of Canada are like that, but if I want to drive home it is a 22 hour drive from Ottawa. Even then, I am not anywhere close to the edge of my riding by that time. It is still another 120 miles to the far edge of the riding.

These are absolutely tremendous distances. As people in Canada become more independent with the services that are provided through technology, they can live pretty well anywhere they want, so

there are now people in these vast areas where in the past there were no people. The people are there now.

We have hundreds of small communities, both municipal and unincorporated. I will take a moment to explain that. Especially in southern Canada, many people would not understand what unincorporated communities are. These are places where individuals have chosen to live far beyond municipal boundaries. They live there for reasons of their own, whether it is the isolation or the beauty of the place, and they have very few services. Sometimes they band together to get road boards and they provide other services for each other, but the fact is that they want to live in these areas and they are prepared to look after each other. There are no basic structures there for them.

When persons travel across northern Ontario they recognize the diversity of the geography as well as the population. This is not unique to Canada in any way or to northern Ontario, but it shows us that as wild and as beautiful as northern Ontario is, its people are as diverse as they are anywhere in Canada.

We have many first nations communities in my riding. In my own particular area, we have the Ojibway. We have the Cree in the far north. They all come from different aspects and from different levels of service and they all need to be represented by their government.

Across the land we have many communities that celebrate their heritage. They celebrate where they come from in the world and how much they want to enjoy it. I am thinking of the Ukrainian communities and the Polish communities.

Everyone needs to be heard and everyone needs a voice.

We also have a diversity of issues. There are as many issues in our ridings as anyone in the south would have. MPs have to deal with these issues. We have all those and more, simply because of the isolation of northern Ontario. I am not explaining that as a detriment to living there. I am explaining it as one of the pluses of living in northern Ontario.

However, we have to understand that MPs need to serve their people. With the improvement in the information highway, it is a much bigger job for us than ever before. Any services that someone in the south takes for granted have to be hard fought for in the north. We do that job.

I will now talk about my own riding of Kenora. It is an absolutely gigantic land mass. In fact, it is the eighth largest riding in Canada. Sixty thousand people live there, fewer every year. It is about 321,000 square kilometres in size and is an absolutely massive area. The narrowest part is 300 miles wide and from top to bottom it is over 1,000 miles.

Scattered throughout that area are people living in municipal structures and in the unincorporated areas and with all the other challenges we have. These people deserve every right to have services. We provide them now, but we are not sure we can do it if there are fewer ridings in the north.



*Private Members' Business*

• (1805)

Maybe I should explain, too, that people can drive many miles through my riding, as most ridings in Canada, but when they hit the end of the road, it is about 600 miles to fly to the top of my riding. At the top, on Hudson Bay, is Fort Severn. Again, it needs service. The constituents need to see their MP. We need to do our jobs.

I am very proud to serve that area, but I want people to understand the sheer size and the challenge. It is rewarding, but it is also a challenge to ensure I am there. People do not want to see us once every two years or once during an election. We need to be there so the people can have confidence in us. We need to be there so they know they can come to us when there are problems. They need to know we will actually get something done on their behalf.

When one thinks of the size of the area, one can understand the difficulty of serving it.

I will speak about the communities now. Municipal communities that have the structure tend to have more services.

Kenora is the largest community, with 16,000 people. I want to remind members that there are only 60,000 people in the entire riding. There are a number of communities, Dryden, Red Lake, Sioux Lookout, Machin, Ignace, Pickle Lake, Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls, all municipal structures. They all provide some level of service. They are all organized municipalities. They all try to serve their constituents. However, it is my job to try to serve them. This area has been very hard hit by difficulties in the forest sector.

We do not want to leave anybody behind. They do not need less representation; they need more. Many of the issues that I have with the current government are about taking away things. These people need more service, not less.

There are a lot of smaller communities, too. In total, I have about 80 communities, places like Borup's Corners, Dymont, Oxdrift. They are extremely tiny, but they have the need and the right to see their MP as often as they can, and it is a challenge. They are beautiful, quaint, tiny villages. These are where the real people of Canada work. They are independent, strong, hard-working and they need representation. They need more, not less. Quite often the MP is the only government presence that they have in their riding.

When I show up in the communities, as often as I can, it is quite an event for them. Quite often in communities smaller than 100 or 200 people, community halls will have events for us. They need to see their MP. Therefore, we cannot have less MPs serving this area.

Again, I go back to the sheer size of this area. This is a massive chunk of land in Canada and it deserves the right to have MPs serving it. It has 10 right now and it needs to remain at that. As I say, there are many provinces that are not nearly as big as my own riding and they are guaranteed a certain amount of MPs. We need to maintain these areas. We have a presence there now and we have to continue with that.

I will speak for a moment about the first nations and what they believe they need service for.

The southern part of my riding is Treaty 3. It is Ojibway, led by Ogiichida Arnold Gardner, who is a tremendous leader. However, I

service more than 20 communities there. These are all serviced by road. They all have the challenges that any other community would when 300 to 2,500 people live in a community. Yet they have many more challenges when they try to get recognized for some of the areas in which they do not feel they have enough service. There is an awful lot of work to do on those.

Then there is the far north. I mentioned the 21 fly-in communities. I am not sure if most members know, but there are rules in the House of Parliament where we can only travel for four days in our ridings. For me to go to these communities, it takes 21 days straight. I have to go home continually because I have to start the four day cycle again. If we took the population ratio that we try to use now, roughly 125,000 people, I would probably have 50 or 60 of these. How could anyone possibly service that? I would do it, but I am not sure if any of the other parties had representatives in that area who would be able to it.

Stan Beardy serves in Treaty 9. There are tremendous challenges, tremendous people, and it is a joy to serve them. Again, how much can one physically do if they lessen the number of ridings in northern Ontario? These people need representation.

A number of decades ago they were all connected. They now see what is in southern Ontario, southern Canada and the world. They want to be part of this. They want a share in what the world is doing.

Kasabonika has a tremendous leader in Gordon Anderson. He has his community thriving. It is an example in northern Ontario, and probably many places in Canada, of what can be done with strong local leadership. These people need to see their MP.

In Fort Severn, Roy Gray lives in one of the harshest areas next to some of my colleagues who serve in northern Canada. It is tremendously harsh and expensive to be there. These are the people who will be hurt if northern Ontario does not have the existing 10 ridings, if we have less representation.

• (1810)

In Fort Hope, Charlie O'keese is the chief. He is a tremendously good guy to work with, but he needs to know that his MP can show up when he needs him and he will not have 160 communities to serve instead of 80.

We need strong voices for Canada. We feel Northern Ontario is as deserving as any of the provinces or any of the other parts of the country that have a guaranteed minimum amount of seats. We need to remember that if Canada is going to have small-town Canada and rural Canada, it needs to support them. I think this bill would go a long way to making sure we maintain the 10 seats so we can do our jobs in an effective way that represents the needs of the people.

• (1815)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

*Private Members' Business**[Translation]*

(The House adjourned at 6:15 p.m.)

It being 6:15 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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