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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 1, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 1, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the hon. member for Yukon.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BUTTER TART TRAIL

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to highlight the Butter Tart Trail in the township of Wellington North. Located at the north end of Wellington County, Wellington North is anchored by the town of Mount Forest and the village of Arthur.

The Butter Tart Trail highlights 13 points of interest, including bakeries, flea markets, antique shops, produce markets, goat and sheep dairies, and a pottery studio. The trail was developed to encourage tourists to stop as they pass through on Highway 6.

The idea for the trail comes from a basic principle of community economic development: work with what you have. This strategy is working, as CBC Radio and *Report on Business* magazine recently discovered.

I want to commend the council and staff of Wellington North, the tourism committee and local businesses for finding a unique way to promote economic development.

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STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with considerable sadness that I acknowledge the government's termination of the summer work student exchange program. For the last 11 years, this program has provided opportunities for 1,200 students each year to gain valuable work experience in another part of the country.

The program, unique to Canada, allows students from every socio-economic group to participate. For many people in Scarborough—Guildwood, the program represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to live and work in Quebec or New Brunswick. For six weeks students explore other Canadian cultures and hone their second language skills.

What is next on the neo-con chopping block? The summer student work program? Over 40 students from my riding participate in that program.

The government's callous, meanspirited attitude toward students across this country is perverse. What do these neo-cons have against students and education?

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning the members of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean Union des producteurs agricoles demonstrated in Jonquière—Alma, the riding of the Minister of Labour, to try to wake up the government to the crisis that is causing particular suffering for grain producers.

With regard to income support, the current federal government contribution to program costs has decreased from 40% to 20%, according to the UPA. Quebec only receives, on average, 6.8% of the budget even though it represents 18% of the agricultural sector.

The producers' situation has been deteriorating since 2002. The latter have seen their average annual income drop from \$20,000 to a loss of \$6,000. The federal government is abandoning the 6,000 farmers of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

If the Quebec Conservative members are unable to remind the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food that agriculture exists in Quebec, the Bloc Québécois will see to it.

* * *

[English]

CHILD TAX BENEFIT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's disastrous administration of the child tax benefit has left single parents, and yes, they still are mostly women, on the losing side in a game of he said, she said.

Statements by Members

The child tax benefit is supposed to provide a financial benefit for low income parents who are the caregivers for their children, but Revenue Canada will not give that money to single parents if a former spouse or common law partner has failed to inform Revenue Canada of his new address. The CCRA's assumption is that he is still contributing to the household income.

Simply because the ex has failed to file his taxes or is fraudulently still using the mother's mailing address or is incommunicado, the burden of proof falls on the single mom to prove that he has moved out. Having to prove that someone is not living with a person is a bizarre and onerous requirement that takes the notion of jumping through bureaucratic hoops to new extremes.

The time to change the rules is now. Single moms might not be on this government's list of five priorities, but I say, do it for their children.

* * *

MILITARY VALOUR

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Her Excellency the Governor General will soon decorate four Canadian soldiers for incredible acts of heroism in Afghanistan. They will be the first recipients of Canada's honours for military valour, which were created 14 years ago.

Sergeant Patrick Tower, of Victoria, B.C., will receive the Star of Military Valour for crossing open terrain under heavy fire to lead a besieged platoon to safety.

Three others will receive the Medal of Military Valour.

Sergeant Michael Denine, of Edmonton, Alberta, exited the hatch of his armoured vehicle under heavy fire to man a machine gun, forcing an enemy withdrawal.

Corporal Jason Lamont, of Greenwood, Nova Scotia, sprinted through open terrain under intense fire to give first aid to a wounded comrade.

Master Corporal Collin Ryan Fitzgerald, from Morrisburg, Ontario, in my riding, exposed himself to enemy fire to enter a burning vehicle and remove it from the roadway, allowing his comrades to escape an ambush.

I ask all my colleagues to join me in saluting these remarkable heroes.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 25 the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne made an application to the Federal Court of Canada to have the government's decision to cancel the court challenges program declared null and void.

[*English*]

In the past, the court challenges program has enabled Acadians to obtain services in their own language and to have French language schools in their own communities. These are essential services. Not

only are the cuts unacceptable, they jeopardize the ability of Acadian society to live, develop and prosper in their own language.

This is why I support the FCFA court action and further invite the minority government to come to its senses and reinstate funding to the court challenges program immediately.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I express my condolences, sympathy and prayers to the families of the three women murdered or attacked in Surrey.

Mrs. Manjit Panghali, a mother of a three year old and a mother to be, had earlier disappeared and her burnt body has been found.

Mrs. Gurjeet Ghuman, who is in critical condition, was shot in the face, allegedly by her husband, apparently in a family dispute.

Mrs. Navreet Waraich, mother of a four month old son, was stabbed to death, allegedly by her husband, in a family dispute.

The role of violence in these situations is undeniable and tragic.

Newcomers to Canada face many challenges, but domestic violence and fearing for one's own safety should not be among them. There is no place for domestic violence in Canada.

Before more lives are lost, all that needs to be done must be done. Members of the official opposition should stop digging in their heels and allow the new Conservative government to make tougher and effective laws. It is already 13 years too late. Perhaps some lives could have been saved.

* * *

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the exceptional work of Héberjeune, a community organization in my riding. I wish to congratulate the members of that organization for the honourable mention they received from Quebec's health and social services network in the 2005-06 "support for vulnerable groups and individuals" category.

Héberjeune de Parc Extension, in Montreal, provides temporary accommodation to young adults between 18 and 25 who are in need of help.

It also sponsors a social support program for young people trying to put an end to their isolation by becoming involved in their community, whether by finishing their studies or finding a job, in short, by assuming responsibility for themselves.

Day in and day out, Héberjeune helps young people take control of and change their lives, thus helping change the world in a lasting way.

[English]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week a report by the public accounts committee delivered a scathing indictment of former Liberal public safety minister Anne McLellan and the billion dollar Liberal gun registry boondoggle.

The committee confirms that the former Liberal minister knew her department was using unscrupulous accounting methods to avoid seeking parliamentary approval for increased funding for their gun registry. The all party report reads:

—the principal public servants in this matter, all indicated that the minister was aware of this problem. Regardless, evidence suggests that the minister knew, and she did nothing to ensure that Parliament was fully informed and for that she must accept responsibility.

For years Liberals denied any wrongdoing for the gross mismanagement of their gun registry. They instead chose to vilify public servants.

Now we know what happened. Liberals kept Parliament and Canadians in the dark about the increasing costs of their gun registry. The Liberal Party owes Canadians an apology.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a backlog of 800,000 immigrants trying to get into our country. The immigration minister has admitted that a backlog of 800,000 is too much, but he has no plan to fix the system.

These are skilled and educated workers who are trying to enter Canada to provide better lives for themselves and their families. The minister has done nothing to shorten processing times, extend visas to families or increase the sponsorship of families. We need to speed up the sponsorship of families and we need to reunite families faster.

Families are separated for four or five years while trying to get into Canada. The reunification of families takes too long. Waiting up to five years for parents to reunite with their families is a hardship. People are suffering under the current system.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, rising obesity rates and decreasing physical activity, particularly in children, represent major public health challenges our country will have to face in the coming decades. Parents, health organizations, schools and governments all have a part to play in this matter.

This is why our government is determined to show leadership and take decisive action to solve this problem.

The children's fitness tax credit will promote greater participation in sports programs and physical activities, and will help parents with the ever-increasing costs associated with such activities.

I would like to thank the members of the expert panel, Doctor Kellie Leitch, Michael Weil and David Basset, who took the time to

Statements by Members

consult Canadians and put together some recommendations on programs that should be eligible for the tax credit.

I am delighted to be working, not with a team that is perpetually doomed to ask questions, but rather with a team that is able to announce concrete measures that will benefit Canadians.

* * *

[English]

PAPER MILL CLOSURES

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, northern Ontario communities are being devastated by mill closures, with no help from federal and provincial governments.

The latest mill in danger is St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie, which has filed for bankruptcy protection. Unless governments act, 400 employees of St. Marys will join what the Forestry Coalition says is 25,000 other northerners who have already lost their jobs.

Provincially, it is the Liberals' disastrous hydro policies harming the mills. The federal government, formerly under the Liberals and currently under the Conservatives, does not have a plan to respond to the over 200,000 manufacturing jobs lost in Ontario and Quebec.

We need a jobs first economic strategy. We need stronger sector councils and a partnership approach. And when restructuring happens, we must ensure that hard-earned pensions are not on the bargaining table. Retirees depend on their pensions. They are deferred wages of hard-working employees.

Stop killing an—

● (1415)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cardigan.

* * *

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise today to congratulate Al-Anon Family Groups on their 55th anniversary and to acknowledge their important contribution to Canadian communities.

For over half a century, Al-Anon and Alateen have been a key source of support and hope for families and friends of alcoholics all over the world, with over 25,000 groups in 131 different countries and 1,400 local meetings across Canada.

We owe this wonderful organization and all its members our continued support and gratitude for 55 years of dedicated service.

This special occasion is being marked by a luncheon celebration here in Ottawa tomorrow in partnership with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ROY DUPUIS

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 19th Tokyo international film festival recently rolled out the red carpet for *Maurice Richard*. Art and style won over the jury, which awarded the best actor prize to Roy Dupuis for his portrayal of the Rocket.

Although he shuns the spotlight, Roy Dupuis is a mythic and popular Quebec actor with animal charisma, combining pure talent with subtlety in performances in such films as *Nikita*, *Séraphin: Heart of Stone* and *Mémoires affectives*, also known as *Looking for Alexander*.

I know the accomplished work, the professionalism and the humility of this committed artist who has put his all into every production he has been involved in. I am delighted to join with my Bloc Québécois colleagues in applauding him and thanking him for so brilliantly representing the creative genius of the Quebec film industry we are defending here, against the Conservative government, which has chosen to jeopardize its continued success.

* * *

[English]

CAPTAIN NICHOLA GODDARD SCHOLARSHIP

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week the Canadian Islamic Congress awarded its first ever Captain Nichola Goddard Scholarship in Peace and Conflict Studies. This honour was awarded to Ahmad Syed, a graduate student at the University of Ottawa, who is concentrating his studies on conflict resolution and conflict avoidance.

On May 17, 2006, Captain Nichola Goddard died in combat during fighting in the Panjwai district of Khandahar province while serving as a forward observation officer with the 1st Regiment of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery.

Captain Goddard was the 17th Canadian to be killed in Afghanistan since 2002 and the first woman to be killed in combat in Canadian military history.

The Captain's father, Dr. Tim Goddard, said:

I believe that this work will help further the hopes and dreams held by Nichola, that peaceful resolution of conflict can be achieved and thus prepare the way for the reconstruction of civil society and the establishment of stable nation states.

* * *

[Translation]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the Federal Accountability Act has for 133 days been in the hands of the Liberal senators, who are unduly delaying its adoption. Today is also the first anniversary of the Gomery report, which revealed that the Liberal Party had stolen millions of dollars from Canadian taxpayers.

Despite the 441 questions the Bloc Québécois asked, that party was unable to put an end to the Liberal culture of entitlement. Only the new Conservative government could react quickly to the Gomery

report by introducing the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history: the federal accountability act.

The Liberals have chosen to delay passing the bill in order to again protect their own interests and those of their party. We wonder who is working behind the scenes to unduly delay passage of the Federal Accountability Act.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his election platform, the Prime Minister stated, "A Conservative government will preserve income trusts by not imposing any new taxes".

Canadians who voted for the Prime Minister did so based on a deception. What is equally concerning, they invested their life savings based on a false promise. Today, thanks to his misrepresentation, Canadians are about \$25 billion poorer.

Everything the Prime Minister will tell the House today about the impact of income trusts on government revenues he knew when he made that promise. Why did he engage in a deception of such monumental and costly proportions to all Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be absolutely clear. The commitment of this party was not that we would have no taxes for Telus. It was not that we would have no taxes for BCE. It was not that we would have no taxes for foreign investors, or no taxes for major corporations. It was a commitment to protect the income of seniors.

The Minister of Finance has brought in an age credit. He has brought in pension splitting. He is imposing fair taxes on the corporate community. I challenge the Liberal Party to support those things.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not what he said in the election. He assured them that income trusts were essential for those who had spent their lives raising families, saving for their retirement and building our country.

Innocent Canadians are suffering an economic bloodbath today because they believed the Prime Minister. He gave his word. Canadians acted on his word. He then broke his word. He knew then what he knows now and he has no excuse.

How can he explain to Canadians the colossal misrepresentation he made in the last election? How can he justify to Canadian citizens his \$25 billion breach of faith to Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition says, lots has changed with income trusts in the past year, including tax holidays for major corporations, which this government does not and will not support.

The Minister of Finance has acted decisively and he has acted with integrity, unlike, I should mention, the previous government. Let me quote a prominent Liberal, Warren Kinsella, who says—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The Prime Minister is giving his answer. We have to be able to hear his answer and the quotations. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor. We will have a little order.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: The quote, Mr. Speaker, is, “Now, if [the member for Wascana] had still been in charge, we might have heard about this from our brokers on the weekend, just like in the good old days”.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, driving people to despair is no way to make friends. The Prime Minister said that income trusts were here for good. He said over and over again that he would preserve income trusts and that he would never impose new taxes on them.

People believed him. They invested their savings based on the Prime Minister's word.

How can he justify his disdain toward those who believed him?

How can he justify the losses caused by his false promises?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and his party have a choice. They should support income splitting for pensioners, they should support higher income for seniors and they should support fair taxes for large corporations.

It is up to them. We have made our choice and we do not have to explain it to the RCMP.

• (1425)

[*English*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, the Conservative Party lied to retired Canadians, to widows and to grandmothers and the consequences are enormous.

[*Translation*]

Canadians invested in good faith in income trusts in order to make their savings grow, so that, when they retire, they can spoil their grandchildren, pay for drugs and even pay the rent.

How dare the Prime Minister allow his Minister of Finance to do the exact opposite of what was written in black and white in his campaign platform?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's comments, I am pleased to inform her that there is substantial provincial support for this initiative, including by the minister of finance of the province of Quebec with whom I spoke last evening.

This is an issue of national importance, not only with respect to the Government of Canada but also with respect to the provinces. It is a question of tax fairness. Should corporations pay their fair share

of taxes in Canada or should we shift the balance more and more onto individual taxpayers?

It is an issue—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance was like a bull in a china shop with his announcement yesterday of radical tax changes for income trusts. Today, people are watching their savings melt like snow on a sunny day as the stock market plummets.

Does the Prime Minister realize that many Canadians now have to think about working a few extra years to compensate for their losses on the stock market, for which he is responsible?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been said:

The fact of the matter is this is an important public policy question. It has to do with revenue to all governments, including the provinces. It has to do with fairness in the business system of this country, and it has to do with productivity and growth for the future. We would like to get the policy right for the long term....

An hon. member: Who said that?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: I did not say that. It was the member for Wascana in this House on September 27, 2005.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie has the floor and we need order.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, a former World Bank economist stated that climate change will have disastrous consequences and will cost the world \$7 trillion. By signing the Kyoto protocol, 164 nations recognized that we must act now. Meanwhile, the government has done its best to renege on its commitments and introduce a bill designed to please its friends, the oil companies.

How can the Prime Minister have the nerve to send his environment minister to co-chair an international climate change conference with the goal of destroying the Kyoto protocol?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc leader has changed his mind. First he insisted on our participation in the Kyoto protocol, and now, he does not want us to be there. It is the responsibility of this government and the minister to be in Nairobi, and we will be there. I would add that our plan includes mandatory targets for all industries, including the oil industry.

Oral Questions

•(1430)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I agree with Greenpeace, the David Suzuki Foundation, astrophysicist Hubert Reeves, and the Canadian Auto Workers, who have all criticized the lack of a real plan to fight climate change.

Given that the United Kingdom and Germany have reduced their greenhouse gas emissions by 14% and 17% respectively, what credibility will the Minister of the Environment have as co-chair of an international climate change conference?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would be irresponsible not to attend the conference. That is why the minister will be there.

I should note that last weekend, Mr. Boisclair said that he wanted a mandatory clean air strategy for Quebec. The federal government is providing that strategy. He should talk to the leader of the Parti Québécois.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of the Environment was counselling Alberta, the fiefdom of oil companies, Quebec for its part was rolling up its sleeves and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

How can the minister oppose the Quebec plan when, to date, Quebec has the best record in Canada for greenhouse gas emission reductions?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always supported Quebec's green plan, but we must do more than just propose incentives and voluntary measures. We believe that corrective measures and penalties are needed in order to obtain tangible results from industries. For that reason we have adopted a strict national regulatory framework for all major industries.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is rather ironic that the Montreal Exchange has reminded the government—formed by a party that says it is in favour of the free market—that the absence of specific targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases makes it impossible to set the price per tonne of CO₂ and is compromising the launch of the Montreal Climate Exchange.

Does the minister realize that her approach is detrimental not only to the natural environment but also to the economic environment?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we met with the promoters of the Montreal carbon exchange. In order for this market to be truly effective and flexible, it requires the support of the House for the clean air act. This legislation will establish the responsibilities and the review required to obtain real reductions.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the threat of climate change is the number one challenge facing everyday Canadians and we as parliamentarians have a responsibility to act on the matter and to act immediately.

Will the Prime Minister confirm today, for this House and all Canadians, that the standoff has come to an end and that the clean air act will be sent to a special legislative committee prior to second reading so that Parliament can get on with the job of reducing

pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and get some results for Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I would characterize anything here as a standoff. The leader of the NDP asked me in my office yesterday if the government would put this bill to a committee before second reading and I told him that was under consideration. I called him 20 minutes later after consulting my colleagues to confirm that we were willing to do that. The House leader will consult with the House leaders of the other parties on the best way to proceed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we reach an agreement on this issue as soon as possible and that the legislative committee be put in place. I am asking the Prime Minister to state that he will take these considerations seriously and implement a constructive approach.

I am asking the Prime Minister, whether he is serious or not, to change direction and take a positive approach in order to achieve concrete results in the fight against climate change.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader has again asked me to refer Bill C-30 to a committee before second reading. We are prepared to do so, and I hope that the opposition will contribute positive and constructive ideas to such a process.

The NDP leader has tried to do that with a private member's bill, and I am waiting for members of the other opposition parties to do the same. When criticizing a plan, it is important to have a plan of one's own.

* * *

•(1435)

[*English*]

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Canadian seniors and other investors, as a consequence of the government's broken promise, saw \$25 billion of their hard-earned savings go up in smoke in two hours of trading. In comparison, the government's pathetically small tax relief is \$1 billion over a whole year.

With the loss in two hours of trading 25 times bigger than the tax relief that the government is providing, how can the government claim that this day of infamy, this black Wednesday, is anything other than a total disaster for those who—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would never go over the top. I know—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor to respond to the question asked by the hon. member for Markham—Unionville. We will have a little order.

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, after 13 years in government and some time in opposition, as of October 18 this year, the member for Markham—Unionville said the following about his party's position on this important subject for all Canadians, "We don't have a definitive position on this".

The former Liberal government offered confusion while we have provided clarity. It offered more confusion for independent families and their tax responsibilities. We offer balance in terms of corporations paying their fair share of taxes going forward in Canada.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me explain to the House what the Minister of Finance offers. He offers a gross failure to manage the economy, a betrayal of investors who mistakenly took the minister and the government at their word, the single biggest blow to the wealth of Canadians ever dealt by a finance minister and a banana republic process, bringing disrepute to Canadian capital markets.

It is obvious that the minister has been a disaster on this file. When will the Prime Minister fire him?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP is not investigating my Department of Finance but it is investigating the member's department of finance.

There were no leaks, no emails and no deals with friends on Bay Street. There was confidentiality, deliberation and the provision of certainty for capital markets in Canada.

Finally, there was an effort to create fairness for individual taxpayers and their families, while the member protects the big—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Outremont.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government broke its promise and went back on its word.

The government should look back at its election platform, which indicated in black and white on January 13:

A Conservative government will...preserve income trusts by not imposing any new taxes on them.

It was set down in black and white on January 13.

Why did the Prime Minister break his promise? Why did the Prime Minister lie to Canadians?

The Speaker: I must say that I have a problem with the words used in the question. Nevertheless, if the Minister of Finance wants to answer the question, he may do so.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a substantial commitment to provide security for seniors in this country. Yesterday we made a very important announcement with respect to an issue that has been outstanding in this country for more than 40 years, and that is the question of income splitting for pensioners.

I know the Liberals opposite do not think it matters much for pensioners. However, if we look at a pensioner now receiving a pension of \$40,000 for one spouse and the other spouse not receiving any pension, the tax savings will be \$2,500 for that couple.

I know Liberals do not think that is much money but it is a lot of money for a lot of Canadian pensioners.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one has to be shameless to think that those minor measures announced yesterday will make up for the \$25 billion in retirees' and small investors' savings that have just gone up in smoke.

Does the minister realize that he did not keep his word, did not honour his commitments, did not keep the promise made by the finance critic? He lied right down the line about his election promises.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Outremont knows very well that such words regarding another member in this House are not permitted. The question is unacceptable and we will discuss this matter following question period.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is in the process of trying to pass a bill that would grant members of the judiciary a very generous salary increase, specifically, 7.25%, plus full indexation, which would mean an increase this year between \$14,000 and \$21,000.

How can a government grant such generous increases to judges, while refusing to help older workers who have been the victims of mass layoffs and do not have enough money to live at home while awaiting their retirement?

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that it is this Parliament's responsibility, under our Constitution, to establish judicial salaries and benefits. It is ultimately up to Parliament to consider and improve any proposed amendments. The committee has considered Bill C-17 and it will be up to Parliament to approve it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the government realizes that one of its primary constitutional responsibilities is to look after people who are destitute.

Indeed, it is the government's responsibility to look after 60-year-old workers who have worked in the same factory for 40 years, only to be let go due to a mass layoff.

However, these workers have been abandoned by the government, which refuses to assume its responsibilities.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard from the Minister of Finance about the important steps that are being taken to address seniors, pensioners and older workers. It is ultimately Parliament's responsibility, on the issue of judicial compensation, to approve this judicial compensation.

* * *

*[Translation]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. government is against having employees with certain dual citizenships working on military contracts awarded to the Montreal company CAE. This discriminatory policy goes against the charters of rights of Quebec and Canada.

Does the government intend to formally protest this violation of the Charter of Rights to the U.S. authorities or will it tolerate it by keeping quiet?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her question.

[English]

We have in fact raised this issue already with the highest levels of the American government.

My colleagues, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Industry, and I have already engaged in an effort to deal specifically with the unfairness mentioned by the hon. member.

We have established a working group in the Department of Foreign Affairs, complete with American officials, to find a suitable solution to this issue.

● (1445)

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, both charters specifically prohibit discrimination based on nationality and on racial profiling, which the U.S. government requires under the guise of security. We expect the federal government to oppose this measure by Washington.

Does the government intend to do so?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already outlined what we are doing about this. We raised it immediately after consulting with industry. We have had a number of occasions to speak directly to the American ambassador. Mr. Negroponte was here about two weeks ago and we raised it with him.

I spoke directly to Secretary of State Rice about this. We put together a working group specifically aimed at finding a solution. We will continue to do so. I would appreciate the cooperation of the House and the members opposite.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by slamming the door on his counterpart from Ontario, the Minister of Indian Affairs has shown how indifferent he is to resolving the crisis at Caledonia. His actions are not befitting those of a minister of the Crown. In fact, they are reminiscent of a petulant child.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Will he remove this file from the minister's responsibility and instead assign it to a minister who understands the importance of immediately resolving the situation at Caledonia?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cancelled the meeting because I felt that the political grandstanding of the Premier of Ontario was irresponsible. I see today that the officials are comparing their conduct to "full contact sport", so I rest my case.

I intend to take this matter seriously, and to discharge my abilities and my responsibilities with the seriousness that they deserve. I know the difference between a hockey game and public governance. If the premier and his colleagues in Ontario have forgotten that difference, it is between them and their voters.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not game time. A provincial minister travels to Ottawa to meet with his federal counterpart. He takes time from his busy schedule and spends taxpayer money to travel. When arriving at the minister's office, he is greeted with stomping feet, slamming doors, and the cancellation of a pre-arranged meeting. Was this a Conservative caucus meeting? No, that is how the Minister of Indian Affairs treats a colleague.

When will the minister show true leadership, accept the federal government's responsibility, and personally meet with the many stakeholders?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated I am prepared to meet with the Ontario minister and his officials when they are prepared to approach this in a serious manner. This dispute is one that has taken place in the province of Ontario. It began with an Ontario company building on Ontario land with the approvals of the Ontario Municipal Board, all under Ontario law. It then became an Ontario policing issue. There is no doubt that policing is an Ontario responsibility, so Ontario will need to face up to its jurisdiction and its responsibility.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Constitution makes it perfectly clear that land claims issues are the sole responsibility of the federal government. For the last eight months, the Minister of Indian Affairs has been missing in action on the Caledonia dispute. The situation remains very tense in Caledonia. It is costly. It has been going on for far too long.

The minister committed to speeding up the land claims issue if the blockades came down. The blockades came down months ago. Why is the minister not living up to his commitment?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the House, and I think my colleague knows this, that over the course of the last five weeks I have met with Ontario's representative, Jane Stewart, a former privy councillor. I have met as well with the federal government's representative. I have sat down personally and met with Chief David General, the elected chief. I have met with their hereditary chief.

We continue to work on this issue. We are making progress at the negotiating table and part of the message that Ontario needs to receive is the seriousness of this issue. Dealing with it at the table is what has to happen, not political grandstanding.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, local residents are demanding action from the federal government and from their own member of Parliament. Despite calls from the area and the fact that the Minister of Indian Affairs hired Barbara McDougall, a former Conservative cabinet minister with no land claims experience, to handle the issue, the Conservatives pretend they should not deal with the issue.

Why does Caledonia's own member of Parliament, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk, refuse to take any action to help in the situation, despite the fact that she is the region's representative at the cabinet table?

• (1450)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk is involved in this issue. She meets with me regularly. We have complete discussions about the conduct of the file. Her thoughts on this matter guide me in the instructions that I provide to Ms. McDougall and to Mr. Doering. We will continue to work together at the negotiating table with the elected chief and the hereditary chief.

I would point out, for the assistance of my friend, that this government, myself as the minister, is the first government in Canadian history to recognize the Haudenosaunee Council and to sit down and talk to them.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Finance announced that Canada's new government would increase the age credit for seniors and allow pension income splitting. These major decisive measures will help seniors, especially those in the low and middle income tax brackets.

Can the Minister of Industry explain the details of this announcement and how it will benefit all Canadians?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague, the Minister of Finance, who announced his tax fairness plan for Canadians today. This plan confirms that we have kept our Budget 2006 promise and that we have increased the basic personal exemption for seniors by \$1,000 as of fiscal year 2006. Furthermore,

beginning in fiscal year 2007, we will allow income splitting for seniors.

After 13 years of the Liberal Party's inaction and laissez-faire attitude, our government is recognizing its responsibilities and acting, which is something the Liberals did not do for 13 years—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the income trust announcement yesterday is a flip-flop that could only make a Liberal proud, it is an important direction for everyday working families. The finance minister has set an important precedent by closing this tax loophole. As he said yesterday, income trusts are a growing trend to corporate tax avoidance.

Considering the minister's statement, will he today commit to shutting down all loopholes in Canada's tax laws including the Barbados tax haven?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly, we are interested in tax fairness as a fundamental principle and expanding the tax base. We believe, unlike the former government, that all Canadians, including corporations, should share in the tax burden fairly. That includes, legitimately I think, review of treaties with respect to taxation as well to ensure that all Canadians are accepting their fair share of the tax burden.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remind the minister and all members that tax havens cost Canadian taxpayers billions in revenues every year.

If we look at just Barbados alone, it is hiding an estimated \$23 billion annually from Canadian tax collectors. This is all at a time when we have a homelessness crisis, child and senior poverty is on the rise, aboriginal Canadians live in third world conditions, and millions of average Canadians cannot get the health care they need.

Will the government commit today to building on the income trust announcement by closing other loopholes and cracking down on tax fraud and unlawful tax avoidance?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an important issue in terms of having fairness in the tax system. I am happy to review those issues.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this meanspirited minority government has turned its back on vulnerable Canadians. It slashed programs that would teach people to read and write and would have provided day care spaces for our kids. Destroying their dreams was not good enough; it had to insult them too.

Yesterday, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development said the hurt imposed by the cuts to her budget was the equivalent of having to do without a cup of coffee.

Will she apologize for her spiteful statement that demeaned the most vulnerable in our society?

Oral Questions

●(1455)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government cares about the vulnerable in our society. That is why we are spending so much money on them. However, we also have the responsibility to all Canadians to ensure that all of their dollars are well spent.

Yes, there are cuts to our programs. We are cutting programs that are not delivering results for Canadians. On a scale though, it is very small. It is two-tenths of 1%. We are going to deliver results for Canadians. We will fund programs that are good for Canadians.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network is closing its doors. Yukon is losing its literacy coalition. The Canadian Labour and Business Centre is already closed. Employment equity offices in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are closing. The 25,000 summer jobs for students are gone. Some cup of coffee.

Is the minister unaware of how hurtful her cuts are because she did not bother to consult any of these groups?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a day when Liberal Party members are standing up defending zero taxes for big corporations and opposing income splitting and tax breaks for seniors, they should be ashamed of themselves to ask that kind of grandstanding question.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development was repeatedly asked for details about \$152 million in cuts to her department. Though the cuts were announced a month ago, she was unable to identify where the cuts are to take place.

The minister has had five weeks to disclose to Canadians what programs will be cut and how Canadian lives will be affected. Does she not know what is going on in her own department, or what is she trying to hide?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to tell Canadians just what we are cutting.

We are cutting programs that were approved by the Liberals. We are cutting programs that paid \$71,000 to upgrade a website. We are cutting programs where one little group paid \$66,000 for travel. We are cutting programs that the Liberals brought in where an executive director made \$150,000 a year. That is even more than a Liberal senator.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at committee yesterday the minister proved that she was very good at hiding from literacy groups. When asked to list the groups with whom she widely consulted, the minister was unable to name a single literacy group.

This must come as a surprise to those in her own riding who submitted an 800-signature petition against the cuts. And what about the petition signed by a coalition of literacy groups in Quebec? Were they consulted?

Will the minister now specifically name which literacy groups she met with prior to announcing these cuts?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government consults widely with Canadians, but I want

to list, on this first anniversary of the Gomery report, some of the people we do not consult with.

We do not consult with people by the name of Ouellet, of Dingwall, of Corriveau, or of Brault. We do not consult with people named Gagliano. We do not consult with people who put \$7,000 of cash in envelopes on restaurant tables.

We hear the quieter voices of hard-working middle class taxpayers, and that is whom we will always listen to.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the president of the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec said he is very worried about the attitude of the government, which, along with the Europeans and the Americans, is questioning the very existence of the Canadian Wheat Board. He said he is dismayed that farmers are having their collective marketing tools taken away from them.

Will the minister admit that this attack on the Canadian Wheat Board leaves the door wide open to another similar attack on supply management?

●(1500)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing, of course, is moving ahead with our campaign promise to allow marketing choice for western Canadian farmers who want to have a chance to market their own products in a marketing choice world. That was a campaign promise, as was our support for the supply management system. We supported it during the campaign; we supported it at Geneva and international conferences. It receives the full support of this government.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I invite the minister to read the latest editorial in *La Terre de chez nous* to get some idea of our concerns in Quebec.

The Canadian Wheat Board and supply management are based on the same principle. They are both collective marketing strategies.

I would like the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to explain to me how he can say he does not question supply management, while he does question the existence of the Canadian Wheat Board.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we will be asking western Canadian farmers in this plebiscite is whether they want the same freedom of choice that Quebec farmers have to market their grain. It is no different. We are not going to ask them to do something we would not ask of or is not already available for farmers in Quebec. It will be a clear question on barley. We think farmers want to have that question put to them. There was certainly a demand by the opposition. We will have a plebiscite on that. I hope that farmers will decide to move forward on marketing choice on barley.

We said during the election that we would give them choice. We said that we would move on behalf of them. We are moving on behalf of farm families in Canada.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Hayder Kadhim, a victim of the Dawson College shooting, said that when he awoke from his coma he was devastated to learn three things: one, his friend Anastasia was dead; two, he would have to live with bullets in his head; and three, his own Prime Minister was going to eliminate the gun registry. Hayder's question to the Prime Minister is, "I want him to explain to me why he wants to dismantle a gun registry proven to have saved many lives and which now costs next to nothing to maintain".

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly share in the grief of what happened at Dawson College. We tried to get in touch with Mr. Kadhim today. His press secretary informed us that he would try to get back to us; they were quite busy. I have offered to meet with him in Montreal on Monday. He may have some insights.

I will also share with him that our view is to have more effective gun control and that those who apply to have guns of any kind would face a more rigorous process. We agree with him. We want to see effective gun control.

* * *

*[Translation]***CRIME PREVENTION**

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Montreal and elsewhere in Quebec, there is a disturbing increase in serious crimes committed by street gangs and young delinquents.

Can the minister tell the House what the government intends to do to prevent these crimes?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last budget we allocated almost \$20 million to prevention programs for troubled youth.

However, let me be clear on this point, we have never had and do not have the slightest intention of amending the law with respect to the age of criminal responsibility. Those with claims to the contrary, such as Father Gravel, the Bloc Québécois candidate in the

Repentigny riding, quite simply are not telling the truth. Father Gravel is surely familiar with the eighth commandment.

* * *

*[English]***HEALTH**

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night a disturbing report by *CTV News* uncovered voluntary plastic surgeries were taking up valuable time in hospital operating rooms from coast to coast to coast. The Minister of Health complimented the journalist on her excellent piece and told her that he would be hearing from provincial ministers on the issue.

Could he now report to the House how many provincial health ministers he has encouraged to end this practice? When does he plan to register formally his concern with the provinces about this tactic?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have not heard from my colleagues yet; operators are standing by, however.

In the meantime, I can report to this chamber that as a result of the excellent budget 2006, we have an extra \$1.2 billion of health transfers going to the provinces to focus on the important medical conditions and the important procedures that every single Canadian has a right to ask for from a government that is delivering.

We are delivering. The Minister of Finance has delivered. I am very proud of the Minister of Finance.

● (1505)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over two years ago this House of Commons passed an NDP motion to ban trans fats in Canada. The entire city of New York will soon be trans fat free. Even the worst of the worst fast food has changed its ways, but the health minister is nowhere to be found on this issue. Trans fats have been scientifically proven to drastically increase the risk of heart attacks. They are totally unnecessary.

Will the minister announce today that Canada will officially be the second country in the world to ban trans fats in our food?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware, a report is under consideration by the Canadian public as well as by the Government of Canada regarding this very issue. We are certainly studying it very closely. The hon. member neglected to mention that food companies in this country have voluntarily gone trans fat free, or are radically reducing their trans fat. We would encourage that trend to continue.

*Privilege***PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

The Speaker: Order. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the galleries today of young people who are participating in the Take Our Kids to Work Program.

[*Translation*]

The Take Our Kids to Work program gives participants an opportunity to experience the demands and the reality of the work world.

Some hon. members: Bravo!

The Speaker: In oral question period, the hon. member for Outremont used unparliamentary language when asking two questions. I am now requesting that he withdraw his remarks immediately. Thank you.

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, out of respect for you, I withdraw the word that has offended your delicate ears.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

REMARKS MADE BY MINISTER OF NATIONAL REVENUE

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege concerning remarks made by the Minister of National Revenue in yesterday's question period.

Yesterday during question period the minister responded to a set-up question from the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley that “since 1999, the Liberals cut 459 CRA positions in Summerside alone”. It is my belief that these comments raise a *prima facie* question of privilege as they are an inaccurate representation of the facts and a blatant attempt to impede my ability to effectively represent my constituents.

My first concern is the minister's assertion that past Liberal governments have cut 459 jobs at the Summerside tax centre. This is an absolute misrepresentation of the facts. There was no significant decrease in permanent jobs at the Summerside tax centre under the Liberal government. The centre was established in 1993 with a core 400 to 500 permanent jobs. The minister knows that there are considerably more than that presently employed at the Summerside tax centre. In fact a combination of permanent, contract and term positions can fluctuate up to 1,100 jobs at certain times of the year.

The minister's statements were a false representation. In fact, if the minister's statements were true that 459 jobs had been eliminated, the centre would be closed.

Second, I spoke with the minister before her meeting with the mayor of Summerside. I asked her before this visit about the situation at the tax centre. At that time she assured me that he, the mayor, would be travelling back to Summerside, and I quote what she said, “a happy man”. I took from that that she had solved the problem on her own and that she had convinced the Minister of Finance to rescind the cuts and the jobs had been reinstated. Obviously that did not happen.

To continue on this point, I have taken this issue to the Commons standing committee, this is true. My colleagues on my behalf took it to the Standing Committee on Finance. Following confusing media reports on the effects changing government policy would have on the tax centre and to ensure that all stakeholders were aware of the full implications of the decision, my colleagues moved a motion at the Standing Committee on Finance that requires the committee to fully investigate the local and national implications of the elimination of the GST visitor rebate program.

Again, I find it incomprehensible that the minister would not think that a parliamentary motion by Liberal MPs at a standing committee of this very House did not constitute bringing this issue to the fore. As a former member of the finance committee, one would think that the Minister of National Revenue would have more respect for the committee process and would recognize this as a legitimate function of my parliamentary duties.

I am just halfway through, Mr. Speaker.

• (1510)

The Speaker: In that case the hon. member for Egmont will want to get to the point. It sounds to me like a major disagreement on facts, but on a question of privilege, he has to indicate to the House what privilege it is that has been breached. He said something at the beginning, but we seem to have gone astray since. I hope the hon. member will get to the point of the question of privilege because this sounds like debate.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Mr. Speaker, I want to call your attention to the ruling of Speaker Lamoureux referred to in Marleau and Montpetit at page 84.

—that parliamentary privilege includes the right of a member to discharge his responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts at intimidation.

I am trying to perform my duties as a parliamentarian described on page 186 of Marleau and Montpetit as representing constituents and getting action out of government, and yet find myself subjected to false accusations.

The elimination of the visitor rebate program has very grave circumstances for the constituents I represent. It means real job losses in the city of Summerside. It was announced as a complete surprise after no consultation with me, other parliamentarians, affected individuals in Summerside, or indeed the tourism industry across this country. I am attempting to find answers for my constituents and represent their interests here in Ottawa through legitimate parliamentary channels.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to examine the merits of this question of privilege with respect to the remarks of the Minister of National Revenue on the grounds I have outlined above. The minister has given an inaccurate representation of the facts in a blatant attempt to impede my ability to effectively represent my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, should you decide that there is a *prima facie* case of privilege, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Speaker's Ruling

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am actually quite surprised that the hon. member, who has considerable experience in this chamber, would rise on this matter. This is not even close to a question of privilege.

The hon. member does not like the facts being told to him by the Minister of National Revenue. If he does not want to hear the facts from various ministers of the Crown, then he should take it up in debate.

If he wants to talk about how the previous government so poorly treated the maritime provinces, it would not be a question of privilege. It was something that might take up the rest of the session, if we were going to fully explore that, but clearly this is not a question of privilege.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I support my colleague in terms of his facts as challenged by the hon. House leader. As a former minister of revenue who travelled to this location many times, his numbers certainly ring true and so does the logic of his statement.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very supportive. We have to keep in mind that this was a set-up question by the governing party on the other side, a soft lob, of which it tried to put misinformation in the House, which affected the privileges of the member for Egmont.

Hon. Carol Skelton (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the numbers I received from my officials in Revenue Canada were the numbers that were given. The member opposite never spoke to me until after the mayor of Summerside visited me.

An hon. member: Shame on you.

Hon. Carol Skelton: No, it was after because he said something to me about Mayor Basil Stewart, and what he had told him after he met with me.

It is false. The numbers were given to me by Revenue Canada officials.

• (1515)

The Speaker: As is quite clear from the discussion, this looks to me, as I suggested, that it was a matter of debate. There is disagreement as to facts. It is not for the Chair to determine how many employees were here or there, or anywhere, at any given time.

I will review the remarks made by all hon. members on this question of privilege and if necessary, I will get back to the House in due course.

CANADA'S CLEAN AIR ACT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Mississauga South on October 19, 2006, concerning the premature disclosure of Bill C-30, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, the Energy Efficiency Act and the Motor Vehicle Fuel Consumption Standards Act (Canada's Clean Air Act).

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Mississauga South for having raised this important matter as well as the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform for his comments on October 23, 2006.

[*English*]

In raising this question of privilege, the hon. member for Mississauga South claimed that a breach of the privileges of the House had occurred as a result of the premature disclosure of Bill C-30, Canada's clean air act. He stated that copies of the bill had been distributed at a press conference held on October 13, 2006 by the Sierra Club and other environmental groups. The bill itself was not introduced in the House until October 19, 2006.

In response to this question of privilege, the hon. government House leader contended by Bill C-30 had a much broader scope than the document tabled by the hon. member for Mississauga South. He noted that the bill proposed amendments to three statutes rather than only to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. He went on to indicate that, even with respect to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, Bill C-30 proposed amendments not identical to those in the document referred to by the hon. member for Mississauga South.

In response to this intervention, the member for Mississauga South stated that the basis of his complaint was not that the two texts were identical, but that they contained, "substantively, the same critical provisions".

This is not the first time a question of privilege has been raised about the premature disclosure of a government bill. In cases where *prima facie* cases of privilege have been found, there has been divulgation of the actual bill prior to members having been made privy to its contents. Members may wish to consult the ruling delivered by Mr. Speaker Parent on February 21, 2000, at pages 3766 and 3767, of the *Debates* where such an issue is discussed.

When looking carefully at the document provided by the hon. member for Mississauga South, it is evident to me that it is not a copy of the bill which the government placed on notice. In addition to the differences pointed out by the hon. government House leader, an examination of the two documents shows numerous other differences. These include not only differences in the organization and numbering of its parts, but more extensive textual differences as well, since there are various provisions in the bill not found in the document provided by the hon. member for Mississauga South.

I have also looked at the press release issued by the Sierra Club in conjunction with the October 13 press conference. The press release clearly indicates that the Sierra Club's comments relate to, "...an August version of the proposed amendments...". The Sierra Club further notes in the press release that its comments on the legislative proposal will remain valid, and again I quote, "...(a)ssuming that this draft is what is introduced into Parliament...".

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

The fact that the document distributed by the Sierra Club contains blacked-out passages also indicates that the document as circulated by the government was a consultation document and not an advance copy of Bill C-30.

[English]

As has been noted in previous Speaker's rulings, the government is free to consult whomever it wishes in preparing legislation for submission to the House. It is not for the Chair to determine what form these consultations may take or what documents the government may circulate for comment.

The key procedural point, as I indicated in a ruling delivered on March 19, 2001, at pages 1839 and 1840 of the *Debates* and to which the government House leader made reference, is that once a bill has been placed on notice, it must remain confidential until introduced in the House. In the present case, I can find no evidence that there has been any premature disclosure of a confidential document to which the House has priority. I, therefore, must rule that no breach of privilege has occurred.

I would again like to thank the hon. member for Mississauga South for his vigilance in drawing this matter to the attention of the House.

• (1520)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Speaker for his ruling. I accept it totally. As it turns out, it is really somewhat inconsequential, since Bill C-30 was dead on arrival in Parliament.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-253—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Order, please. I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. government House leader on June 21, 2006, in relation to the procedural issues relating to Bill C-253, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions), standing in the name of the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

In his arguments, the hon. government House leader explained that clause 2 of the bill contained provisions which would effectively increase how taxable income was calculated and thus result in potentially more taxes being collected. Specifically, subclause 2(5) would make any refund of payments regarding contributions to RESPs considered as taxable income. Subclause 2(6) necessarily repealed a section of the Income Tax Act, which would have made such refunds excluded as taxable income.

Therefore, the hon. government House leader argued that if Bill C-253 was creating a new tax burden, then it should not have been given first reading without the adoption of a ways and means motion, and the Speaker should discharge the order for second reading and remove the bill from the order paper.

[Translation]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice provides some information on the operation of taxation bills on pages 758 and 759:

The House must first adopt a Ways and Means motion before a bill which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer can be introduced. Charges on the people, in this context, refer to new taxes, the continuation of an expiring tax, an increase in the rate of an existing tax, or an extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayers... Legislative proposals which are not intended to raise money but rather reduce taxation need not to be preceded by a Ways and Means motion before being introduced in the House.

Furthermore, on page 898 it states:

With respect to the raising of revenue, a private member cannot introduce bills which impose taxes. The power to initiate taxation rests solely with the government and any legislation which seeks an increase in taxation must be preceded by a Ways and Means motion.

[English]

As I understand it, the current RESP regime requires the person contributing to the plan to make such contributions out of after tax income. If, subsequently, the amount in the plan is not to be used for funding post-secondary education as intended, the contributor may have the contributions refunded. This refund is not taxed as the original contribution was made from income on which tax had already been paid. Similarly, a student withdrawing money from an RESP is not required to report the contribution amount as income, but only the interest earned while the funds were invested in the plan.

Let us now turn to the proposal before the House. The summary of Bill C-253 states that the bill provides "that contributions to a Registered Education Savings Plan are deductible from a taxpayer's taxable income".

The bill also provides that if, at a later time, contributions are taken out of the plan by the contributor, they are to included as taxable for that year. Not having been taxed initially, the contributions would cease to enjoy tax-exempt status at the time of withdrawal from the plan.

This proposal amounts to a tax deferral. Rather than making contributions out of after tax income, the contributor would be provided with a tax deduction at the time that the contribution is made. If, subsequently, the money is not used for educational purposes but is withdrawn from the plan, the funds would be reported as taxable income at that time.

I do not regard such a tax deferral as imposing any increased tax burden on the contributor. It is permissible for a private member's bill to introduce a tax exemption, or to propose a delay in the reporting of income. Therefore, I find that Bill C-253 is properly before the House.

Accordingly, in my view, debate may continue on the bill in its current form.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1525)

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the Republic of South Africa, from August 27 to September 3.

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)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 14 petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group, respecting its participation at three events.

The first event was the 46th annual meeting of the Regional Policy Forum—Council of State Governments—Eastern Regional Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 30 to August 2.

The second event was the 2006 annual meeting of the Council of State Governments—West: Alliance With an Attitude, Breckenridge, Colorado, August 10 through 13.

The third event was the meeting of the Canadian American Border Trade Alliance, the U.S./Canadian Border: A Unified Focus, Washington, D.C., September 10 through 12.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two reports to table from the Standing Committee on International Trade.

The first report I have the honour to present, in both official languages, is the second report of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee has considered the Canada-Central America Free Trade Agreement negotiations and agreed to present it to the House.

The second report I have the honour to present, in both official languages, is the third report of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

In accordance with the reference of April 25, the committee has considered the main estimates and agreed on June 5 to present them to the House.

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference on Monday, June 20, your committee has considered Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Judges Act and certain other Acts in relation to courts and agreed on Monday, October 3 to report it with amendments.

Routine Proceedings

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I think you would find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That, during today's debate and the debate on November 7 on the business of supply, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair; and within each 15 minute period, each party may allocate time to one or more of its members for speeches or for questions and answers, provided that, in the case of questions and answers, the minister's answer approximately reflects the time taken by the question, and provided that, in the cases of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allocated may speak one after the other.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

(Bill C-19. On the Order: Government Orders)

November 1, 2006—Report Stage of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (street racing) and to make a consequential amendment to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act—the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also believe you would find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (street racing) and to make a consequential amendment to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, be deemed reported back from committee without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

● (1530)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

BILL C-9

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also move:

That the time allocated for the report stage of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment), shall not exceed one hour and the time allocated for the third reading of Bill C-9 shall not exceed two hours.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the government House leader has just put on the table in terms of this proposed motion reflects the discussions among House leaders over the course of the last number of days and represents progress on the proposal that the official opposition had made for expediting the justice plan.

With respect to Bill C-9, however, I wonder if the government House leader could provide just a bit more information to the House. We have no problem with the motion the way it is proposed and for which the House leader is seeking unanimous consent, but in the discussion about Bill C-9 and about this motion, there was a certain understanding among House leaders about the type of amendment that the government would bring to the floor of the House during the report stage proceedings.

It is our understanding, according to the order paper, that the nature of that motion has changed to a certain extent, and because the agreement that is embodied in this motion was predicated on a certain understanding of the proposed amendment, I wonder if the government House leader or perhaps, failing that, the Minister of Justice, could simply put on the record the nature of the change that the government has in mind between what was discussed originally and what is now embodied in the motion on the order paper.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the official opposition House leader makes a very good point with respect to the discussions that took place between he and I and all other House leaders.

It is my understanding that it was not possible to have the exact amendment restored. Apparently, we had to put a little bit less than what was in the section that was defeated at the committee stage. In order to get it on the floor and make it accessible it had to be changed slightly, which is what it is.

However, I can confirm that the opposition House leader had it right as to the discussions between us. I again thank him for his cooperation on this particular motion.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions between all of the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, 10 members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to Edmonton, Alberta on November 9, 2006 and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table two petitions this afternoon. The first petition was sent to me by the St. Roch's Catholic Women's League and its first vice-president, Mrs. Barbara Cornack.

The petition contains names from residents in my riding of York West. The petitioners are calling upon the government to reopen the issue of marriage in this Parliament and to repeal or amend the Marriage for Civil Purposes Act in order to promote and defend marriage as the lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition was sent to me by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. This petition contains names from residents in Ontario. The petitioners are calling upon the government to raise the age of consent from 14 years to 16 years of age.

MARRIAGE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present, in both French and English, brought forward by the Catholic Women's League in Manitoba on the issue of marriage.

They are asking Parliament to repeal or amend the current Marriage for Civil Purposes Act in order to promote and defend marriage as the lawful union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

[*Translation*]

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition today. I would like to thank the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, who gave me this petition from the Chicoutimi homeless shelter. The petition includes 428 signatures.

In this petition, the Chicoutimi homeless shelter is asking the government to renew the national homelessness initiative immediately—including the SCIP and the RHF—and to make it permanent and increase its funding. The petitioners say that these programs help underprivileged people and respond to real needs. They help many people in various organizations and create a number of jobs in the community. The petitioners say that the programs have created 25 jobs. The money really helps the homeless and I am pleased to table this 428 signature petition.

•(1535)
[English]

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to present petitions on behalf of the hard-working men and women of the Canadian Auto Workers who call upon the government to cancel negotiations for a free trade agreement with Korea and to instead develop a new automotive trade policy that would require Korea and other offshore markets to purchase equivalent volumes of finished vehicles and parts as a condition of continued access to our markets.

I respectfully submit these petitions.

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to present a petition from about 350 constituents of mine from Prince George, Mackenzie, Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, Pouce Coupé, Cecil Lake, Charlie Lake, Rose Prairie, Baldonnel, all from my riding, and from Valemount, B.C.

These citizens call upon Parliament to immediately take all necessary steps to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age. Hopefully they will note that the government has moved in this regard and has introduced Bill C-22. It is my hope that the bill will pass forthwith.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a number of my constituents of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour who have called upon Parliament to recognize that the marriage is the permanent union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others and they are calling upon Parliament to reopen the issue of marriage in this Parliament and to repeal or amend the Marriage for Civil Purposes Act to promote and defend marriage as the lawful union of one man and one woman.

I am pleased to present the petition on their behalf.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to table this petition from approximately 350 residents of Verdun who are asking this House to reverse Canada Post's decision to close Verdun's only post office. Among others, several elderly people want access to a post office that is near their homes and to postal professionals who have been doing their job for years.

Furthermore, these people are asking for continued access to post office boxes in the location provided for that purpose so they can keep the same addresses and postal codes. As we know, keeping the same address is the main reason an association, for example, gets a post office box. The consequences for associations are serious.

[English]

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to present a petition on behalf of the CAW members and

Routine Proceedings

also other citizens to the Government of Canada for a new automotive trade policy.

This is part of a larger petition containing 47,000 signatures which calls upon Canada to abandon the free trade talks with Korea and to halt the unfair importation of many of its vehicles flooding our market at this time when we are not allowed to access its market. The petitioners want a trade policy that will be fair and responsible, especially during these difficult times where Ontario and Quebec are losing many manufacturing jobs.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions.

The first is another petition asking that the Government of Canada take all necessary measures to immediately raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age. This petition is from a number of constituents in my riding of Langley, including residents of Abbotsford and Surrey.

The second petition that I present today is from my constituents in Langley and it is also on the age of consent.

•(1540)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that has been signed by many citizens which calls upon Parliament and the government to immediately halt the deportation of undocumented workers and to find a humane and logical solution to this situation.

As all members in the House are aware, I have presented this petition on many occasions in this House and I was very surprised to hear that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration said that it was my new-found interest. I guess he has not been paying attention to the petitions that I have been putting forward on many occasions in this House.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to present a petition that has been signed by many residents of Nanaimo—Cowichan, plus other people who live in British Columbia. The petition asks us to honour our legal commitments to the Kyoto treaty and to further pledge to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below the 1990 levels.

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to deposit today in the House.

Points of Order

The first one petitions the Government of Canada for a new automotive trade policy. It is not from my constituents but it does call upon the Government of Canada to cancel negotiations for a free trade agreement with Korea, which will worsen the one-way flood of automotive products into our market and, secondly, develop a new automotive trade policy that would require Korea and other offshore markets to purchase equivalent volumes of finished vehicles and auto parts from North America as a condition of their continued access to our market.

[*Translation*]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): The second petition concerns civil marriage. It contains a number of requests. Most of the petitioners are people from my riding. I will not read all the requests, but here is one:

Therefore, your petitioners are calling for Parliament to reopen the marriage debate in Parliament and to repeal or amend the Civil Marriage Act so as to promote and defend marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 107 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 107—**Ms. Dawn Black:**

With regard to the Canadian presence in Afghanistan: (a) what is the number of Canadian Forces (CF) members wounded since the first deployment to Afghanistan in 2002; (b) what is the number of CF members permanently wounded; (c) when was the decision made to not bring the flag to half mast after the death of a soldier; (d) what is the process for making next of kin aware of casualties in the CF; and (e) what operational reasons would there be for any delay in making next of kin aware of casualties?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED SIMILARITY OF PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a point of order from the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River and we will hear him now.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this point of order concerns the presence of Bill C-257 and Bill C-295 on our order paper. Both of these bills are private members' bills and they provide for prohibitions on the use by employers in federal jurisdictions of replacement workers during a strike. Bill C-257 was passed at second reading by this House on October 25, last week.

Both of these bills are substantially the same and I proceed on the assumption that the Speaker will agree that they are substantially the same, one minor difference between them being that the quantum of a fine or penalty for an infraction is slightly different.

The passage or adoption of both of these bills would create a legal impossibility or confusion here for our Parliament and for the public. The House is now faced with this issue. Fortunately, we do have some wisdom of a previous House to rely on.

The question is, what should happen to the second bill, which the House has not voted on yet? I refer to the ruling of the Speaker in this chamber on October 29, 1957, almost exactly 49 years ago, when a bill introduced by a member to provide for vacation pay for employees in federal jurisdictions was substantially the same as a government bill then introduced. From the journal, the Speaker quotes from Erskine May, 15th Edition, page 499:

There is no rule or custom which restrains the presentation of two or more bills relating to the same subject, and containing similar provisions. But if a decision of the House has already been taken on one such bill, for example, if the bill has been given or refused a second reading, the other is not proceeded with if it contains substantially the same provisions, and such a bill could not have been introduced on a motion for leave. But if a bill is withdrawn, after having made progress, another bill with the same objects may be proceeded with.

Here I refer the Speaker also to Beauchesne's sixth edition, at page 198, note 653.

If the Chair agrees that because of the adoption of Bill C-257 last week some step must be taken to deal with Bill C-295, the question is, then, what is to be done?

Bill C-295 is currently on the order of precedence and could ordinarily move to a second hour of debate and a vote as early as next week, I think next Tuesday. I think it is clear that this bill should not be further debated and should not be voted on at second reading. The bill should be removed from the order of precedence because that listing is specifically designed to provide for debate and disposition by the House.

I would submit that it is not necessary to have the bill totally withdrawn because it is possible that Bill C-257, which was passed, could be defeated or negatively dealt with by this House or a committee in the future. The way would then be clear for the mover of Bill C-295 to proceed with that bill.

Government Orders

However, we should also note that the member introducing Bill C-295, which has not been dealt with at second reading by the House, has already been selected by our rules to move a bill that he has selected, and he has chosen this one. It would be arguably unfair to prejudice his position by placing him and his bill back in the initial order paper, at the back of the line behind all of the members who have private members' business.

What I am suggesting is that the Speaker place the bill aside in a type of procedural holding place, a procedural position not yet provided for in our rules but adverted to in the 1957 Speaker's ruling, so that the bill could be placed on the order of precedence again in this session, or even in a subsequent session, if that is consistent with the procedures for private members bills'. As for Bill C-257, if it is defeated or otherwise removed from the order paper, this issue could also be reviewed, of course, by the procedure and House affairs Committee.

I hope my comments are helpful to the Chair and will enable the Speaker to take the most appropriate action on this matter.

• (1545)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I did not hear the beginning of the comments of the member who has raised the question about Bill C-257 and Bill C-295, but I have the general gist of it. There are a number of issues here as well as concerns that we would want to put forward, because it is our member who has introduced Bill C-295.

The first point I would make is that when these bills were introduced they were approved by the Table. They both came forward in good faith, so certainly to suggest now that through some other arbitrary measure or ruling by the Speaker or that you somehow make a decision that one bill would be removed, I think that would very much place this member in limbo.

The fact is that these two bills, although they deal with the same subject matter, that is, replacement workers, are different bills. There are differences between the two bills, for example, in the question of penalties. I do not have the two bills before me so I cannot go through them clause by clause, but there are differences in these bills. That is why they were permitted in the first place.

If you made such a ruling as requested by the member from the Liberal Party, what would happen to that member who has the second bill? She has proceeded in good faith. She is about to go to a second hour of debate. If she chooses to make some other arrangement with a member in terms of the order in which things come up, that is her prerogative, but to have that decided by a third party, whether it is you or somebody else, I think would be very unusual. I do not know on what basis that would be done. I would be very concerned that she would lose the position she has. I think that would actually set a precedent, because then where else would it happen in private members' business?

I understand the concerns of the member, but I think to take such an action through the Speaker and to remove that member's place would be highly unusual and very problematic. The bill is now here and it is in effect the property of the House. I really question whether or not what the member is suggesting is a wise thing to do in the long run and so I would ask you to take that under advisement if you are going to consider this question.

• (1550)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say first that I thank the hon. member opposite for his point of order. Clearly it is a complex issue. We would like some time to consider this issue. We will come back in the near future, I should say, with our submissions and response.

The Speaker: I was going to take the matter under advisement in any event and review the facts set out in the argument put forward by the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River. I will look forward to remarks coming from the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, or one of his colleagues, on this issue.

In light of the statements made that this bill may be up for debate on Tuesday next, it might be prudent to put the arguments forward on Monday at the latest so we can deal with the matter in a timely way. With that caveat, I will certainly take the matter under advisement and we will deal with it soon.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There is one motion in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-9. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

[Translation]

I shall now propose Motion No. 1 to the House.

[English]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved:

That Bill C-9, in Clause 1, be amended

Government Orders

(a) by replacing lines 6 to 13 on page 1 with the following:
 “742.1 (1) If a person is convicted of an offence and the court imposes a sentence”

(b) by adding after line 25 on page 1 the following:

“(2) Despite subsection (1), the court shall not order that an offender serve the sentence in the community if the offender is convicted of any of the following offences:

(a) an offence punishable by a minimum term of imprisonment;

(b) an offence prosecuted by way of indictment for which the maximum term of imprisonment is fourteen years or more; and

(c) any of the following offences, if prosecuted by way of indictment and punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of ten years:

(i) a terrorism offence,

(ii) a criminal organization offence,

(iii) an offence under any of the following provisions:

(A) section 83.231 (hoax — terrorist activity),

(B) subsection 88(1) (possession of weapon for dangerous purpose),

(C) section 144 (prison breach)

(D) section 160 (bestiality, compelling, in presence of or by child),

(E) subsection 212(1) (procuring),

(F) section 221 (causing bodily harm by criminal negligence),

(G) subsection 249(3) (dangerous operation causing bodily harm),

(H) subsection 252(1.2) (offence involving bodily harm),

(I) subsection 255(2) (impaired driving causing bodily harm),

(J) section 264 (criminal harassment),

(K) section 267 (assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm),

(L) section 271 (sexual assault),

(M) section 279 (kidnapping, forcible confinement),

(N) section 279.02 (trafficking in persons — material benefit),

(O) section 281 (abduction of person under 14),

(P) section 282 (abduction in contravention of custody order),

(Q) section 283 (abduction),

(R) paragraph 334(a) (theft),

(S) subsections 342(1) and (3) (theft, forgery of credit card, unauthorized use of credit card data),

(T) paragraph 348(1)(e) (breaking and entering with intent, committing offence or breaking out),

(U) section 349 (being unlawfully in dwelling-house),

(V) section 354 (possession of property obtained by crime),

(W) section 382 (fraudulent manipulation of stock exchange transactions),

(X) subsection 382.1(1) (prohibited insider trading),

(Y) section 396 (offences in relation to mines),

(Z) section 400 (false prospectus),

(Z.1) section 403 (personation with intent),

(Z.2) section 424.1 (threat against United Nations or associated personnel),

(Z.3) section 435 (arson for fraudulent purpose), and

(Z.4) section 465 (conspiracy),

(iv) an offence under any of the following provisions of the Criminal Code, chapter C-34 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1970, as they read immediately before January 4, 1983:

(A) section 145 (attempt to commit rape), and

(B) section 156 (indecent assault on male),

(v) an offence under any of the following provisions of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act:

(A) section 5 (trafficking),

(B) section 6 (importing and exporting), and

(C) section 7 (production),

(vi) an offence under any of the following provisions of the Food and Drugs Act, as they read immediately before the coming into force of section 64 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act:

(A) section 39 (trafficking in controlled drugs),

(B) section 44.2 (possession of property obtained by trafficking in controlled drugs),

(C) section 44.3 (laundering proceeds of trafficking in controlled drugs),

(D) section 48 (trafficking in restricted drugs),

(E) section 50.2 (possession of property obtained by trafficking in restricted drugs), and

(F) section 50.3 (laundering proceeds of trafficking in restricted drugs), and

(vii) an offence under any of the following provisions of the Narcotic Control Act, as they read immediately before the coming into force of section 64 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act:

(A) section 19.1 (possession of property obtained by certain offences), and

(B) section 19.2 (laundering proceeds of certain offences).”

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-9, an act to amend the Criminal Code dealing with conditional sentences of imprisonment, essentially house arrest, and Motion No. 1.

When the government introduced this bill, it required that those who committed serious crimes would be required to serve their sentences in prison. The bill followed through on a clear commitment that this government made during the last election campaign to tackle crime and make our streets safer.

Unfortunately, the bill that has been reported back from the justice committee is a far different bill from the one that this government initially tabled. Amendments proposed by the Liberals and supported by the New Democrats and the Bloc have effectively gutted the bill. I am not prone to hyperbole, but that is essentially what has happened to this bill. Canadians should know that.

The bill now requires the Crown to prove that the offence is a serious personal injury offence in order to ensure that criminals who have committed serious offences serve their sentences in jail rather than in the ease of their homes. No one should underestimate the burden that the opposition Liberals have placed on the crown attorneys who are trying to prosecute these cases.

The concept of the serious personal injury offence has previously related to a very limited number of offences and is used to determine whether an offender is a dangerous offender. It has been applied in only the most exceptional circumstances.

Let us consider the following case from the Alberta Court of Appeal. In its decision *R. v. Neve*, 1999, the court found that a robbery where the victim was attacked with a knife and abandoned naked in an open field in 5° weather was a not a serious personal injury offence for the purposes of the application.

The Crown had argued that any degree of violence was sufficient to make an offence a serious personal injury offence. The court specifically rejected that argument and said that the Crown would have to be required to prove “severe physical or psychological injuries”.

That is the same standard the Liberals are imposing on the Crown before it can dispel a conditional sentence. The effect of the amendment proposed by the Liberals and supported by the New Democrats and the Bloc is that criminals who commit arson, break and enter into residences or robbery or who cause bodily harm while driving impaired will all be eligible to receive conditional sentences.

Lest Canadians make any mistake about what that means, it means house arrest. They get to go home, lie on the couch and serve their sentences there. That is what the Liberals have done to our Criminal Code. If the trends of the past 10 years continue, these criminals, as a result of this Liberal amendment, will receive house arrest for these serious offences.

The opposition amendments to this bill have also made offenders who commit serious drug offences eligible for a sentence of house arrest. The opposition has ignored the plague of violence and hardship, the grow ops and the methamphetamine labs of those who engage in serious drug operations in our society in this country. Contrary to what the opposition Liberals think, trafficking in large amounts of narcotics is not a victimless crime and deserves a sentence of serious prison time.

By adding this extra step into sentencing proceedings, the opposition has placed an additional burden on the crown attorneys, a burden that will make trials longer, more complex and more expensive. In some cases, it will mean that victims will have to testify a second time.

Can anyone imagine that? Victims have been through a trial already, but because the Liberals want the Crown to prove that it is a serious personal injury offence, victims would have to go back to court and go through the same process again. That is what the Liberals want. That is the only way to avoid the whole issue of house arrest.

That is what the Liberals want to do to crown attorneys. More importantly, that is what the Liberals want to do to victims.

• (1555)

It will also mean that the category of serious personal injury offences, which was previously only used for dangerous offender applications and which are about 12 applications a year in Canada, will be diluted and thereby possibly bring into question the constitutionality of that very important tool.

The question I ask the opposition Liberals, are they prepared to be responsible for these negative effects on our justice system? What the Liberals and the New Democrats have done has made it clear that they are prepared to talk about being tough on crime during an election campaign. At least we know where the Bloc stood on that issue. They have never been tough on crime, but the Liberals and the New Democrats, during the election, said they would move on crime. They broke their word.

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When it comes to delivering to Canadians, the victims of crime, they do not deliver. This amendment is a clear example that their shoddy rhetoric in the last election campaign over public safety support for mandatory minimum penalties for gun crimes and even a reverse onus when it came to bail applications for gun crimes was a shameless ruse to lure voters.

I am proposing an amendment that would restore certainty to Bill C-9 and ensure that those who commit serious crimes will actually serve their time in jail. I have heard from Canadians, victims and police that this certainty is absolutely necessary to ensure the safety of Canadians.

During my travels over the past few months it has been made clear to me by Canadians that those who break and enter into homes, those who rob us on the street at knife point, and those who commit arson and cause bodily harm should serve their time in prison. These offences are serious crimes. They are unacceptable to Canadians. Unfortunately, they are not unacceptable to the Liberal opposition. The perpetrators of these offences should not serve their sentences in the ease of their homes under house arrest.

I have heard the concerns that were expressed in committee that Bill C-9 applies to a number of what the opposition says are relatively minor offences. My amendment follows through on the original principle of Bill C-9 by providing certainty with respect to eligibility for house arrest. The amendment that makes it clear that certain offences should receive prison sentences while lesser offences like the unauthorized use of a computer will be eligible for conditional sentences unless they are related to an organized crime or terrorism offence.

My provincial colleagues have raised concerns about this bill relating to implementation and the cost. My colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, is addressing those issues and we will continue to work with the provinces. However, when I have discussed this matter with my provincial colleagues, they have been clear in their support for the type of measures that we proposed in Bill C-9 and indeed in the amendment that I am proposing here today.

Let us be clear here. Anyone who votes against this amendment is saying yes to house arrest for those who commit crimes like robbery, break and enter into a dwelling house, arson, committing bodily harm while driving impaired, and for serious drug trafficking and production offences. Anyone who votes against this amendment is saying yes to house arrest for those who commit serious commercial crimes like fraudulent manipulation of stock markets, and misleading investors in a prospectus and serious theft.

Government Orders

During the last election the voters made it clear about their expectations from Parliament. They wanted us to tackle crime and make our streets and communities safer. Now it is time for the opposition parties to live up to the commitments they made during the last campaign. Were their election platform covenants with Canadians on crime merely whimsy? The answer to that question will be revealed over the next weeks and months as they vote on the amendments to this bill and government bills on mandatory minimum prison sentences for gun crimes.

The amendment that I have proposed is a reasonable one and responsive to the concerns. It is clear that those who commit serious crimes should serve their sentence in jail and that those who commit minor crimes will be eligible for a conditional sentence. This fulfills our commitment. Will the opposition Liberals fulfill theirs?

● (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard the minister say that, during the latest federal-provincial meeting of ministers responsible for justice, all justice ministers supported the previous wording of Bill C-9.

In my opinion, the minister's comments were not very clear, and I wish to give him the opportunity to correct the facts.

Can he confirm to this House that he has the support of the government of Quebec and its justice minister, Mr. Marcoux, regarding all the offences initially listed in Bill C-9, which the minister wants to bring back?

In my discussions with the minister's office, I was personally told that they were in agreement concerning certain offences involving assault against the person, but not at all concerning property-related offences.

I therefore invite the minister to clarify his statements and tell us what really happened at the federal-provincial meeting to which he referred.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, in fact, what I said is that my provincial colleagues had been clear in their support for the sorts of measures that I am proposing in my amendment today. By and large, they were all supportive of Bill C-9, other than Quebec which expressed certain concerns on property offences. Generally speaking, in respect of the amendment that I am proposing today, there would be support.

When looking at issues like robbery, break and enter into dwelling houses, arson, committing bodily harm while driving impaired and serious drug offences, the question is not what the provincial ministers are saying. What is the member saying? Where does he stand on this issue? I know that he does not think that those are serious crimes.

If somebody burns a house down and someone does not have a place to live, he does not think that is a serious property crime and that people should get house arrest. That is what he thinks. Well I can tell members that is not what Canadians think. Arson, break and enter and robbery are not offences that should be eligible for house arrest.

● (1605)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Justice for expressing his view to the House and to Canadians.

I think that some members of this place, including myself, would like to have a little more information with regard to the offences that the minister just articulated. I wonder if he could advise the House what percentage of those offences, that he is referring to, would have had sentences, under the existing laws, of less than two years in prison.

Second, if the law were changed as the minister would like, could he advise the House approximately how many additional people would be going to jail who are not going to jail now, and what it would cost if it is necessary to build more jails in Canada?

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, those are issues in fact that my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, and the provincial ministers are dealing with. It will have an impact on the provinces. We believe it will have a beneficial impact in that people will actually be deterred from crime. Those who commit robbery, those who commit break and enters will not be out on the street committing more when they are in prison. For those who commit serious crimes in our country, it is demonstrated statistically that anywhere from 12 to 21 other crimes are not being committed for every year that they are in prison.

I would suggest that the member, who I know has supported us on prior bills on issues like this, should think very carefully about where his support lies on this. I think he would agree with me that when somebody is robbed at knife point, abandoned and left in a field in five degree weather in Alberta, that is a serious personal injury according to the law. In the amendment that his colleague made to the bill, the individual who perpetrated that kind of crime would still be eligible for house arrest.

I know what Canadians are saying about that kind of an issue. They say that if it costs us a little more money to put that individual in prison who does that to another human being, they are prepared to pay it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to point out that the Minister of Justice did not answer the question and that tells volumes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): That was not a point of order, but a point of argument.

Resuming debate, the hon. member London West.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that because I would like to be able to get some time at my committee this afternoon to listen to the Law Commission of Canada. However, every day we are here at the same time that we are supposed to be at committee.

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In any event, last spring in my original speech in the House on Bill C-9, conditional sentencing, I spoke about the need to have some change and some narrowing in the conditional sentencing regime. Many of those people who were in the House before the House was brought down for the last election recall that Bill C-70 was a bill from the former Liberal government that used these three areas that we have, in committee, amended the bill on: serious personal injury as in section 752, the area of organized crime and terrorism offences. Each of these categories would incorporate broad numbers of areas in the Criminal Code in respect of the availability of the conditional sentence in those areas.

The only difference with this amendment, other than the one clause that was not admissible because it talked about denunciation and introduced another thought that was also inadmissible, was the fact that we still allowed the judge discretion. The opposition members in the House think it is important that the judge in the courtroom hearing the facts of the individual case and seeing the individual person before the court has the discretion to choose amongst a large tool kit of available options of sentencing, anywhere from suspended sentence to incarceration, to probation, or to conditional sentencing.

Conditional sentence, under the Supreme Court of Canada, is said to be a real sentence. Members think house arrest, as they tend to call it, is some joke, that it is a comfortable zone. Try telling that to one's kids if one is under house arrest on Halloween and cannot go out and distribute candy, or cannot go to a family reunion. The person is told he or she can go to work with very restricted conditions or perhaps for treatment for an addiction. That is when a judge will tailor the offence.

Let us take the offence of robbery. In the Criminal Code robbery has a wide range. It can have a maximum term of imprisonment, but a robbery by definition is charged under the same section of the Criminal Code, whether it is a kid stealing a bicycle worth \$100 or a person robbing a bank. There is a different and wide range of possibilities. It is the judge hearing the case who will determine how serious it is.

The law on conditional sentencing and the sentencing principles currently part of the Criminal Code say it has to be proportional. It says judges have to pay attention to who is before them and the facts in the individual case. It says they should do the least amount of restraint of the individual as is necessary. However, they cannot even use a conditional sentence unless the punishment is in a provincial situation of less than two years. They cannot even use it further unless the judge has determined that the protection of the public will be there. In other words, judges have to ensure that putting them into the public domain is safe for the community. That is what conditional sentencing is about. Judges can put in many things as conditions to go along with those sentencing principles.

What has happened in this bill? I remind everyone that the minority Conservative government dealt with the bill not by sending it to committee after first reading, so that there would be a wide scope for amendment and we could work collaboratively together, which I put on the record in my first speech last spring, but it sent it after second reading. It was a one paragraph bill that had many offences in the Criminal Code covered.

There were days in the House when all parties asked the government, especially on the property offences, why are they there, why does the government have this long list of offences that are property offences and not personal injury offences or not violence offences?

It is incumbent on the government, when it wants to restrict liberty, to justify and explain to Canadians its reasons for including so many offences that would not qualify in its opinion for a conditional release.

● (1610)

It is true that opinions differ among the parties in the House. We see the justice system differently than the Conservative government does. We want a judge to be able to deal with the situation of a sentence of less than two years and be satisfied that an offender serving a sentence in the community would not endanger the safety of the community and would be consistent with the fundamental purposes and principles of sentencing set out in section 718 and section 718.2 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

On September 19, 2006 I asked the Minister of Justice when he appeared before the justice committee if the government would amend its own bill. I was told no. Throughout the committee process the government did not take one thing out of its bill until today, a couple of hours ago. It offered no amendments. The opposition, on the other hand, amended the bill at committee based on good evidence presented by a number of witnesses to include the terrorism, organized crime and serious personal injury offences that we discussed.

Bill C-9 was amended by the majority of committee members who listened to the evidence of Gladue courts. Gladue courts allow people on a conditional sentence, the aboriginal people in downtown Toronto who have addictions and are involved in criminal activity to support their addiction, to get treatment under a conditional sentence. We heard that evidence. Some of those people are addicted to serious drugs but they are not there because of trafficking in drugs. Trafficking is not by an individual; the organized crime section of the bill talks about three or more people being involved. They will pick those things up so that is the part not being heard.

Bill C-9 was amended by a majority of members on the committee after listening to the evidence of those people who operate diversion and treatment programs. We listened to Julian Roberts who gave the best empirical evidence on data collected. He came in from his current post in England to tell us the work he had done inside the justice department to fix this area where it needed amending, but not to the width and breadth that was there. What happened then?

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We even kept in the notion that if there was a conditional sentence, it would not be available if there was a mandatory minimum. Therefore, for some of the driving charges, in the case of second and third offences, there are mandatory minimums. Conditional sentencing will not be there.

Just in case anybody thinks that the courts are running wild on some of these things, I have some numbers from *Juristat*. To hear the other side, one would get a conditional sentence as though it were mandatory. What happens? Let us just take a look at the total cases sentenced in 2003-04. Under impaired driving, operation causing death, there were 9,477 cases, terrible situations, and 98% did not get a conditional sentence. Under impaired operation causing bodily harm, there were 9,763 cases. Again, 98% of them did not get a conditional sentence. In other words, judges are still using their discretion.

There was a last minute change today. If the bill had been tabled last spring in the form that it is being presented here today, maybe we could have worked with it. When I ask the justice minister why he does not meet with the critics, there is no reason. It is not their way or the highway. We do have some expertise in this chamber, members who actually want to work to get things done.

The list presented today is an amalgam. It seems to have been hastily put together over the last couple of days. It has some of the sex offences, terrorism offences and organized crime offences that are already in our amendment. Some property offences have been kept and drug offences have been added. There is no available treatment for the few people in this country who might be willing to get treatment if they were given the opportunity. Granted, there are not that many of them, but the ones who do, do not have to spend time in prison, and maybe if they are fixed, they will be more productive members of society.

The Conservatives did not think of the provincial partners. We asked for the cost of their program, but they did not give it to us. They said they were working on it. Guess what? That is downloading to the provinces and that is not responsible.

● (1615)

We have a responsibility here. We have heard about some of the costs of the government's justice bills. We have it from the provincial ministers. We know that the government is looking at about \$1.5 billion in infrastructure costs and about \$300 million annual cost. We do not need to do this and we are going to reject—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can hardly believe what I am hearing. I just heard the member defend judges having the discretion for suspended, conditional, or some other form of sentencing. I know how she feels about mandatory sentences because I have heard her speak to that before. She does not believe they work.

We were elected on a platform to bring in mandatory sentences for repeat and violent offenders. This bill would take away conditional sentences for very serious crimes. We are talking about arson or break and enter.

The member talked about the hardship that some people with conditional sentences have to face. I thought I heard her say that parents would have to explain to their children why they could not take them out on Halloween.

There was a break and enter in my riding recently at the home of a 92-year-old man and his wife. Thank God the woman was able to call 911 before the criminal broke in. He was threatening to cut off her finger to take her rings. The 92-year-old man was beaten so badly he died a few months later. A 37-year-old man is being sentenced. Does the member think that individual should be considered for a conditional sentence so he can take somebody out on Halloween? Is that what the member is trying to defend? Is she serious? Does she recognize that Canadians are outraged because of the problems the Liberals, her party, caused when they were government with their leniency on crime and on criminals that make our society unsafe for our citizens? Is that what she is trying to defend?

● (1620)

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to be smart with our justice policy. We have offered to fast track seven of the minority Conservative government's 11 justice bills. No one can tell me that we are not trying to cooperate. We have and will cooperate wherever we can. One justice bill went through today.

Mr. Dave Batters: Name one.

Hon. Sue Barnes: If the member needs to be told, Mr. Speaker, the government's street racing bill went through less than an hour ago on a fast track that we initiated.

The Halloween example was probably not the best example I could have given. I will say publicly that I did not mean to demean anybody. I apologize to any Canadian who took offence by my giving the Halloween example. I really do apologize because I did not mean to cause any offence.

I was trying to impart that when people are given conditional sentences, it does not mean that they have the freedom to leave their homes. They can only go where the court dictates. They are allowed to go to their place of employment or to a church, but really very little else. I was trying to get the fact across that there are consequences to the children and other family members in the home. I was not trying to be disrespectful to anybody. There was a B and E at my house and I know how it feels.

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I do want to make the serious point that this is just one of the tools and I do not think in every case we have to take it away. If the government had come forward last year with a bill that looked more like the amendment that we received a couple of hours ago, we probably could have worked through that, but it just stonewalled and would not consult with the opposition. It would not accept any amendments, even when we told the government upfront what we were talking about. The way the government chose to take the bill to committee made it very difficult to work through amendment procedures. I even have questions of how the government managed to get the list in, but I will take that up with the people who legally advised us at a later date.

It is important that the House realize that the sentencing principles in the Criminal Code have to be lived up to. If the government had removed the sentencing principles about the various areas of section 718, it would be a different matter, but it did not do that even in its bill. Proportionality has to be respected. The person who measures that proportionality is the judge at the sentencing.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have some stats here from Statistics Canada, the Canadian Centre for Justice. It says that those who serve conditional sentences are less likely to return to corrections than those who serve a prison sentence. These stats are from Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.

I wonder if the member could comment on that.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I think the stats that the member has given are accurate. I regret that so much of what we are getting as justice legislation is based not on the evidentiary research that we know is there, but on anecdote and the ideology—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that it seems to me that we have a responsibility to be somewhat serious and make decisions based on probative and conclusive data when we have the good fortune to be representing people in public life.

I would like the people listening to us to understand that there is no one in this House who is not concerned about the safety of our neighbourhoods, our communities. There is also no one who wants dangerous criminals or people who do not deserve to be at large being allowed to be. I find the speech that the minister made in this House to be rather insulting, as if the Conservatives were the only ones who are concerned about these issues.

This arrogance, which manifests itself in a very unhealthy certainty, is surely the reason why Quebeckers and Canadians, in their great wisdom, did not give this government a majority mandate.

When we are talking about criminal law or criminal justice policy, we cannot think of things as being black or white. Obviously there are people who will never deserve to be released with a conditional sentence.

There are people who make youthful mistakes or just plain mistakes for whom there should be oversight and supervision and for whom it should therefore be possible to recommend that they serve

their sentence in their community. What I find sad is this kind of black and white thinking.

Bill C-9 started from a principle. It took all the offences in the Criminal Code for which a term of imprisonment of ten years or more may be imposed. We realized that there were 120 of these offences, but they are as disparate as making counterfeit money, copying a computer program and sexual assault. Those three offences are certainly deserving of punishment, but the fact is that they do not all have to be interpreted in the same way in terms of the seriousness of their consequences.

The problem with the Conservatives is that they cannot see grey areas. That is not the case for all Conservatives, but it is the case for a large number of them. The result is that they propose criminal justice policies that are absolutely dangerous because they do not allow for grey areas.

I will give a few examples of what I am talking about.

The John Howard Society presented a brief to the parliamentary committee. I think it gave a convincing demonstration of the fact that the ten-year sentence criterion is entirely unsound.

First, I would remind the House of two facts. Conditional sentences are a marginal phenomenon in sentencing practices. According to the most recent statistics available, there were 257,127 cases leading to conviction in 2003. Of them, 13,267 resulted in a decision by a judge at one level or another to impose a conditional sentence of imprisonment. That is a rate of 5.16%.

Conditional sentencing must not be spoken of as though it were widespread.

Second, people must realize that, when section 742 respecting conditional sentencing was introduced into the Criminal Code in 1996, everything was clearly marked out. This was not done arbitrarily. There were, and still are, four conditions to be met.

First of all, a judge cannot impose a conditional sentence if there are minimum prison terms. So right away there are some 70 offences for which conditional sentencing is not an option. Also, conditional sentencing is not possible if the judge imposes a prison sentence of more than two years. Nor is it possible to impose a conditional sentence if the judge is not satisfied that the person does not pose a threat to the community. And it is not possible if the judge is not satisfied that it is compatible with the objectives of sections 718.1, 718.2 and 718.3 of the Criminal Code, which deal with the objectives of sentencing.

● (1625)

There are already certain conditions to be met for conditional sentencing. This is understandable, since naturally a sentence to be served in the community is different from an institutional sentence, even though in 2000 the Supreme Court—in *R. v. Proulx*—said that it remained punitive.

Obviously it is not the same thing to serve one's sentence in the community as it is to serve it in prison. Serving one's sentence in the community is not a constitutional right, but rather a privilege which relates back to certain values and enables individuals to follow a program.

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An individual who receives a conditional sentence—with a supervisor—is supervised throughout their conditional sentence. As some witnesses have mentioned, this type of sentence is safer than others because an individual is eligible for conditional release after serving one sixth of their sentence. This individual is no longer supervised afterwards. These facts must be placed in context.

I repeat: the Bloc Québécois is not saying that conditional sentencing is the answer in all cases. Obviously this is not so. This is why judges must know the offender's profile, the context in which the offence was committed and the risk of reoffending. They must also be satisfied as to eligibility in the light of the four criteria that I mentioned.

The problem with Bill C-9 is that some offences are not punishable by 10 years in prison, yet are far more serious than some offences that carry a 10-year prison term.

One example would be failure to provide necessities of life for a child under 16, which carries a two-year prison term. In theory, this should raise questions. Neglecting a child seems to me to be more concerning than copying computer hardware or software. Infanticide is punishable by five years in prison. I think that this is a situation where no one would want a conditional sentence. Yet it does not meet the criteria, which specify a 10-year prison term.

Every time the government proposes criminal policies that are so broad that they lack nuances, which we are entitled to expect, this creates problems.

In closing, the Bloc Québécois agrees that some individuals cannot be eligible for a conditional sentence because of the seriousness of their crime or their low potential for rehabilitation or because what they did was so reprehensible that people feel they have no right to a conditional sentence. We need to trust our courts of law to assess these situations. There is no evidence to suggest that the judiciary has improperly used section 742 of the Criminal Code.

•(1630)

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened this afternoon to members from the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP. They all have something in common, something that separates them from the Conservatives.

When those parties are looking at criminal justice issues, they focus almost entirely on protecting the rights of the criminals. They forget there are victims in these crimes, and we are talking about some very serious crimes.

I suggest the members of these parties be more concerned with rebalancing the scales of justice so the rights of victims are put higher on their list of priorities. The rights of criminals are considered, but they are not the highest priority. I think that would be more in line with the thinking of Canadians.

Another thing I have noticed is that most of the members of the opposition do not see crimes, such as breaking and entering, as a serious crime. This is breaking into a sanctuary, supposedly a safe sanctuary for people, their homes. That differentiates the Conservative government from members of the opposition as well.

Until the thinking of the members opposite changes, they will never be on the same page as we are and as Canadians are. Would the member respond to that?

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect for our Conservative colleague, many things differentiate us, but let us say that this is what separates us.

We are convinced that break and enter is a serious crime. I challenge the member to provide an example of when we stated that it is not. Why is it serious? Not only because the Supreme Court said so but also because we realize that our home is our castle and that when our privacy has been violated it is clearly a serious matter.

What is the penalty for break and enter? Life imprisonment. Is that not proof enough that the Criminal Code requires more than just a literal reading?

I repeat, we do not believe that conditional sentencing is a right and that it can be applied without any context. The difference between the Conservatives and ourselves is that we believe in the individualization of sentencing, we have faith in the judges and we refute the Conservatives' soapbox proposals. These solutions often follow an automatic process and so are not nuanced and are devoid of analysis.

•(1635)

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to ask a question of a member, with whom I was on the justice committee in the last Parliament. I greatly respect him. He is a very bright and articulate person, but I have great difficulties with his very lenient approaches to the justice system.

An hon. member: Soft on crime.

Mr. Mark Warawa: He is soft on crime and has a hug a thug philosophy.

He said something that is not correct. He said that under conditional sentencing, the offender is under supervision. That sounds good, but in reality we need to ask the member what his definition is of supervision.

Supervision could be that the offender, who is supposed to be at home, could be seen once a week or once a month. However, that is not what Canadians understand as supervision. Full time supervision, having somebody watch the person all the time, is what they are assuming.

Mr. Dave Batters: Jail.

Mr. Mark Warawa: How do we get supervision? We have just heard it, incarceration.

Canadians want to give offenders a chance, if they are first-time offenders and it is a minor offence. However, we are talking about people breaking into people's homes and auto crime, serious, high risk offenders. We are talking about very dangerous people. They will reoffend. Permitting them to serve their sentences at home, puts communities at risk.

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Could the member define what he means by under supervision?
[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Hochelaga has 20 seconds to reply.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I agree more with what the member said in the first part of his remarks and less with his comments in the second part.

It is obvious that in cases of serious crime—and I repeat, break and enter can be a serious crime—conditional sentencing may not be appropriate.

We do not claim that it is indicated in all circumstances, we do not claim that it is a constitutional right, but we are stating that it may be appropriate in certain cases.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not cover the ground already covered by the members from the Liberal Party and the Bloc. I will focus on a particular aspect of the amendments introduced in the House today.

The work the committee did and the amendments the committee proposed dealt with the most serious offences. It is unfortunate that the minister chose to introduce the amendments to this bill today when they could have gone to committee for full and open debate. The committee could have had some witnesses come forward to address some of the issues that have been raised in the House today.

I will focus on one particular group that would be adversely impacted by the proposed amendments in the House; that is the first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

We have had briefing notes from the Assembly of First Nations, in which they comment on the overrepresentation of first nations people in the criminal justice system. It is important that I highlight a couple of statistics the Assembly of First Nations has raised of the very serious concerns about the overrepresentation of first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

The assembly says that 2.7% of the population in Canada, as of March 31, are first nations, but they represent 18.5% of all federally incarcerated prisoners in Canada. In 2000 approximately 1,792, or 41.3% all federally incarcerated aboriginal offenders were 25 years or younger. That is a shocking number. The number of incarcerated aboriginal women has also steadily increased from 1996-97. In the year 2003-04, they represented an increase of 74.2% over seven years.

Those are numbers that we must deal with as a Parliament and as a nation.

In addition, the Assembly of First Nations also identified the fact that aboriginal offenders represented 12% of the overall number of conditional sentences. That is an important fact, and that is the item that is before this House today, in connection with sentences.

There a number of recommendations that the Assembly of First Nations had specifically made. One of them is that we continue with the aboriginal justice agreement, which had been in development. However, it also emphasizes the fact that restorative justice has played a role in harnessing the rate of overrepresentation of first

nations people in the criminal justice system and it is more consistent with the values of first nations than the prison system and can result in restoring harmony in the communities.

Those are all very important factors that this House needs to consider.

I want to quote from a letter from the Teslin Tlingit Council. They wrote a letter, dated October 20, which included a briefing it sent to the justice committee. I want to quote from the letter because I think this is a very important element. It states:

Notably we are concerned with the Prime Minister's refusal to endorse the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights which speak to the right of self-determination, as well as [the Minister for Public Safety's] response to the Federal Correction Report findings that First Nation inmates face discrimination within the Canadian justice system, followed by the recent federal bills tabled by [the Minister of Justice], which in our world view contribute to the already high rate of incarceration of First Nations people.

This is in context of the Teslin Tlingit's attempts to have a justice system as part of their agreed terms in their treaty.

In the briefing it provided to the committee, it indicated that:

Within the Yukon, conditional sentences had proven to be an effective instrument utilized by the Territorial Courts working with First Nation community processes, such as the Teslin Tlingit Peacemaker Sentencing Panel. Conditional sentences have contributed towards the promotion and exercise of community accountability and support of offenders to achieve the successful completion of their conditions, while also acknowledging and responding to the interest of those who have been victimized by a crime. The result is that families are kept together with a focus on balancing retribution and rehabilitation of the individual, which provides for the benefit of the overall community.

This element is important. A member of the government just talked about the fact that opposition parties have no concern for the victim. However, the Teslin Tlingit peoples specifically talk about the fact that conditional sentencing is an important element in not only considering the victim, but considering the overall health and well-being of the community. This element has been left out of the discussion.

• (1640)

In addition, the Teslin Tlingit have made a specific recommendation around what is perhaps a potential solution here. They say:

Consultation with First Nations would inform parliamentarians that the majority of offenders require social support to address root issues of self-destructive and offensive behaviour. Resources directed towards enforcement and institutions create a false sense of security for a short period of time. Institutional programming is often ineffective as the work is done in isolation of the realities of a community with little of the required changes to assist in the offender's reintegration to their family or community.

It is this overall comprehensive approach that all of us in this House would agree is very important. It is very important that there are enforcement regulations that do fit the crime, but we also feel that there need to be adequate resources in prevention and in support and rehabilitation.

In the recent annual report of the correctional investigator, we again have a report that talks about the disproportionate numbers of aboriginal peoples, first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples who are in prison. The investigator highlighted a couple of key elements. He said:

Government Orders

Over the past decade, our Annual Reports have made specific recommendations... addressing the systemic and discriminatory barriers that prevent Aboriginal offenders from full benefit of their statutory and constitutional rights and that significantly limit their timely and safe reintegration into the community.

He goes on to say that first nations, Métis and Inuit represent “18 per cent of the federal prison population though they amount to just 3 per cent of the general Canadian population”. He states that the correctional service does not control admissions to penitentiaries, but it does have the constitutional and statutory obligation to manage sentences in a culturally responsive and non-discriminatory manner.

Given the fact that we have this report from the correctional investigator which talks about systemic and discriminatory barriers, it would seem incumbent upon us to use other tools such as conditional sentences to make sure that first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples are receiving justice measures that are more culturally appropriate and to also deal with their overrepresentation in the current federal prison system.

He notes in his report that aboriginal women are overrepresented. I pointed to this earlier in the Assembly of First Nations statistics. He talks about the fact that aboriginal offenders, once in prison, are less likely to be granted temporary absences and parole or are granted parole later in their sentences, are more likely to have their parole suspended or revoked and are more likely to be classified at higher security levels. He says that is just as true today as it was 20 years ago, so clearly nothing much has changed in 20 years. It is a sad comment on the way the justice system has these systemic and discriminatory barriers.

In wrapping up, I want to re-emphasize the position that has been put forward by the Teslin Tlingit, which is that there should be consultation and the cultural perspective of first nations, Métis and Inuit communities needs to be taken into account.

I want to close by mentioning the importance of investing in community resources. There is a youth detox and youth stabilization program under way in my riding, run by a program manager and called ADAPT. This program is aimed at helping youth deal with addictions and substance abuse. The local RCMP officers in our community are actively involved in this program because it is a critical element in helping youth stay out of the prison system and also in working closely with the community to make sure that rehabilitation is there to help potential young offenders, their families and the community at large deal with some very serious issues.

I would urge members of the House to reject the amendments proposed by the government and get back to looking at the original bill, which actually deals with some very serious crime issues but also encourages us to look at conditional sentences as a tool before the courts to deal with some of the cultural issues facing first nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

•(1645)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I thank the hon. member for her comments and thoughts, particularly on how this bill applies to our first nations people, my concern is that this particular bill is for all Canadians. While I do understand her concerns and I thank her for having

voiced them here in the House, this particular bill is to get tough on crime for all Canadians.

I am a father of five children. I was reading through some of the offences that were gutted from the bill in committee. Quite frankly, it is shocking. I will read some of them now in the House for members.

For example, there is impaired driving causing bodily harm. What if I am walking down the street and someone has decided to drive while impaired and they hit my child? It is house arrest for that person.

Next is assault with a weapon. We are talking about a weapon and assaulting a fellow Canadian. Again it is house arrest.

Kidnapping and forcible confinement are next. Once again, I am concerned for my family and my children. I do not think I stand here alone. I believe I am speaking for Canadians who are worried about crime.

Next is abduction of persons under the age of 14. Four of my children are under the age of 14. This concerns me greatly.

Next is breaking and entering with intent. Here I would ask people to imagine themselves in their home when someone breaks in and enters their home. They have invaded our privacy. They have invaded our sanctuary. They may have assaulted us with a weapon at the same time. They are going to get house arrest.

Putting party politics aside, how do Canadians feel about these crimes? How do my colleagues feel about these crimes and this idea of house arrest for serious crimes such as these?

I have a question for my colleague. I understand my colleague's concerns, but how does she respond when the bill applies to all Canadians and to their concerns about family safety and their own personal safety within Canada?

•(1650)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I only have to point to the statistics in the United States, where there are 700-plus people incarcerated per 100,000 of population and where supposedly there is this tough on crime approach. It clearly is not working.

Again, I think all members of the House would agree that for those very serious offences we should have a system that takes a look at appropriate incarceration, but I also think we need to ensure that our judiciary has a toolbox and a range of approaches that will allow them to make the most appropriate determination.

Certainly where there have been mistakes in the past, I think we have mechanisms to deal with those issues. I think we do need to also look at a comprehensive package, again, one that looks at incarceration and enforcement as one aspect of it, but we also need to look at the rehabilitation and the prevention. We have to make sure that our communities are addressing some of the poverty issues, for example, which we know drive people to some of those crimes.

We really do need to look at a broader picture so that we have a comprehensive package that makes sure Canadians are safe in their homes.

Government Orders

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been about three dozen aboriginal justice reports and inquiries over the last number of years, each pointing to the utilization of the strategies that the member talks about.

Would the member tell the House how she thinks Bill C-9 will continue to contribute to that negative stereotyping and those systemic barriers that are in the system today?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I think that is one of the big challenges with the bill. It does not look at the systemic and discriminatory barriers that are already in place in the criminal justice system. It does nothing to address the poverty issues in first nations, Métis and Inuit communities that contribute to the kinds of challenges we have.

If as a society we want to say that we respect human rights, I think we really do need to look at a justice system that is also culturally appropriate. Bill C-9 fails to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 4:52 p.m., pursuant to order adopted earlier today it is my duty to interrupt the deliberations and to put the question on Motion No. 1.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until the end of government orders.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): So ordered.

* * *

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INFORMATION REVIEW ACT

The House resumed from October 16 consideration of the motion that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Hazardous Materials Information Review Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Québec.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill S-2 originated in the Senate. It is the old Bill S-40 from the Senate before the last elections. It was discussed in the Senate. Now

it is being debated in the House of Commons. We need to debate this bill on reviewing hazardous materials information.

I am the second Bloc member to speak on this. My colleague, the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, was a health and workplace safety engineer at Hydro Quebec and made his career in the health field. He spoke about this bill, guided us in our understanding of it, and enlightened us on its purposes.

The Bloc Québécois supports this bill for several reasons which I will explain over the next few minutes. Its purpose is to reduce the amount of information required to claim an exemption. The current process for claiming an exemption is very long. The form is complex and can delay the adoption of an exemption, even when the company agrees to do so. In the past, this was refused. Now, when there is a claim for an exemption, the process will be much shorter.

The second purpose is to speed up the process for providing workplace health and safety information about using these products. This bill enables the commission to reply to requests for further information on matters submitted by the appeal board. At present, this is not permitted. When companies want to submit rectifications without going through a long process, they are refused.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, could my hon. colleagues in the NDP be a little quieter? They are very excited and I can hardly hear myself speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. The hon. member for Québec is asking for the cooperation of all hon. members of the House.

[*English*]

I would hope that members of all parties will allow the hon. member for Québec to be heard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I was confused. That happens sometimes; it is very human. We are here in the House and often we have information to give to colleagues. That sometimes disturbs the concentration that we require to speak on a subject.

I will continue my remarks. The Hazardous Materials Information Review Act governs the activities of the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission. That is an agency independent of the government with a quasi-judicial role. The commission plays a role in workplace health and safety and in the protection of industrial secrets.

The Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission is also a component of the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS). This system was developed by unions, industries and the federal, provincial and territorial governments. It provides information to workers who are in contact with hazardous materials and who need information for their own safety at work.

Government Orders

Why does such a system exist? As I have said, it serves to communicate all the information workers need concerning hazardous materials. All those workers who come into contact with hazardous products need to be protected. That is why the Bloc Québécois supports this bill, along with all the other stakeholders on this subject, including the workers, the industry, the unions and the manufacturers of these products.

WHMIS provides information in the form of data sheets and on labels. For example, if the information is contained on labels that are damaged and the information can not be properly read, a person who must work with that hazardous product can refuse to handle it. He or she can call for the manufacturer to provide information on the dangers of handling certain products. This provides a degree of safety for all workers, and especially for new employees, who also need the data sheet. That data sheet should be available at all times and should be placed in a location that is easily accessed. If it were under lock and key, workers would not have easy access to the data sheet, and that would be contrary to the objectives of the act.

The data sheet provides a list of all dangerous and toxic ingredients, as well as the precautions to be taken in handling the product. The data sheet also describes how to provide help to someone who is exposed to the product, or whose body or eyes have been in contact with the product. There are first aid procedures for anyone who has been in contact with a hazardous product. WHMIS is very important. It is very useful to have an established protocol that all companies must follow for the health and safety of employees in the workplace.

So, there is the establishment of WHMIS, the disclosure of information on the loss of competitive advantage and the disclosure of ingredients. Companies are uneasy about having to provide all the information about the manufacture of a dangerous product. I was going to say, "a drug." Since I am our health critic, I almost made a mistake. Really, this is a product that contains hazardous materials. This information must be disclosed; but some company information must remain secret when a product is marketed. The company asks for an exemption from disclosing certain information about certain products to their competitors.

There is a process to claim exemption from disclosure of this information. The bill sets out to ensure that this exemption claim, which is processed by the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission, is much easier to make than it is now.

● (1700)

Application for exemption from WHMIS documentation on how to use hazardous products safely will be much easier and will require much less red tape. It will cut to the chase.

Then we will see how a claimant can be exempt from having their information reviewed, while still providing information on the health and safety risks associated with their product's ingredients and their effects. Some information could also be provided that the companies do not want to disclose in order to protect their trade secrets. This process will be much easier and less restrictive.

Those who do not have trade secrets have no problem since there will be no documentation to provide on health and safety.

The companies will be subject to a review by a federal, provincial or territorial agency and not by the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission.

Others, who want to withdraw from this exemption, will continue their efforts with the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission.

The significance of the trade secrets will be carefully looked at. Not everyone will be exempt. Furthermore, the compliance of the company's material safety data sheet will be determined based on federal, provincial and territorial requirements. If the documents submitted are not satisfactory, then a new material safety data sheet may be required.

Bill S-2 would make a number of changes. It would change the procedure by which a hazardous materials manufacturer can obtain an exemption from disclosing the confidential composition of its products.

As I said earlier, the organization that grants exemptions is the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission. This organization works with industry, associations and workers, who are the primary stakeholders.

I think this bill strikes a balance between the challenge of keeping workers safe while handling hazardous materials and industry's right to protect trade secrets from the competition. The Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission will follow up and make the procedures more efficient. In fact, the commission's council of governors asked that the hazardous materials bill be amended in this way.

The commission was established in 1988. The data sheets were reviewed and 95% were found to be non-compliant. This bill makes it possible to determine whether the data sheets are providing accurate information not only on toxic substances but also on hazardous materials. How could we do a better job of training the people who work with these hazardous materials?

Over the past few years, eight or nine corrections have been required on each data sheet. Better protection for workers' health has also been implemented. There were hazards to their health. Monitoring was inadequate. This bill corrects that situation.

Workers must be given all available information to better protect their safety. The commission plays two roles: one in approving exemptions and the other in health protection with respect to exemptions.

● (1705)

The council of governors is the consultative body that sets policy for the commission. It was the council of governors that submitted the three amendments before us today. Only four out of more than 1,400 claims for exemption have been denied in the past. In addition, the documentation was too detailed, and the goal is to expedite this process because of the administrative burden it places on claimants and the commission.

Government Orders

I would now like to come back to the material safety data sheet. It must be available at all times, even for new workers. Quebec has a welcome protocol that provides new workers with information about a company's traditions and practices. But when it comes to hazardous materials, companies have to go beyond traditions and practices and support workers properly in handling these hazardous materials.

I think that this is the reason why the Bloc Québécois supports this bill. It is a question of facilitating the process to speed things up.

As well, many companies wanted to update their material safety data sheet and the information they gave their workers. The new bill can facilitate that. A company will now be allowed to act voluntarily instead of waiting to be notified to make a claim for exemption.

I think that this is a good idea, because if the company shows that it is willing to support its workers better in handling hazardous materials, it will not have to make a claim for exemption. It will be allowed to proceed voluntarily. That is why the Bloc Québécois supports this bill.

The Bloc is very proactive when it comes to the health and safety of workers. We have submitted a number of bills that were very proactive in this area. Take, for example, the bill introduced by my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert on preventive withdrawal for pregnant workers who have to handle hazardous materials. Considerable caution is required.

And then there are replacement workers. It could be dangerous for them to work in places where they have to handle hazardous materials. We are already talking about the workers who are used to their job, but there are all the other workers, including replacement workers. My colleague's objective, or at least her concern, was to introduce a bill on replacement workers during a strike, should a company decide to use such workers. Taking that another step, if a replacement worker should have to work with hazardous materials it would be dangerous for him or her to do so. We have to think about workers who are in daily contact with hazardous materials.

I think I have covered the issue with respect to the body charged with implementing the new procedure. This is an improved procedure that is more functional and less restrictive, but also makes companies accountable. I think that when workers, the company and the people concerned agree with a bill and its amendments, then the Bloc Québécois—which has closely followed this issue and has the workers' interests at heart, as several bills confirm—also agrees. We will therefore also vote in favour of this Senate bill.

* * *

• (1710)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations and I think you will find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

[Translation]

That statements by ministers be taken up after oral questions tomorrow.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS INFORMATION REVIEW ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Hazardous Materials Information Review Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague for her excellent presentation on Bill S-2 regarding hazardous materials.

My question is simple. The hon. member represents a very beautiful riding, Quebec City—one of the oldest cities of our nation of Quebec—which has developed and evolved considerably, and has been extensively renovated. Many products containing hazardous materials were used to make these magnificent improvements to Quebec City.

I would like the hon. member to give the House a brief overview of the work that has been done in Quebec City and to tell us about the workers who worked there, who are currently working there in construction and who may receive assistance thanks to this bill.

Quebec City has undertaken some magnificent improvements and renovations because it will soon be celebrating its 400th anniversary. Can the member tell us how the city is getting gussied up for this event?

Government Orders

• (1715)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: The city is certainly gussying itself up. We hope, though, that this bill will provide more assurances to the workers who come into contact with hazardous materials. The city is fixing itself up for its 400th anniversary and a number of projects are underway. We have been talking about the health and safety of workers in contact with hazardous materials. In my view, though, we need to go further in workplace health and safety and take a broader view of these materials.

My hon. colleague was speaking about construction workers. When I was a college student, I did some papers on workplace health and safety. In the old days in pulp and paper plants, for example, they did not have safety railings. Workers walked along in front of machines that could shred a human body in five seconds. One of my uncles passed out and fell into a machine. We need to be sensitive to this kind of thing when we think about our working people.

I could list all the things being done at construction sites in beautiful Quebec City, as my colleague requested. However, I will have to keep that for another speech because I would not have time to list all the major projects in the city in just a few seconds. We hope that the federal government will support one of the major projects that can also be dangerous for construction workers: the improvements to the Quebec bridge, which have not been made yet.

There will certainly be some fine work done. However, one thing will not get done, despite the federal government's promise: removing the rust from the Quebec bridge. It is too late for 2008. The bridge will remain rusty and all our fine visitors will see it like that. It is too late because the necessary decisions were not made on time. I have high hopes, though, that the Bloc Québécois will finally force the government to move because this will be an important election issue in the next campaign.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech on Bill S-2.

[*English*]

As we know in the House the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission is part of WHMIS which is the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System. This is a communications system which provides workers with information on the safe handling of hazardous materials used in the workplace.

I noted that since 1988 the commission has registered a total of just over 5,200 claims and that presently there are 1,450 active claims. To help rectify this matter the council of governors has put forward some legislative proposals such as, first, allowing claimants to declare that the information for which an exemption is sought is confidential business information and that full justification is available and will be provided on request; second, allowing claimants to enter into undertakings with the commission to voluntarily correct health and safety information when it is found non-compliant with applicable legislation; and third, allowing the commission to provide factual information to independent appeal boards.

I would like to put a question to my colleague. In her dealings with business and industry, and in her dealings with workers, what

sort of feedback has she received from those two different groups with respect to Bill S-2 and these amendments that we would like to bring forward on WHMIS?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I was not at the committee to hear the witnesses' presentation. However, I can say that this decision was made by the council of governors of the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission. As well, the industry as a whole, labour, and the federal government are involved in this review commission. All of the stakeholders who were entitled to speak to express their desire for change were in favour of Bill S-2. You know very well that if there had been a risk to workers, or if labour had not agreed with this bill, we would have studied it further and we would have gone into much greater depth in our consideration of it.

I think that it would be a step in the right direction to provide better monitoring of safety in the workplace and in terms of the information that has to be provided. We know that labelling and material safety data sheets are very important. The council of governors, which has chosen this arrangement, was in contact with the entire industry, and especially with labour. We know that the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission is made up of 18 people, nonetheless. Some of them represent the provinces and territories and the federal government, others represent labour unions and businesses. It is somewhat rare to see so many people around a table supporting a bill. There was ultimately consensus on this question.

This is why the Bloc Québécois wants to see it pass.

• (1720)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

AERONAUTICS ACT

The House resumed from May 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I started this speech last June I believe and I do not intend to speak very long. I am not sure whether there will be other speakers. I would like to compliment the former minister of transport who brought in Bill C-62 over a year ago and which has now been reintroduced.

After years of consultations with stakeholders it was noted that we would do the following: first, we would implement new strategies to regulate aviation safety; second, we would increase penalties for violations under the act; and third, modernize the act to meet the needs of the aviation community.

A press release from the Minister of Transport stated:

The proposed amendments to the Aeronautics Act reflect new strategies being implemented to regulate aviation safety, including an increase in penalties that may be imposed under the act. Key amendments would also allow individuals and operators to confidentially report, on a voluntary basis, less safety-critical regulatory violations.

If we look back at the record of this Parliament, we would find that a number of the bills that are being tabled in the House are in fact the reintroduction of bills that were introduced by the previous Liberal government. That bodes well. Parliament is working and will continue the important legislation that is in the best interests of all Canadians.

There are two proposed amendments to this bill. The first amendment would allow individuals and operators to confidentially report on a voluntary basis what is described as a "less safety critical regulatory violation". I am not sure that we have the assurance of the minister as to what constitutes a less safety critical regulatory violation. I am going to be interested to hear more on this subject. If they are not serious violations, why do they have to be confidential? There are some questions here. We want to know if there will be an opportunity for members of Parliament to be briefed on a number of such reports and their nature.

The second amendment would allow the Canadian government to obtain information through any air accidents that happen outside of Canada through new and expanded powers being allotted to the military and to the Minister of National Defence. In the interests of transparency, I am wondering what checks and balances will be on these new powers?

We are paving the way to ensuring that all the information is available to authorities, especially in tragic accidents. There is a balance to be struck. We on this side of the House would like the Minister of Transport and the Minister of National Defence to take some time to assure us that measures are in place to ensure that these powers will be strictly adhered to. We also expect that there will be a report to parliamentarians in any case where this amendment comes into play and has to be exercised.

As a result of all the hard work of the former minister of transport in creating this legislation, we will be supporting it. We hope the government will uphold the spirit of this legislation.

•(1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question I will ask my colleague is a simple one.

The effect of this bill will be to institute what the government and Transport Canada call a new monitoring system, a management system that will assign responsibility for ensuring safety to the airlines, which will have to regulate themselves.

I would like my colleague to explain how this will be safer than it is now. As we speak, inspectors and pilot inspectors are doing inspections, without warning, to ascertain whether airlines are complying with the rules.

Now, a management system is being created that will have the industry regulating itself. Ultimately, the industry is to discipline itself when it comes to monitoring and ensuring the safety of the industry.

I would like my colleague to explain how this will be better than what is done today. As we speak, inspectors and pilot inspectors are carrying out completely unscheduled inspections. They arrive without notice to check the condition of the aircraft, the quality of the piloting, etc. This is to be replaced by a system managed by the industry itself. I would like my colleague to explain how this will be better than what is done at present.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked a very good question.

Very simply, we can state that the new powers and duties will be comparable to those exercised by the Transportation Safety Board investigators examining civilian accidents. If he is interested in how this bill brings that closer in terms of the level and the quality of the work done, the bill includes: the status of the Airworthiness Investigative Authority making available any on-board recording obtained in the course of an investigation of a military-civilian occurrence; a coroner who requests access to it for the purpose of the investigation that the coroner is conducting; and to any person carrying out the coordinated investigation under section 18 of the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board Act; or, finally, to a board of inquiry convened under section 45 of the National Defence Act by the minister, if he or she requests a recording be made available, the occurrence did not take place in or over Canada and it involved an aircraft operated by the Canadian Forces.

The bottom line is that it basically harmonizes the provisions that we see under the investigations of civilian accidents with those now being referred to in this bill.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

The House resumed from October 31 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in the name of the hon. member for Malpeque.

[Translation]

Call in the members.

● (1800)

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

*(Division No. 52)***YEAS**

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Bélangier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Black	Blaikie
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Cannis
Cardin	Carrier
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comuzzi	Cotler
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Duceppe	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Gagnon
Gaudet	Gauthier
Godfrey	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Guarnieri	Guay
Guimond	Holland
Hubbard	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keeper	Kotto
Laforest	Laframboise
Lapierre	Lavallée
Layton	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)

Merasty
Mourani
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Owen
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Priddy
Ratansi
Regan
Roy
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
Simms
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Stoffer
Szabo
Temelkovski
Basques
Thibault (West Nova)
Turner
Vincent
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilson
Zed— 155

Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Ouellet
Pacetti
Patry
Peterson
Plamondon
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Russell
Savoie
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Steckle
Stronach
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Tonks
Valley
Wappel
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Ambrose	Anders
Baird	Batters
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casey	Casson
Chong	Clement
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Doyle
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mays	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poillievre
Prentice	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipley	Skelton
Smith	Solberg

Private Members' Business

Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 121

Stanton
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Mayes
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
Obhrai
Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Scheer
Shiple
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Turner
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mark
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Schellenberger
Skelton
Solberg
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 124

PAIRED

Members

Allison
Brunelle

Anderson
Loubier — 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment), as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of Motion No. 1.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-9.

The question is on Motion No. 1.

• (1810)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

(*Division No. 53*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Ambrose
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casey
Chong
Cummins
Day
Devolin
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Goldring
Gourde
Guamieri
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton

Ablonczy
Allen
Anders
Batters
Bernier
Blackburn
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Casson
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Grewal
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer

Alghabra
Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Barbot
Bélanger
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett
Bevington
Black
Blais
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Cardin
Chan
Chow
Comuzzi
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Duceppe
Eyking
Folco
Gaudet
Godfrey
Goodale
Guay
Holland
Jennings
Kadis
Karygiannis
Kotto
Laframboise
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
MacAulay
Malo
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse

NAYS

Members

André
Asselin
Bachand
Bains
Barnes
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blaikie
Bonin
Bouchard
Brisson
Cannis
Carrier
Charlton
Christopherson
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dhalival
Easter
Faille
Gagnon
Gauthier
Godin
Graham
Guimond
Hubbard
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Keeper
Laforest
Lapierre
Layton
Lee
Lessard
Lussier
Malhi
Maloney
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen

Private Members' Business

McCallum	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merasty	Minna
Mourani	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nadeau
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Perron	Peterson
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Roy	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	St. Amand
St. Denis	Steckle
Stoffer	Stronach
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	Tonks
Valley	Vincent
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesnewskyj	Zed— 152

PAIRED

Members

Allison	Anderson
Brunelle	Loubier— 4

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to pass report stage of Bill C-9 on division.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

The hon. whip for the Bloc Québécois.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to understand. In light of the prior discussions among the whips, I had understood that all the parties supported the bill now before us.

• (1815)

[English]

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from October 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-299, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Competition Act (personal information obtained by fraud), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-299 under private member's business.

The question is on the motion.

• (1825)

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

(Division No. 54)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Ambrose
Anders	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Barnes	Batters
Bélangier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bennett
Benoit	Bernier
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bezan	Black
Blackburn	Blaikie
Blaney	Bonin
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casey	Casson
Chan	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement
Comuzzi	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cummins
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davidson	Davies
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Doyle
Dykstra	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Eyking	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Folco	Galipeau
Gallant	Godfrey
Godin	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Graham
Grewal	Guarnieri
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Holland	Hubbard

Jaffer	Jean
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Keoper
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lapierre	Lauzon
Layton	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malhi	Maloney
Manning	Mark
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Mayes	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Menzies	Merasty
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Owen	Pacetti
Pallister	Paradis
Patry	Peterson
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Proulx
Rajotte	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Robillard
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Scott
Sgro	Shiple
Siksay	Silva
Simard	Simms
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stanton	Steckle
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Stronach
Sweet	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (West Nova)	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Tonks
Trost	Turner
Tweed	Valley
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Wappel
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylycia-Leis	Watson
Wilfert	Williams
Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich	Zed- — 230

NAYS

Members

André	Asselin
Bachand	Barbot
Bellavance	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Cardin	Carrier
Crête	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Duceppe	Faille
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Guay
Guimond	Kotto

Private Members' Business

Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	Malo
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani	Nadeau
Ouellet	Paquette
Perron	Picard
Plamondon	Roy
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Vincent- — 46	

PAIRED

Members

Allison	Anderson
Brunelle	Loubier- — 4

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

PERFLUOROCTANE SULFONATE VIRTUAL ELIMINATION ACT

The House resumed from October 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-298, An Act to add perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) to the Virtual Elimination List under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the second reading stage of Bill C-298 under private member's business.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I thought we might have unanimous consent to pass the motion before the House but I see the sponsor would like a standing vote.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I do believe the sponsor is amenable and, if it is unanimous, I would ask that you seek consent to unanimously support this wonderful private member's bill by the member for Beaches—East York.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member for Beaches—East York give her consent for unanimous consent?

Hon. Maria Minna: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the House give its unanimous consent to the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

Private Members' Business

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

● (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would ask all hon. members, as we do every week, if they need to carry on conversations with other hon. members or with various ministers, that they take advantage of the lobbies on either side of the House so the House can get down to private members' business.

It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from June 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to engage in debate today with my fellow colleagues on Bill C-253, sponsored by the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

The bill proposes two major changes to registered education savings plans, or RESPs, that would affect contributions made in 2006 and future tax years.

We all agree that post-secondary education is important for the future of our children and for the future of this country. A well-educated workforce is a critical factor to improving Canada's productivity and raising our standard of living. In a knowledge based economy, our young people must have the skills to compete successfully in an increasingly sophisticated labour market.

More than half of the new jobs created today require post-secondary education. We can only expect education requirements to increase over time. We want our children to have access to post-secondary education and we want that education to be second to none.

The bill before the House today proposes an increase in support for post-secondary education by providing additional tax preferences for RESP savings. However, I believe this bill is not the best way to promote post-secondary education.

First, I will give a brief overview of the considerable support the Government of Canada provides for post-secondary education; second, I will explain the significant support that is already provided for education saving; and third, I will explain why measures proposed in the bill presented by the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East would not be cost effective ways to support post-secondary education.

The Government of Canada provides significant support for post-secondary education. In addition to transfers to the provinces, the Government of Canada provides over \$5 billion annually in direct support to post-secondary education. Of this amount, \$1.7 billion is provided to educational institutions for research to help ensure our brightest researchers stay in Canada and contribute to maintaining

Canada's edge in innovation. Also, \$1.8 billion is provided in grants, scholarships and loans to improve access to post-secondary education for low income students and rewarding those who attain academic excellence. We also provide \$1.7 billion in tax relief to students and their families in recognition of the cost of post-secondary education through measures such as the tuition tax credit and the education tax credit.

This government's commitment to post-secondary education was evidenced in the 2006 budget presented in the House on May 2, 2006. The budget follows through on our platform commitments by proposing to create a textbook tax credit. The credit will be provided of \$65 per month for full time study or \$20 per month for part time study.

This government also recognizes that post-secondary students need to be supported in their hard work in the pursuit of academic excellence.

Hon. Dan McTeague: It is a pittance. It is one textbook.

Mr. Joe Preston: I am glad to hear that the member opposite agrees with me.

Budget 2006 discards the previous \$3,000 partial exemption and proposes to make all scholarships and bursaries received by students enrolled in post-secondary studies completely exempt from tax.

Budget 2006 also proposes to improve access to student loans by reducing the parental contribution required for students from middle income families for the purpose of student loans. It is estimated that this change will enable 30,000 students to gain access to assistance and 25,000 to have access to increased loans.

The government will also provide a one-time payment of \$1 billion into the post-secondary education infrastructure trust, providing that the 2005-06 surplus is in excess of \$2 billion. The trust will support critical and urgent infrastructure and equipment in colleges and universities.

Budget 2006 also included funding for research and development and measures in support of apprenticeships and trades.

● (1835)

Let me turn to the assistance that is already provided for education saving. RESPs are given preferential tax treatment to help parents save for their children's post-secondary education. Up to \$4,000 can be contributed to an RESP in a year for each beneficiary to a lifetime maximum of \$42,000 per beneficiary. Funds invested in the plan grow tax free until they are withdrawn. Contributions are not deductible, but can be withdrawn tax free. Investment income earned in the plan is taxed in the hands of the students when withdrawn for post-secondary education. In short, the tax benefits in an RESP come from two sources: the deferral of the tax would be investment income and the fact that this income is taxed at a low rate because students generally pay little or no tax.

Private Members' Business

In addition to the tax preferences I just described, RESP savings qualify for the Canada education savings grant, or CESG, which makes saving in an RESP even more attractive. Under this program, which is aimed at encouraging saving for post-secondary education, the government provides a 20% grant on the first \$2,000 in RESP savings for each beneficiary in a year.

To illustrate how this works, assume a parent contributes \$2,000 to an RESP for his or her child, the contribution would earn \$400 in CESG and the income on both the contribution and the CESG would grow tax free until the funds were withdrawn to cover the cost of the child attending college or university.

Further, because it is more difficult for low and middle income families to save for a child's post-secondary education, the Canada education savings grant provides a higher grant rate on the first \$500 in contributions by these families. Depending on family income, the grant rate could be as high as 40%.

In addition, since 2004, the Canada learning bond kick-starts education savings for children born after 2003 and who are in families entitled to the national child benefit supplement. Up to \$2,000 in total Canada learning bond grants could be paid in a child's RESP by age 16. These measures were adopted with our support.

In fact, the current RESP limit, saving \$2,000 annually into a child's RESP, means that almost \$75,000 could be available for that child's post-secondary education by age 18, and about \$95,000 would be available if the parent contributed \$4,000 annually until the \$42,000 lifetime limit was reached.

The combination of the generous tax treatment of the RESP and the CESG that tops up private savings has provided powerful incentives for parents to save for their children's post-secondary education. At the of 2005, these plans held almost \$18 billion in savings for future post-secondary education, seven times their value nine years ago.

Since 1998, \$2.7 billion in Canada's education saving grants have provided for over 2.2 million children. Over \$440 million in grants was paid into RESPs under the program in 2005. In addition, the tax deferral provided by RESPs represents about \$130 million per year in forgone revenue for the Government of Canada and about half that amount to the provinces.

In total, the Government of Canada devotes over \$570 million annually to tax relief and grants to help parents save for their children's post-secondary education. I believe nobody would dispute that the current RESP regime has been extremely successful at promoting savings for post-secondary education.

Let us consider the impact of the measures under Bill C-253.

First, the bill proposes to provide a deduction for contributions to RESPs made in 2006 and future tax years, with contributions withdrawn being taxed in the contributors hands rather than tax free as is currently the case.

Second, contribution limits would be raised to be the same as those applying for registered retirement savings plans, or RRSPs, that is 18% of the earned income up to \$18,000 for 2006.

The bill is supposed to encourage parents to save more for their children's post-secondary education, but I suggest that the measure proposed in the bill would be ineffective and would be expensive.

For these reasons and many others, I am unable to support the bill and invite my colleagues to do the same.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to a subject of ever-increasing concern here in Ottawa and in the eyes of the population. Post-secondary education, and particularly its accessibility, is a very topical issue.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle of this bill because it is an improvement over the current provisions of the Income Tax Act, which governs the registered education savings plan—RESP—program.

To summarize the bill briefly, a registered education savings plan is created from contributions out of after-tax income. Such contributions do not entitle contributors to a tax deduction, as is the case for contributions to a registered retirement savings plan or RRSP, but the investment income that is earned on the contributions accumulates in the RESP and is tax-free. The investment income is taxed only when it is withdrawn from the RESP. If the savings are withdrawn to finance the beneficiary's post-secondary education, the investment income will end up in the hands of this beneficiary.

The problem is that not everyone can afford to make contributions to a registered education savings plan, since a substantial income is necessary in order to do so. People prefer to contribute to an RRSP rather than an RESP.

This bill, if passed, will make it possible for parents and families to benefit from a tax deduction, as they do with an RRSP.

Putting such a measure in place would come with a cost, of course, but it would foster the growth of our society and have an undeniably positive impact on its development.

Bill C-253 has numerous shortcomings. It nevertheless remains that it is an improvement as far as the RESP program is concerned.

During the first reading of this bill, my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber identified the bill's chief shortcomings in his speech. I would like to do a quick review of the RESP program and the advantages for society of passing such a bill.

Although the registered education savings plan program has been around for 30 years, the federal government has given it special attention of late. In 1998, the federal government created the Canada Education Savings Grant, the CESG. This is a grant of a maximum of 20% of the contribution made, which provides the beneficiary with an extra \$400. This means that, when a parent or grandparent contributes \$2000, \$400 will be added to the RESP of a child under the age of 18.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-253 is a continuation of the improvements that began a few years ago. According to the statistics for 2002, the participation rate for the registered education savings plan was only 6% in Quebec; that is right, I said 6%, while it was about 10% in Ontario and in British Columbia.

At present, a large number of parents and grandparents do not contribute to a registered education savings plan because it does not constitute a deduction from an individual's taxable income. In addition, some people do not have the financial resources to do so.

● (1845)

Therefore, people prefer to put their money into registered retirement savings plans. However, it is a good bet that more people would like to benefit from a RESP if there were an income tax deduction similar to the deduction for RRSPs.

What the bill seeks to do is to target an often-neglected group of taxpayers, who are already asked to make more than their share of sacrifices in our society. I am talking about the middle class; the class that includes the largest number of Canadian citizens. What this bill offers is greater accessibility to post-secondary education.

The education of our children and our grandchildren is often a cause for worry and concern not only for parents, but also for the expanded family, the grandparents, aunts and uncles. Many of them fear that they will not be able to pay the increasingly higher costs of post-secondary education. The introduction of an incentive for the contributor and the beneficiary represents an investment by the government in today's young people and gives hope to a great many young parents, young families and grandparents.

On the other hand, if the beneficiary does not pursue post-secondary studies and no other beneficiary is designated, the contributor can receive the income from the investment under certain conditions. The funds could be transferred to a registered retirement savings plan without penalty, up to a maximum of \$50,000 if the individual's RRSP contribution ceiling allows. Otherwise, a 20% income tax deduction would be made on the withdrawal and the amount that could not be transferred to an RRSP would have to be added to the individual's income for the year. We are talking here about only the accumulated investment income within a registered education savings plan because the capital is not subject to income tax.

It is certain that the adoption of such a bill could be very costly for taxpayers because, at present, those who contribute to a registered education savings plan are not able to deduct that contribution from their income. Therefore, those households with higher incomes will benefit even more from such a measure and low-income families will see little or no advantage. However, no program is perfect and Bill C-253 represents an excellent incentive to parents and families.

In summary, I would say that this bill would enable an individual making a contribution to an RESP to deduct that contribution from income, which is almost identical to the practice for an RRSP. In closing, I want to congratulate the member for his bill and thank him for his interest in the education of our children and our grandchildren.

● (1850)

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in this debate on Bill C-253, a private member's bill put forward by the member for Pickering—Scarborough East to adapt and change the RESP contribution program.

Unlike my colleagues from the Bloc and my colleague from the Conservative Party who has spoken, I am going to put on the record remarks of deep concern about this particular private member's bill. I am sure it will come as no surprise to the member for Pickering—Scarborough East that while we appreciate his work in this area, we feel that his efforts are misplaced and the focus of the bill is misplaced. Through this bill we will not necessarily accomplish what I believe he wants and what we all want, which is greater access to post-secondary education for our young people. That is clearly a burning desire from all of us.

We hear daily from constituents and from young people across this land how much they want to go to university or college to pursue their educational dreams and aspirations only to learn that the obstacles sometimes are so great as to prevent them from fulfilling those dreams. Here are the questions we have to ask today. Does this bill advance the public agenda in that regard? Does it make it easier for our young people to access post-secondary education? Do the costs outweigh the benefits or not?

That is why I rise today with deep concerns about this particular bill. We have just finished a whole series of pre-budget consultations. We heard from numerous groups involved in education, students, teachers, researchers and administrators. In each and every case the demand from the education community, and from families who are concerned about opportunities for their children, was for increased responsibility and roles on the part of the federal government in the post-secondary education system.

Each and every one of those representatives called upon the government to redress the serious problems that befell our system when the Liberals cut the heck out of education back in 1995 with their infamous federal budget. They basically set us back an entire decade with their regressive and extreme views in terms of dealing with the fiscal challenges of the day. We are still trying to recover from that period. It is not helpful to have another patchwork approach to a very serious systemic issue.

All we have had over the last decade is one band-aid after another. That has been the Liberal approach to education in this country. First the Liberals cut the heck out of the system, then they promised when they had a surplus, they would deal with it and put the money back. What did they do instead? They gave huge tax breaks to corporations and put all the surplus available against the debt. Nothing was done in terms of dealing with the systemic problems facing access to post-secondary education.

This bill is another band-aid on top of a band-aid. This is like trying to fix up a patch that is already on a system that is bleeding and hurting. This is not serving the country.

I do not need to tell the House how difficult it is these days for students to access university given the rising costs of tuition. The evidence is all around us.

Mr. Speaker, it would certainly help if you could bring some order to this chamber. It is very hard to hear oneself think when there is that kind of nattering going on in the Liberal benches.

• (1855)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I think the member for Winnipeg North makes a good point. It is often difficult to hear members, especially those who sit down at that end of the chamber. It is difficult for the Chair to hear her comments when so many people are carrying on side conversations. If anybody needs to converse, please take advantage of the lobbies on either side of the chamber.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I was having trouble hearing myself think. I know I was saying a few things that are agitating the Liberals, but I hope they might appreciate that there are different views on this issue. We are not speaking against the RESP per se, except that it is a time of limited resources and I will concede that point.

We heard from the Liberal finance critic many times about limited choices and limited resources. Therefore, there are choices that we have to make and I will concede that we have to make some hard choices.

I want to ensure that the dollars we spend go the furthest. I want to ensure that whatever we do is opening the doors wider for students from all backgrounds. I know from this proposal that we are going to see a huge loss of public revenue that could be spent elsewhere.

In fact, right now we spend about \$135 million as a result of foregone revenue with the RESPs. With this proposal, we will lose much more than that, at least \$460 million in the first year. That is a lot of money that serves a very small group of people and is confined to not middle income earners, as my colleague from the Bloc has suggested, but is restricted to benefiting largely those at the high end of the income scale.

It would probably be useful for the House to know what a couple of the organizations told us during our pre-budget consultations with respect to the general matter of education tax measures.

I would like to quote from a reputable organization, the Canadian Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. These are people who deal daily with the problems students are facing. They deal daily with trying to find ways to ensure that access is there for students of all backgrounds for post-secondary education. They concur with all of us when we say that probably the most important thing we can do as parliamentarians in a competitive world is develop a skilled and educated workforce and a post-secondary education is the primary means of achieving this objective. This organization tells us:

Since 1998 the federal government has spent increasingly on student assistance through fiscal measures introduced to the tax system...scholarship and bursary exemptions, credits for tuition fees and an allowance for each month of full time enrolment, as well as contributions to Registered Education Savings Plans.

—these tax credits are distributed almost entirely without reference to need. Several studies suggest that families from higher income ranges benefit

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disproportionately...they do little to assist high need students and under-represented groups, for example, students from low income families, students with disabilities, aboriginal students, adult learners to enter our post-secondary education system.

This organization goes on to say:

We believe that means tested student financial assistance that is accessible through a simplified application process, that delivers funds at the time that expenses are to be incurred represents the most effective use of taxpayers dollars.

I think that is a point that has to be considered in this debate. I would further point to a brief presented to our finance committee by the Canadian Federation of Students which also exemplifies the problems we have in pursuing a tax credit approach to education as opposed to an investment in our post-secondary institutions to ensure greater access. The Canadian Federation of Students brief states:

Since the mid-1990s, the federal government has increasingly looked to tax expenditures as a substitute for directly allocated student financial assistance. In total, federal tax expenditures for post-secondary students have grown from \$566 million in 1996 to more than \$1.46 billion in 2005. This represents a 213% increase in real dollars and more than the total amount the federal government will spend on upfront grants this year.

It goes on to say that, in fact, this approach has virtually benefited those at the high end of the income scale and contributed to the growing barriers that low income people face in trying to access post-secondary education. The problem is about choices. It is about where do people put their money, how do they get the best bang for their buck.

• (1900)

While this RESP is something that could be part of an overall package, if one has to make choices in the context of a time when we are still recovering from the gutting of our post-secondary education transfer system and down to a federal share of a single digit, we have to do something much more significant and meaningful than tinkering with this band-aid approach.

I would suggest that we put this on hold and get down to the real issue at hand which is access for all students to post-secondary education.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill tonight and congratulate my colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East for this initiative. I think it is very important. As a former educator I can say how important this is to students across the country.

I heard earlier about the gutting of transfers to the provinces with regard to post-secondary education. I might point out to members in the House that in 1993 the Liberals inherited a \$42.5 billion deficit, of which 33% of the money was borrowed. When we were transferring money, we were transferring borrowed money. It was not real money.

So, to suggest that we gutted the system, we in fact got our fiscal house in order, so that we could now do the kind of program that the hon. member who just spoke would like to see. What is the proposal this evening? It is basically to help young people and their families better save for an education.

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We know that two out of every three jobs require more than a high school education. Tuition fees have continued to double. Tuition is the responsibility of the provinces not the Government of Canada. We know that it has gone from around \$2,000 six years ago and by 2012 we are looking at about \$12,000, and never mind the books and residence costs, et cetera. Then we are talking tens of thousands of dollars.

The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East has proposed to build on a Liberal initiative, which of course is the issue of the registered education savings plan. At the moment it is not deductible. I am assuming that all members in the House have constituents who pay taxes. When we pay taxes, we would like to see some benefits.

Unlike an RRSP, a registered retirement savings plan, currently under the registered education savings plan, we cannot deduct, there is no tax benefit. Imagine a family that saves \$100 to put into a program that the hon. member has put before the House. If one does that 12 times in a year, there would be \$1,200 which would be tax deductible. Individuals would get a break and that would be an incentive for the family, whether it is the parents, grandparents or whatever, or the student.

Having worked with students over the years, they do not earn a lot of money at summer jobs. They do their best, but it is not going to cover all of the bills. How do we fix that problem? The hon. member is proposing that we have a tax deduction.

We are not going to solve all the ills or all the problems of a post-secondary education, but we want to be on the leading edge of technology. If we want to be a knowledge based economy, we must have the people in universities and colleges to learn. They cannot learn unless they obviously have the money to go. This is really important.

We hear educators talk about the proposal as an important step in advancing educational opportunity. We hear unions talking about the importance of advancing this for educational opportunities for young people. We are investing in young people and if I have an opportunity to put \$100 a month or a \$1,000 or whatever it is, and I am going to get a tax break, that is an incentive.

However, it also builds and it does not mean that it is going to be the be-all and end-all. There are going to be other ways that people are obviously going to deal with it, whether they have a summer job or whatever it happens to be, but the important part is that this is going to stimulate people in that regard.

The prosperity of the country is based on knowledge and on higher education. We are very fortunate that we have an excellent post-secondary system across the country. In fact, our college system in the province of Ontario was modelled in Vietnam. The Vietnamese modelled the college system in the province of Ontario because they saw that it was an important level that they did not have. We have a great system here. We need to motivate people.

If we are going to deal with skill shortages, which we do have in this country, one of the things we must do is invest in young people. Again, this program will do that and I think it is very important when we are talking about our competitiveness with other countries around the world. We need a highly skilled, motivated workforce. We want

to ensure that we have continued economic prosperity and this bill will assist in efforts to obtain those funds.

● (1905)

I do not think the member for Pickering—Scarborough East said that this would cure all the ills around post-secondary education, but I believe his bill should be before a committee for review in order to have a good discussion about the points that all members have raised. There have been good points from all sides but the bill needs to be studied and to move forward.

At the moment only 27% of Canadians actually have RESPs, only 27%, so 73% of Canadians do not have them. This again is an incentive for people, which is extremely important. Twenty-seven per cent is a very low figure. Making contributions tax deductible, as this bill proposes, would give that initiative to families. It would be another opportunity to move this agenda forward. I know we in the House all believe that the betterment of young people is important and we want to make sure they have the kinds of opportunities and education that the generations before them did not necessarily have.

It is a way of addressing some of the educational costs. Yes, there are other issues in terms of transfer payments to the provinces which I am sure the government looked at, as the Liberal government did. Again we have to make sure when we transfer money to the provinces that the funds are earmarked for the purpose for which they are being sent. If they are sent simply in bulk form to deal with health, post-secondary education, social programs, et cetera, and it is administered by the provinces, there is no guarantee the money will get to where it should have gone.

When this bill comes to a vote, I think all members in the House will look at the situation in their own ridings. I know that other members have been visited in their offices by young people who have talked about the massive debt that often occurs after they leave university. There are some students who cannot even go to university because their families cannot afford it and they wish they had some kind of vehicle to help them. This is what this bill addresses.

Employers are demanding post-secondary graduates. It is not enough to have a bachelor of arts degree these days. Employers are demanding masters of arts degrees and MBAs. If students cannot afford to get a bachelor of arts degree, where are we going to be against the emerging economies in the world? Where are we going to be against Japan? Where are we going to be against the European Union and the Chinas of the world in devoting that kind of energy? We need to make sure.

For me it is a motherhood and apple pie issue. How could people not want to support something which may advance education in this country? At least send the bill to a committee to look at. The hon. member has put a lot of thought and effort into this bill. He sees the same problem that I see, that even though people have the ability, they cannot go to university.

It was the previous Liberal government that brought in the millennium scholarships, which made a huge difference to students in my riding. Unfortunately, certain provinces clawed back. The hon. member knows about the clawback that occurred, including in the province of Ontario, under the previous Conservative government.

An hon. member: And the NDP voted against it.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: And the NDP voted against it my friend reminds me.

This is not a cure-all but it is a very important tool in assisting students and we need to look at that. I am sure the government will be looking at other issues with regard to transfers, but at the end of the day I would not want a student to come into my office and say that we had an opportunity to help but we did not do it because of some issue about not solving all the problems of the world. Let us look at it.

When I was on the finance committee as parliamentary secretary these were the kinds of initiatives that were important to look at because they advanced a big agenda. The most important agenda that I think members in the House support is the knowledge agenda.

I again want to thank the member for Pickering—Scarborough East. I urge colleagues to look at this issue very carefully when it comes up for a vote.

• (1910)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act sponsored by my colleague, the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East. I am also pleased by the Speaker's announcement today that the bill can proceed in its present form in spite of previous concerns that it might have exceeded the jurisdiction of private members' business. The purpose of the bill is to allow contributions to registered education savings plans, RESPs, to be tax deductible similar to the way Canadians already deduct contributions to registered retirement savings plans, RRSPs.

I need to digress a little. Today has been a rather difficult day for Canadian investors. Contrary to what Conservatives told Canadians prior to the last election, the finance minister announced that he has decided to flip-flop on the income trust issue and slap a tax on the distribution. Within two hours of trading today Canadian investors lost \$25 billion in retirement savings affecting virtually all sectors of the economy and unfortunately creating a sudden and bleak future for hundreds of thousands of pensioners.

That being said, I wish to return to the proposal brought forth in Bill C-253. I believe this proposed legislation warrants further consideration. I believe it is important to support this bill at second reading so that it can be referred to committee for an in-depth analysis. The reason is simple. We acknowledge that the cost of post-secondary education is becoming extremely expensive for average Canadian families, especially those with more than one child to educate.

Students are graduating with an excessive amount of debt and many say they simply cannot afford an education. This is a troubling situation especially since our future productivity is dependent on the next generation of students. Currently Canada has the highest

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participation rate in post-secondary education among the OECD countries, but that ranking is in severe jeopardy if the federal government does nothing to change the situation.

Bill C-253 would encourage more parents to participate in the registered education savings plan because they would see the fruits of this program at the end of every tax year. As we heard from my hon. colleague, only 27% of parents participate, so the bill would encourage more participation. This would be beneficial to Canada because we would have a more educated population and hence a more productive population.

In addition, the savings that are incurred from this tax deduction could be reinvested into an RESP in order to assist families with the goal of maximizing their annual RESP contribution. At present the maximum annual contribution is \$4,000 a year with a lifetime limit of \$42,000 per beneficiary. These investments grow tax free until a child needs money for tuition. While it is true that Bill C-253 would shift the tax burden from the parents to the child beneficiary, the annual income of a full time student is quite low and any tax liability would be offset by other tax credits while students are still in school.

Currently students emerge from universities with a huge debt. This bill would ensure that students emerged from their education with a much lower student debt. Consider that by 2010 a four year degree program could cost in excess of \$100,000. It becomes quite clear that long term planning is required on the part of the students and parents, but also the federal government. This would ensure that post-secondary education does not become a luxury only those families with money can afford.

It is also quite clear that an RESP worth \$42,000 would offset a significant portion of the cost of a proper education.

I note with interest that the author, the MP for Pickering—Scarborough East, has considered measures to prevent RESPs from abuse. Bill C-253 proposes severe tax penalties for those who would attempt to take advantage of an RESP's simple tax shelter without any serious regard for the potential beneficiary. In the event that a beneficiary has no intention of going to school, the accumulated income would be subject to a 20% tax on top of the regular tax normally payable on such investments. That I call accountability.

• (1915)

Roughly 50% of college and university graduates graduate with a debt. The average debt amounts to \$20,000, making it very difficult for young people to get a headstart in life.

I ask for the support of all members in this House so that serious thought can be given to helping all Canadians access post-secondary education regardless of their economic circumstances.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The last speaker will be the mover of the motion, a five minute rebuttal.

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Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all colleagues for participating in this debate. I know there are many issues that cannot be resolved in the few minutes that are given to me, but let me provide a very brief outline.

Let me decipher the position of the House leader over the past couple of months. First, thank you for your ruling earlier today, Mr. Speaker, in which you made it abundantly clear that this bill in no way violates or requires a ways and means motion in order to give rise to the vote which will take place, I presume, at some point next week. What is most important is that the roadblock of the ways and means position seems to be the legitimate reason the government opposed this bill. Mr. Speaker, since that roadblock has been clearly taken away by you in your infinite wisdom, I would offer to the government that it incorporate this bill as its own and begin the process to meet the challenge of students who so clearly need the help of this Parliament and to come up with innovative ways to ensure that young people have access to higher education.

It is very clear to all Canadians, any Canadian who pays taxes, any Canadian who is concerned about the future, that the prosperity of this nation very much depends on a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Right now, as opposed to reaching out and giving everybody who wants an education an opportunity to get that education, we hear naysaying from some corners. We heard the member for Winnipeg North who chastised the bill because it is an attempt to try to cover more people who desperately need an opportunity to get that access to higher education. Whether it be a skill in the workforce, whether it be a craft, whether it be taking up a trade, or whether it be to move on to post-secondary education, we know that this cycle of education will continue in years to come. For people to have the opportunity to access education and thereby maintain the health, wealth and prosperity of this nation depends on our ability to provide instruments that are at our hand without denying the government the cash it needs to continue working on the nation's priorities.

To look at the issue of post-secondary education in the abstract, there are a number of programs out there, but we need to do more. When only 27% of students are being provided an education through an RESP, it clearly demonstrates that almost three-quarters of Canadians are not.

I do not think any of us in this House want to take a position here that suggests that today, in the year 2006, education only becomes the purview of the rich.

Students are talking to each one of us as members of Parliament and our provincial colleagues as to the amount of debt they are incurring. Students talk to us about the need to ensure that we rebuild the system, about the need for a piece of legislation that would provide an opportunity for them to continuously access education in a world in which there is increasing competition, not just in terms of trade, but in terms of resources.

It is extremely important. Given all these factors, but above all when we see in my province of Ontario the tuition freeze that has just been lifted, we now have a situation that is unacceptable to all Canadians. We need to look at the rapid rise in the cost of education.

Universities want to compete on an international level. They can only do so with higher tuition fees. The government can move to cap these things, but these are band-aid solutions. We in this chamber have to find the creativity to provide people an opportunity to access education.

In my riding, and I am sure the riding of Winnipeg North and ridings right across this country, every one of us as members of Parliament has an obligation to look deeper so that when someone is paying a tax, they may actually be put in a position where they are able to benefit from it.

This legislation is really calling for Parliament to think bigger. This legislation is asking the finance committee and parliamentarians not to navel gaze about what has happened in the past but to understand what the OECD has said with respect to rising tuition costs for students and to listen to what students are saying. However we decide to make it possible for students to get access to higher education, Parliament has a higher obligation to respond to the need.

This is not by any means the only solution, but it is an important step forward to recognize that the federal government plays an important role in the lives of students in ensuring the viability and the safeguarding of our education system. We must ensure that young people, and all people, have access to education. The instruments are there. The income tax system is probably the easiest way to do this. Most Canadians pay income taxes and they would have a great opportunity to help their children in the future.

• (1920)

As my final words on this, I would encourage the government and all members of Parliament to look beyond the rhetoric and to look to what their constituents need. Clearly, on RESPs, tax deductible is the way to go.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion is adopted. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you may have gotten ahead of yourself. We were waiting for you to ask for the yeas and nays. You did not get to that stage. You just declared it carried. We were saying no.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I appreciate the good advice from the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park. However, the Speaker did not hear any nos. I did not hear any nos, and then I heard a suggestion, on division.

Let us turn back the clock and read this again.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (1925)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 8, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder by what authority do you go back on a decision already made by the house?

In accordance with the Standing Orders, the House made a decision. Now you have cast doubt on this decision.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East rising on the same point of order?

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the need to, as it were, return to the issue at hand and to recall the position that you had taken. I say so respectfully, but you clearly enunciated that the bill would in fact proceed on division. Whether or not people said yes or no, it remains that the Speaker did not hear the nos. In fact, the Speaker ruled that he had heard only yes and accepted this on division.

To have then had another vote on this, Mr. Speaker, to reverse your position, is in my view, I humbly submit, an error as far as the regulations and the longstanding procedures of this House. I would therefore recommend, Mr. Speaker, that the original decision stand and that we proceed to your original decision without it being reversed. I understand that members of Parliament may have decided afterward that they wanted to speak a little louder or whatever the case may be, but this is why members of Parliament should be in the House at the time, to make those declarations.

Clearly, this went on division and should be now referred, in accordance with your initial decision, to the Standing Committee on Finance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I can only recognize members who are sitting at their seats. I have already recognized the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park Park. I will now recognize the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not an expert in procedure but I clearly said no. The member, whose riding I am not sure about, was clearly heckling me for saying no, so he definitely heard me say no. I am sorry if you did not hear it, but I clearly said no loud enough for people to hear me on both sides of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I have heard the representations of all members. I want to apologize to the House for not hearing properly. This chair occupant has worked in good faith. And in good faith, I called the question in a manner so as to make very sure of the intentions of the House. I was not sure the first time.

I seek the forgiveness of the House if some members believe that I should have heard properly the first time. I will be more attentive on another occasion. I would like now to move to the next item and leave this chair to proceed into committee of the whole.

• (1930)

[*Translation*]

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is this about the same point of order or another?

An hon. member: The same point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Unfortunately, I have already rendered my decision. I did not see you at the time.

An hon. member: I am here, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I know you are there, but I have already rendered my decision. I ask for your indulgence. Thank you.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes under Human Resources and Skills Development in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

[*Translation*]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[Translation]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT—MAIN ESTIMATES 2006-07

(House in committee of the whole for consideration of all Votes under Human Resources and Skills Development in the Main Estimates, Mr. Royal Galipeau in the chair)

The Deputy Chair: I would like to open this committee of the whole session by making a short statement on this evening's proceedings. Tonight's debate is being held under Standing Order 81 (4)(a) which provides for each of two sets of estimates selected by the Leader of the Opposition to be considered in committee of the whole for up to four hours. The debate is also held under the motion adopted by unanimous consent earlier today.

[English]

Tonight's debate is a general one on all of the votes under Human Resources and Skills Development. Each member will be allocated 15 minutes. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

As provided in the motion adopted earlier today, parties may use each 15 minute slot for speeches or for questions and answers by one or more of their members. In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allotted may speak one after the other. The Chair would appreciate it if the first member speaking in each slot would indicate how the time will be used, particularly if it is to be shared.

When the time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, since this time will be counted in the time originally allotted to the party.

[Translation]

Though members may speak more than once, the Chair will generally try to ensure that all members wishing to speak are heard before inviting members to speak again, while respecting the proportional party rotations for speakers.

Members need not be in their own seats to be recognized. I would remind hon. members that, according to today's motion, during this evening's debate, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained.

● (1935)

[English]

As your Chair, I will be guided by the rules of the committee of the whole and by the motion adopted earlier today. However, in the interests of a full exchange, I am prepared to exercise discretion and flexibility in the application of these rules.

It is very important that the traditions of the House in relation to decorum be respected and that members make their remarks and pose their questions in a judicious fashion. The Chair will expect all

hon. members to focus on the subject matter of the debate, the main estimates of the Department of Human Resources and Social Development.

I also wish to indicate that in the committee of the whole ministers and members should be referred to by their title or riding name, and of course all remarks should be addressed through the Chair.

I ask for everyone's cooperation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

[Translation]

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, the committee will rise, the estimates under Human Resources and Skills Development will be deemed reported and the House will adjourn immediately until tomorrow.

[English]

We may now begin tonight's session. The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), the first appointed day, consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Human Resources and Skills Development in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

The hon. member for Halifax West.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank everyone, including the ministers, for gathering here this evening.

All the cuts the government has announced reflect choice, not necessity. The government inherited a remarkably strong financial situation.

Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Oakville, and until further notice, unless we advise otherwise, the members will all be asking questions this evening, thus using their time to ask questions.

The government chose to cut literacy programs, child care, student employment, seniors, volunteers and homeless people, among others. Does the size of the cuts reflect the weakness of the minister or does she simply put no value on protecting the vulnerable in society?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I should correct the record. Our new government is trying to effect responsible spending for Canadians. That is what they asked us to do. The hon. member across has made some inaccurate statements already this evening, which I would like to set straight for the record. We have continued with our investment in the homeless. In fact, we have increased it by \$37 million because we recognize the importance of this program.

As well, we have maintained our programs for seniors such as new horizons for seniors. My colleagues, particularly the Minister of Finance, have enhanced benefits for the financial security of seniors. Just yesterday he announced two new programs for seniors that will significantly help them. One is the option for pension splitting going forward, and also an increase in the age credit of \$1,000. That is a significant step forward in helping the financial security of some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Business of Supply

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, first, the hon. minister should know that she said yesterday in committee that she was unable to tell us where the cuts were. Also, we had the point in relation to homeless people yesterday in committee. She would not tell us if one of the most important programs for the homeless, which is the SCPI program, the strategic communities partnership initiative, would continue beyond March 31, 2007.

I will give her the opportunity again. Will that program go on beyond March 31, 2007?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we have continued with the SCPI program, which is part of the national homeless initiative, because we believe it is important that we try to help the homeless.

That program has been in existence for almost ten years. We think it is only fair to Canadians and to the homeless that we examine it to ensure that it is providing the best value possible. While we are providing the service, we are examining how effective it is.

We are also taking the opportunity to look for alternatives. We will be continuing with the program for the homeless. It may be SCPI. It may be something even better, and I do not understand why the hon. members opposite would not want us to try to find even better ways.

● (1940)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, yesterday in the House the minister claimed the cuts were \$100 million. They are actually \$152.8 million. Does the minister even know how much was cut from her department?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the grand total, I believe, was \$152 million. That includes approximately \$45 million from Canada Mortgage and Housing. Those were not cuts to Canada Mortgage and Housing programs, however, but savings that we will be realizing through lower than anticipated interest rates and inflation.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, have any of her Conservative colleagues complained to her about these cuts, and can she name them?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. My understanding of the procedures tonight is the hon. members opposite would be able to ask questions about the spending estimates of the minister's budget, not whether individual members of the government are questioning about particular cuts. I do not see the relevance that question has to the estimates of the department, and I would ask for a ruling in that regard.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. the Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader is raising really a point of debate rather than a point of order. I would like us to continue with the debate.

The hon. member for Halifax West.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, I did ask my question, and I am waiting for an answer. Could she tell us if any of her Conservative colleagues complained about these cuts? This is part of her accountability to the House. Could she tell us what their ridings are, if they did?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I have had numerous discussions with many of my colleagues. In fact, as we discussed these savings for Canadians, the vast majority of my colleagues were in favour, particularly once they understood what we were trying to do.

Not only that, but many of my Conservative colleagues came to me with examples of areas where the previous Liberal government had invested in programs, which fall within my department, where there was significant waste and where we should look for even more savings as responsible government.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, yesterday in committee, the minister agreed to instruct her officials to provide, in writing, details of all adult literacy program funding for her department for the fiscal year 2006-07. Where are they and why were they not provided before now?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, my recollection is that I did not commit, however, to do that within 24 hours. I know the hon. member asked for it. I do not recall agreeing to do that, but I would be happy to check the record and correct it if I did.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, just to be clear, is she saying she will not provide it, or will she provide it, and when?

● (1945)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I thought I made it clear that I did not recall making that commitment. I do recall being asked for it. I would like to check the record, and if I am mistaken, then I will comply.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Will you do it?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, her time is up.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Halifax West does not rule whose time is up. The Chair does. The Chair will try to ensure that everyone gets a fair chance. I do not mind if there is back and forth, but interruptions within back and forth prevents the sharing of information.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, you will understand my frustration. I asked her a very clear question. Will she commit to provide the information? She did not answer. She talked about what she had already talked about before.

Will she please tell if she will provide the information that I asked for yesterday? I do not care whether she agreed to it or not at the time, but will she agree now to commit to provide the information?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I was trying to answer except that I am afraid the hon. member did not hear me over the sound of his colleagues. I would be happy to provide that information just as quickly as we can get it ready.

Business of Supply

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in an OECD study of 14 member countries released in September, Canada now ranks dead last in spending on early childhood education. In light of this dismal state of affairs, could the minister explain how the monthly payoff of \$100 constitutes the most effective program to develop the best and the brightest to compete in the global marketplace of the 21st century?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the OECD study was done prior to this government taking office. It based its analysis on the previous Liberal government's investments in child care. Despite their best promises, we have doubled those promises for child care and early development. We are very pleased that Canadians are receiving the money now in the form of \$1,200 a year for each child under the age of six.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Chair, the money they are spending is far less than the money the Liberals were spending. The fact that we are dead last, as of September 2006, suggests that we have stalled on this file.

The same study revealed that access to early childhood education in Canada was measured as negligible, ranking us with Greece and Mexico.

The Conservative government has been in power for eight months, plenty of time to improve access for our children. How many new child care spaces has the Conservative child care spaces initiative created to date?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, after 13 years we are still waiting to see the ones the Liberals promised.

I made it very clear to Canadians that our child care spaces initiative would take effect April 1, 2007. That is when the spaces will start to be created. We made that very clear from the start. That is why we provided transition funding to the provinces in the meantime.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Chair, the minister's first strategy was based on a \$10,000 tax credit to entice businesses to create spaces. When it received no response from business and failed, she went to plan B and created a ministerial advisory council on child care spaces initiative.

Of the nine members on this council, how many are recognized as child care experts? How many run for profit day care operations or represent those who do? How many are from Quebec?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I do not have the detailed bios of each of the members of the advisory committee at my fingertips I am afraid, or at top of mind. However, we were trying to find people who could advise us on what would best motivate businesses and community groups to create spaces.

Who better to ask than the groups we are trying to motivate? That is why we are consulting with them. They have a wide range of backgrounds, including the head of the YMCA, which is one of Canada's largest child care providers.

• (1950)

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Chair, the government boasted that recent cuts to the department were made in an effort to trim the fat and provide taxpayers with value for money.

How much money does the government spend each year in mailing out the \$100 cheques, cheques that are taxable, which the minister forgot to mention during the campaign and even afterward?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we made it clear from the very beginning that the choice in child care allowance would be taxed in the hands of the lower income spouse. We have been upfront about that all along.

We have begun sending out the cheques, and I am pleased to report that the CRA has advised us that the vast majority of parents are moving rapidly to direct deposit so we will achieve even further economies on the administration of this program.

The Deputy Chair: There is no time left but because of the interruptions I will allow one more question.

The hon. member for Halifax West.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chair, could the minister name each of the literacy groups she consulted with before she gutted this program? To be specific, which groups did she sit down with and ask how cuts would affect what they do?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we make it a practice, my officials and I, to consult with a wide range of people on a wide range of subjects. Many of those consultations are private in nature and, out of respect for the privacy of those individuals consulted, I would prefer not to provide that list at this point in time.

The Deputy Chair: The time for the official opposition definitely has ended now. Most members who are in the committee of the whole at this time were in the House a little earlier when the Acting Speaker did not hear certain things that should have happened.

Let us make sure that the Chair of this committee at this time hears everything that he must hear. That can best happen with less heckling. It is most important to the work of this committee that the Chair does a good job and the Chair can do a better job if he hears all the relevant information on both sides. Please, I ask you, less heckling.

The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am sure we all appreciate your efforts to keep decorum in the House.

I rise in my place today to speak to the 2006-07 main estimates. Canada's new government brought together many of the key levers for Canada's economic and social future. It combined the former Department of Human Resources and Skills Development with the former Department of Social Development and also gave me responsibilities for CMHC.

Business of Supply

I am very pleased to head a department that has a broad impact on Canadians, an impact on our economy and on our society. We have a vision for Canada based upon the values of Canadians: protecting the vulnerable; emphasizing the family as the key building block of a strong society; championing hard work to get ahead and the importance of learning and skills in the workplace; encouraging individuals to make choices for their own future; and, carefully managing hard-earned money.

It is an honour to have been entrusted by the Prime Minister to oversee this ambitious and large ministry, which employs over 24,000 Canadians across the country and has planned spending of nearly \$80 billion. As its mandate centres on helping Canadians, nearly 95% of this spending goes directly to Canadians through statutory benefits such as employment insurance and old age security.

The remaining funds support programs that help Canada and Canadians succeed, help children get the best possible start, help develop skills for the 21st century and, help seniors and Canadians with disabilities take an active role in their communities. In pursuit of these objectives, Canada's new government is taking bold steps to strengthen our programming in concrete, meaningful ways.

For families, some 1.4 million families are receiving a universal child care benefit for every child under six. We are working with partners across the country to find ways to create real, flexible child care spaces.

For students, we are expanding eligibility for Canada student loans. We are eliminating federal income tax on scholarships and bursaries. We have created a new textbook tax credit. This is a total investment of an additional \$390 million over two years.

For post-secondary education, we have transferred \$1 billion in the post-secondary education infrastructure trust that the provinces and territories will spend in modernizing libraries, laboratories, classrooms and other infrastructure projects.

For Canadians in need of housing, we have provided a one time strategic investment of \$1.4 billion for the establishment of three housing trusts with the provinces and territories for affordable housing, northern housing and for aboriginals living off reserve.

For the homeless, we extended the national homelessness initiative to the end of March 2007 and invested an additional \$37 million from funds unspent by the previous government. Now we are looking at ways in which we can support the homeless in the future.

For skilled workers, we provided an apprenticeship incentive grant and a tools tax credit for those who want to pursue careers in skilled trades. For older workers, we have a targeted initiative to help the unemployed older workers in vulnerable communities get new jobs.

For seniors, we have increased the pension income credit to \$2,000. Over the next two years this will put 900 million additional dollars into their hands.

For all Canadians, the Service Canada delivery network now reaches more communities. The number of service points has increased by 157, for a total of 477. In its first year of operation,

Service Canada paid about \$70 billion in benefits to nearly eight million Canadians.

In delivering these programs, Canada's new government is committed to respecting the hard-earned dollars of Canadian taxpayers. We are committed to reflecting the true priorities of Canadians and we are committed to providing value for money and to delivering real results.

● (1955)

On January 23, Canadians voted for the end of an era of waste and mismanagement. Canadians voted for the end of a tired and corrupt government that had so many priorities that it actually had none.

Canadians voted for a new government that is about respecting Canadians, achieving results and strengthening accountability. Canadians expect their hard-earned tax dollars to be invested in effective programs that meet their needs. We are committed to making our spending transparent, disciplined and accountable. We are consulting with provinces, municipalities and stakeholders to ensure we are moving in the right direction and building effective partnerships to ensure success.

For instance, on the recognition of foreign credentials, we are working with provinces, business, academia and interested organizations.

As we move forward with our child care spaces initiative, we are getting ideas and advice from business, communities and the real child care experts, Canadian parents.

We are consulting the provinces on national objectives, roles, responsibilities, accountability and results for post-secondary education and training.

This brings me to another key area in which our spending priorities are different from those of the previous government. Canada's new government respects provincial jurisdiction. We are committed to ensuring that federal programs do not encroach upon areas that are rightfully provincial matters. Our goal is to work with the provinces and territories to provide the most effective use of taxpayer money.

Canada's new government recognizes that there is only one taxpayer. We recognize that it is the same taxpayer that pays to the federal, provincial and municipal governments. We owe it to that taxpayer not to compete with one another for jurisdiction.

However, the bottom line for my department is that within our mandate and jurisdiction we invest in people.

Our investments are aimed at ensuring that our labour force can meet the challenges of the 21st century. We will make investments so that individuals will have the opportunity to make choices that will equip them with the skills to have productive and rewarding lives, while participating in our economy and society.

Business of Supply

This includes helping the most vulnerable in our society. For example, we are working with partners to find the most effective ways to enhance the inclusion and participation of Canadians with disabilities.

We are examining the most effective ways to address the needs of the homeless, while recognizing the importance of addressing the root causes of homelessness.

Investing in people also includes ensuring that Canada has a skilled and capable workforce for the 21st century.

We are in an enviable position. This became clear over the past month as I had occasion to compare Canada's performance with my OECD counterparts in Toronto and my G-8 colleagues in Moscow. In my consultations, I was able to point out that the state of Canada's labour market is strong. We are in the midst of our best labour market outlook in decades. Our overall participation rate for workers of nearly 80% is one of the highest in the G-8 and our unemployment rate is at a 30-year low.

In spite of this, Canada's new government recognizes that we cannot be complacent. We have an aging workforce. Global competition places new demands on knowledge and skills and skilled labour is in short supply.

While Canada has a highly flexible and adaptable workforce, not every community or every individual can adapt to this environment. We will work to remove barriers to work and ensure appropriate support for underrepresented groups, such as aboriginal people, recent immigrants and people with disabilities. By doing so, we will have a sufficient quantity of workers to meet the needs of our economy.

We are also providing significant support for skills training and post-secondary education to ensure that Canada has a quality workforce to compete globally. We will promote an efficient national labour market so that employers can find the skilled workers they need and so that workers can pursue opportunities throughout Canada.

● (2000)

Our vision is of a strong, vibrant and diverse Canada, a Canada where individuals have the skills and opportunities to participate in the economy and society and to live productive and rewarding lives.

We are taking real steps to achieve that vision. All the while, we are committed to remaining accountable to Canadians by listening to their concerns and spending their tax dollars wisely.

This is the foundation we are building on and that is the legacy we wish to leave for generations to come.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I listened to the minister with great interest. She used words such as “invest in people”, “most vulnerable”, “recent immigrants”, “foreign credentials” and “working with provinces”.

My question is very simple. I wonder if the minister could give us an update as to the work that her department has done in recognition of foreign credentials, not pretty words, but specific.

I would refer the minister and some of her officials who are here to a symposium on December 9 of last year that was going to take in all

the provinces and all the stakeholders in order to work toward the recognition of foreign credentials. I wonder if the minister could bring us up to speed on what her department has been doing since then, if anything, in moving toward the recognition of foreign credentials.

● (2005)

The Deputy Chair: I will recognize the hon. the minister to reply to that question, but I would like to remind members of the official opposition that they had their turn and this is the time slot for the government. So whatever time was used for this question will be added to the government's time.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we recognize how important it is to get people who arrive in this country to work using the skills they bring. Since I took on this department, I and my deputy have spoken with all the provinces and territories because a lot of this is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Over 440 regulatory bodies are under provincial jurisdiction and over 200 educational institutions that present credentials and recognize credentials for newcomers. We are working with them very closely to expedite this process.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to make a couple of comments and ask the minister a specific question because I find it odd that we have members opposite saying that with the billion dollar expenditure reduction that this government implemented it affected Canada's most vulnerable.

Could the minister comment on the fact \$47 million of that billion dollar expenditure reduction came from reducing the size of cabinet? I suppose only Liberal members could think that federal cabinet ministers are among Canada's most vulnerable. I would suspect that they think that way because, as all Liberals, the taxpayers' money is really not important, it is what use the money is to the Liberals.

I would suspect that the minister might have some comments on why a \$47 million reduction in the size of cabinet would result in good value for Canadian taxpayers.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, it is true that we have been much more efficient than the previous government. We take a broader view of things. Combining, for example, human resources and skills development along with social development has allowed us to break down the silence that existed when developing new programs.

Much of our work on the economy and the labour market will require various programs to work together, not in competition but that they complement each other so that going forward we have a comprehensive, cohesive, integrated plan to address the needs of the market and the economy, something that did not exist with the previous government.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, could the minister tell the House why she thinks our universal child care is in fact is in fact the best and most equitable way to address parents and families today?

Hon. Diane Finley: Our government recognizes, Mr. Chair, that a one size fits all day care plan just does not work for Canadians.

Canadian families have a wide range of needs. Some need nine to five, Monday to Friday. That is fine. Some need weekends. Some need evenings. Some work night shifts. Some have seasonal demands if they work in agriculture. Some need part time. Some children have special needs.

Our universal child care benefit provides \$100 a month directly to the parents of each child under the age of six regardless of the circumstances, but that money will help each parent access the choice in child care that meets their family's unique needs.

● (2010)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, is it time for questions or for debate?

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate.

This round belongs to the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to use my time as follows: I will speak for three or four minutes, then I will ask some questions.

I plan to use my first three or four minutes to bring another perspective to the debate. The minister painted a rosy and sentimental picture of what is actually a dramatic situation. It is deplorable that a person in her position, with enormous responsibilities—as she stated earlier—takes those responsibilities so lightly.

I would remind the members that in the matter of employment insurance, fewer than 40% of people who lose their jobs are eligible for employment insurance benefits.

I would remind the members that older workers find themselves in a terrible predicament as the job losses add up, especially in the softwood lumber and textile industries, to name just two. The minister has not yet responded to this situation by providing income support to older workers.

Poverty has escalated dramatically. The Canadian Association of Food Banks says that over the past year, child poverty has increased and in Canada, 880,000 people—including 314,000 children—regularly rely on food banks.

If so many of the poor go to food banks for their food, it is not because they have decided to change restaurants. It is because poverty is a reality and one of its causes is that the social safety net for individuals who have the misfortune of losing their jobs, among other things, is falling apart. The last two parties in power played a major role in this.

Even more serious is the fact that the money to support these individuals was available. The employment insurance account, funded by employee and employer contributions, generates surpluses

year after year. This year they will total more than \$2.15 billion. Over the past 12 years, more than \$50 billion has been diverted from the employment insurance account and used for other purposes. It is a reality that the minister is ignoring and which she does not wish to address here.

I will appeal to the compassion and a certain sensitivity of the minister so that she gives the real answers to our questions.

One of the ways to solve this problem is to give back control over their money—money that belongs to them, the employment insurance account—to workers and employers.

I am getting to my questions.

The rules of the House state that the answer must be no longer than the question. My questions will be brief and explicit and I hope that the minister's answers will be brief, explicit and clear. And now for my questions

Last year, the Conservative Party voted in favour of the Bloc Québécois' Bill C-280, to establish an independent employment insurance fund. The minister voted for the bill last year. This year, does she approve of the bill that we tabled in order to establish an independent fund?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, this is one of those cases where I admit that I reserve the right to be smarter today than I was yesterday. I have learned from experience, particularly in this job, that my understanding of the need for a separate EI account was based on erroneous information. At the time I thought it was a cash account. It is not. It is a notional account. What I did not understand before I got into this job was that that EI surplus had actually been spent as part of the consolidated revenue fund to the benefit of all Canadians, so no, I do not support that position any longer.

● (2015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister when she had this flash of insight. Does the minister feel that the Prime Minister lacks judgment?

On May 1, in response to a question about the separate fund from the leader of the Bloc Québécois in this House, the Prime Minister said, “We share the Bloc leader's philosophy on this”.

Does this mean that the minister is now smarter than the Prime Minister, who recognizes the need for a separate fund?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, to be perfectly candid, the Prime Minister and I have not discussed this particular subject recently, but part of the reason for my recent decision that this might not be the best option to pursue is that we are now in the first year of a new rate-setting process, whereby an arm's length, independent EI Commission, based on actuarial evidence, reviews the rates and sets the new rates. This was not done before.

Business of Supply

We are in the first year of this new process. I would like to give it a chance and see how it works. Maybe it will be a much more efficient, much more effective system. Since we are trying it, and since we have almost a year's experience behind us, I would like to give that a chance.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, this is a major about-face in the space of a month and a half. As recently as September, in response to another question from the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the Prime Minister said, "As the leader of the Bloc knows, our party supported the idea in the past. I am on the verge of proposing to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development—that is you—that she formulate alternate measures for this government".

What alternate measures, Minister?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we are looking at a number of different alternatives regarding the EI account and the EI program in general because it is so broad and because so many Canadians depend upon it.

One of the issues is that of looking at the best rate-setting mechanism, the best way to ensure an effective and efficient use of funds. We are also trying out several new programs. We have just launched a targeted initiative for older workers. We also launched the five week pilot project to help seasonal workers who are experiencing a gap. We are trying to get going with trying out new programs to make sure that we can get the best EI system possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, this still runs counter to the minister's thinking. When the minister voted last year on Bill C-280, which sought to create a separate fund, she said—and it was the resolution that said this—"Employment insurance funds should be used strictly for the employment insurance plan".

Recently, when the government declared a \$13 billion surplus, that \$13 billion included \$2.118 billion belonging to the employment insurance fund. Her government used that money to pay down the debt.

Is the minister telling us that she has changed her mind and now agrees with the diversions that are still going on today?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, this is a new process that we are going through with the new rate setting. The target is to break even so that we do not have to even address the situation of surpluses in the EI account.

Quite frankly, if the hon. member, who has devoted a lot of time and energy to this particular issue, and I congratulate him on that, would really like to discuss the previous enormous surplus in the EI account, I would suggest that he direct his questions to the previous government. That government is the one that created it.

● (2020)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, I believe the minister is the only one who does not know that there is a surplus in the EI fund. This year, the total is \$2.118 billion. Over the past 12 years, year in and year out, there has been an annual surplus of between \$2 billion and \$7 billion.

I urge the minister to familiarize herself with the situation. I understand that she does not want to promise here today to create a separate employment insurance fund. That would involve renegeing on some campaign promises.

Since the minister does not know if there is a surplus and does not know what approach to take regarding the EI fund, I would like to talk about improvements to employment insurance.

The Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-269, which would improve the EI system. Among other things, the Bloc proposed a minimum of 360 hours worked to be eligible for employment insurance. Do you agree with this number of hours?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I have several concerns with this bill, in particular the number of hours. My understanding is that the proposal would allow for someone to work for a short period of time to collect long term benefits. That is not what we need in this country at this point in time. We have, across this country, a shortage of skilled labour and unskilled labour, in many parts of the country. It behooves all of us to make sure that as many people who are capable are engaged in that workforce and contributing to the growth of our economy. That is why we have to provide incentives to work, not incentives not to work.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, I hope the minister knows that, sometimes, people want to work, but there is no work for them.

Does the minister agree that such people should be eligible for employment insurance after accumulating 360 hours of work? That is my question.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, with our targeted initiative for older workers, we are helping people get re-skilled to get back into the workplace and be productive. We do not want to pension off those workers in the 55 year old to 64 year old age bracket. We do not think they should be treated the way the Bloc has suggested, by being put out to pasture. We think they have a lot to contribute. That is why there is funding there, including income supports, to get them re-skilled, to get them work experience, and to give them the tools they need to even apply for another job.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, unfortunately, a question has been raised on a certain matter and the minister talks about something else.

I am not talking about older workers at all. There are also younger people who are unemployed. It seems the minister must verify that, as well.

Business of Supply

Does the minister agree with the notion of increasing EI benefits, which are currently 55% of income earned, to 60%? Does she agree with this proposal in Bill C-269? Does she understand what I am talking about?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I said before, rather than increasing benefits to pay people not to work, we need to focus on getting people to work, on getting them the skills they need to be gainfully employed and on getting the opportunities and the economic development going so the jobs are there.

Quite frankly, we already face a shortage. It does not make sense to pay people not to work. Most people I know have the option of learning. That is why we are investing so much in skills, skills development and workplace skills, whether it is our apprenticeship programs, our workplace skills development or our entrepreneurial programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, does the minister realize that there is a shortage of manpower in some regions of Canada, while there is unemployment in other parts of the country?

Let us take the workers in the Abitibi region. They were laid off because sawmills closed their doors. Does the minister wish to send these workers to Alberta? Is that what she wants to do?

We have to be realistic. I want the minister to answer my question. Does she realize that when people are unemployed, it is not by choice, it is because there are no jobs in their region? Is the minister aware of that? If so, will she improve their employment insurance benefits?

• (2025)

[English]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to advise the minister that the time has run out but I will allow the answer to this question.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, quite simply I come from an area that is facing the same kind of problem where for a variety of reasons we have a lot of unemployment. What we are looking at is economic development. That is what we need to focus on. Our targeted older workers initiative is designed to work with economic development to create the jobs.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Chair, I plan to ask a series of questions and then make a statement close to the end of the 15 minutes.

I notice that \$27 million has been spent to design and promote the universal child care benefit. How much of that is being spent on putting ads in newspapers and on radio stations, and from which department does the money come?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, according to my records, our advertising campaign to raise awareness of the universal child care benefit to make sure that all of the eligible parents applied which wrapped up in September and which included Internet, newspaper and radio advertising, cost approximately \$2.9 million.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, I hope the minister will respect the time.

I assume then that the funds come from the HRSD department. Yes or no?

Hon. Diane Finley: Yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, \$25 million has also been cut from the first nations children on reserve funds that are supposed to be used to hire teachers, develop specialized programs and other early learning education programs.

Why was that money cut?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I would ask the hon. member if she could provide a little more detail. We do have a number of programs and I am not quite sure to which one she is referring.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, in the 2005 budget there was supposed to be \$700 million for child care; \$650 million has been sent to the provinces and another \$25 million was supposed to be for first nations children on reserve. I am just wondering whether that money is being spent or not.

Hon. Diane Finley: I do apologize, Mr. Chair, but at the moment based on the information the member has provided, I cannot identify that particular program. I would be happy, however, to meet individually with the member to discuss it further and to answer her questions.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister very much for that answer. I think the answer to my the next question will be the same, which is regarding the \$25 million also on child care which is for research and accountability on the whole child care program. I do not believe that money is there either. If the minister does not have the answer we could investigate that further.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I would be happy to pursue that with the member.

• (2030)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, I notice there will be at least \$240 million that would be collected from taxes from the universal child care benefit by April; that is the prediction from the department. What intention does the minister have on spending this money? Would this money be going back into child care or would it go to general revenues?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the rules of the government dictate that the money go directly into consolidated revenue.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, that is really too unfortunate, because that is the money from working families and the children.

I want the minister to name one other department that has sustained more cuts than her own. My reading is that the Department of Human Resources and Social Development sustained the largest percentage cut in the entire operation of the government. I have a list here and it looks like the Human Resources and Social Development cut is \$152.8 million. Is there any other department that received this dollar amount cut or any that received a larger percentage cut?

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I think we need to place it in context. This is probably the largest department. I am not exactly sure whether financially it is. I know it is almost \$80 billion. The savings that we are realizing for Canadians, including CMHC, amount to \$152 million. That is a very, very, very small percentage.

The key here is that we are saving on programs that just have not been delivering results for Canadians. The opportunity is there to realize savings while improving quality by just letting us do it better. There is tremendous opportunity there. I would not be able to comment on savings realized in other departments.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, speaking about good programs, I note that \$55.4 million has been cut from the youth employment programs through the summer career placement program. That is a cut of more than 50% to this very precious program. It is a program that leads to 55,000 jobs a year. It really helps students offset their huge student debt. It helps them get on the job training. It helps non-profit organizations and rural businesses compete with larger corporations for summer student help.

Can the minister tell us how many fewer jobs will be offered next summer? How did she arrive at the conclusion that 50% of the jobs will be cut?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, when we looked at the summer career placement program, which has a very noble purpose to help students earn money to go back to school and also to increase their work experience, we quickly realized that it was oversubscribed. In other words when we checked, fully a third of employers actually admitted that they would have provided these jobs even if they had not received the funding provided through this program. Now if only a third admitted it, imagine how many actually believed it.

When Tim Hortons cannot hire people to work in Calgary, we do not believe that we should be subsidizing \$20 an hour summer jobs there. We will be focusing on where students need help, whether it is rural communities, whether it is new Canadians, wherever the barriers are to employment. We will help students where they actually need it.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, the minister talked about Tim Hortons, which is of course a company. I am wondering whether the minister would commit that the remaining amount of the funds will go only to non-profit organizations that are in desperate shape and need the funds to create the jobs rather than companies that probably have other means of finding employees.

Hon. Diane Finley: What we want to do, Mr. Chair, is make sure that we are providing opportunities for students wherever those opportunities exist.

I should point out that the subsidy to private business for these jobs is only 50%, not 100% as for the not for profit sector. I would caution the hon. member that it will be the small businesses that take advantage of this program in many communities where students have a tough time finding a job. That is where the jobs will be created, the very ones the member is so eager to create, as am I.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, the minister said that almost one-third of employers who participated in the program last summer said they would have created some of those jobs. However, that is one-third. How does she come to the conclusion that more than 50% of

the program would be cut? If she is using that as a reason, then surely it should not be 50%; it should be less than a third.

• (2035)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we took a look at where the demand was, where we saw people getting jobs that would have existed anyway. We do not need to spend Canadian taxpayers' money to create jobs for students in Calgary. I am sorry, but we do not need to do that. We need to do it elsewhere. We need to get the focus of this program back on students and on creating meaningful jobs that will help them gain valuable experience and money to help them continue with their education.

The Deputy Chair: At the beginning of this time slot, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina mentioned that at the end of the time slot she would be making closing remarks. How much time does she want so that I can give her notice?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, thank you for helping out. I noticed that I have five more minutes because I had 15 minutes.

The Deputy Chair: You have four and a half minutes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, I will time it in order to make the end statement accordingly, as long as I do not run out of time. I just have a few more questions, if that is okay. I thank the Chair for his assistance.

My question is on the summer student employment program. Perhaps the minister can say that in Calgary there are lots of jobs around, but certainly there are other areas, for example, in Toronto, with quite a few vulnerable communities where young people are desperately in need of summer employment programs.

Would the minister consider starting a new program? Would she consider reinvesting some of the funds that have been put aside or cut or whatever in some of the vulnerable communities where a large number of young people are unemployed and alienated, some of whom are turning to criminal activities?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, in fact one of the areas that we are going to be focusing on is helping youth at risk and students in communities with high crime. Those are barriers to the workforce and we want to help them overcome those barriers.

As we are currently in the process of reviewing this program, I would certainly invite the member to share her ideas for a new program so that as we go through with this and make changes to it, we can look at including some of her ideas. That would be just great.

Business of Supply

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, on foreign credentials I understand that \$18 million has been put aside to establish an agency to assist new immigrants. I am wondering what the work plan is. From what I saw a few weeks ago, the ministry is still doing consultations and it is not really going very far.

When does the minister believe that the first dollar will actually be received by either an agency or an actual program, such as a mentorship program, a co-op program or bridging programs? A lot of organizations, like the Maytree Foundation, are saying that they desperately need these funds to help new immigrants so that they can have productive jobs, gain Canadian experience, et cetera.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the previous government spent a lot of years dabbling at this effort. We are going forward seriously with a new agency. I am pleased to inform the House that the dollars are already flowing. The dollars are flowing to groups that will help with this initiative. It is building on the consultations that we have been doing with the Public Policy Forum. We had an FPT meeting of the deputy ministers and myself and other stakeholders.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, I have two questions. I would ask the minister to give more information as to how the funds have been flowing and whether any programs have been funded.

The other question is on the social development and partnership program, the \$13 million in cuts. Who is being cut and by how much?

I notice there is no call for proposal for even the remaining amount of money. Is there going to be a call for proposal and when? Who is being cut and by how much out of this social development partnership program?

• (2040)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, first I am a little surprised that the hon. member is raising cuts to social development because it was her party yesterday that was tabling further reductions in social development spending. I am a little confused as to where she is coming from on that one.

On foreign credentials, we are working with the regulated professions, trying to target places where we can have the biggest impact the soonest. We are working with the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, the Medical Council of Canada, the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, the Canadian Nurses Association and others. That is just a very short list from a long one.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Chair, first, I would like to salute my colleague, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, and the hon. members who are here this evening for this debate.

I am also pleased to inform the House of our latest achievements through my department's work program. I want to tell the House about Canada's workplaces, their importance, and the measures that our government is taking to ensure that they remain competitive and continue to meet the needs of workers and employers.

Canada's wealth is generated in the workplace, whether it is in an office or in a plant. The workplace is also where most of us spend the better part of our lives. This is why creating ideal conditions in workplaces has major repercussions on our economy, our lives and our society.

As Minister of Labour, workplaces remain my main objective, and my responsibilities involve labour-management relations and also working conditions in businesses that are under federal jurisdiction.

My responsibilities are as follows: first, mediation and conciliation relating to collective agreements and industry disputes; second, implementing a regulation and enforcement program to support the primary provisions of the Canada Labour Code, especially with respect to health and safety; third, monitoring and providing advice about new labour developments at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, as well as representing Canada abroad in issues related to labour policies; and fourth, conducting research and analysis on the evolution of the workplace, including contributing information to discussions about industrial relations.

When the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development listed her department's priorities, she mentioned the importance of being decisive and making good choices. I share this approach. Allow me to discuss five areas in which we have been particularly active recently.

First, we have worked to promote and guarantee safe and healthy workplaces. Canada's health and safety officers continue to do excellent work ensuring that businesses respect the Canada Labour Code, particularly the health and safety provisions.

Second, I am taking concrete steps with respect to the Joint Statement on Healthy Workplaces, a statement I signed recently along with my provincial and territorial counterparts.

Nearly 40% more members of these groups are now in workplaces covered under the legislation. Our efforts seem to be bearing fruit, but we know we will have to keep working to eliminate disparities, particularly for aboriginals and the disabled.

The Strategy for a Racism-Free Workplace is our third sphere of activity. By promoting equality and eliminating discrimination in the labour market, Canada can provide the world with a very competitive labour force trained to respect diversity and inclusiveness.

Let us be clear. This is a shared responsibility. This is why we are offering educational tools, recommending best practices for employees and employers, establishing creative partnerships and launching programs to fight discrimination.

Business of Supply

In addition, I recently visited five cities to promote racism-free workplaces and the elimination of barriers to the employment of visible minorities and aboriginals.

On the subject of racism in the workplace, I would like to remind the House that 1.8 million Canadians say they have experienced racism in their lives, and for most of them, it occurred for the first time in their workplace. I would also like to remind the House that, within seven years, half the population of large cities such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal will be made up of visible minorities. This is an important statistic, which is why we must put an end to racism in the workplace in Canada. My recent tour to promote had just that goal.

Next, I would like to report on the work that has been done with respect to pay equity.

● (2045)

I recently announced new measures to ensure that our partners in the workplace are well informed of their obligations and responsibilities regarding pay equity. We are also establishing additional measures to guarantee compliance with these obligations.

Working women deserve immediate and significant results in this regard, and I am proud to say that we have taken decisive measures based on relevant comments we have received over the years.

I would also like to address another area of activity, that is, our role on the international stage. Indeed, we are very active in the promotion and protection of workers' rights around the globe. For example, our exemplary practices serve as a model for other countries.

In this context, I would like to mention that my counterparts from China, Mr. Tian Chengping, and from Chile, Mr. Osvaldo Andrade, recently came to Canada to become acquainted with the government's policies on work environments. The labour program offers training in mediation and conciliation to Chilean officials and both the training they receive in Canada and our expertise carry over to neighbouring countries. I think we are showing leadership and that this work is very much appreciated by our colleagues from China and from Chile.

Since I have spoken about the measures taken so far to support the Canadian work environment, I will now turn my attention to the work we have ahead of us.

First we have the report of the Federal Labour Standards Review Commission, which is the first review of this kind in 40 years.

For over two years, the Arthurs commission conducted extensive research and public consultations on work environments. It closely examined the point of view of individuals and addressed certain problems such as new employment relationships, the balance between work and family and the impact of labour standards on productivity.

I received Professor Arthurs's report recently, on Monday in fact, and as minister, I am currently reviewing his findings and recommendations. We are seeking the points of view of employers, unions and employees on overtime hours, hours of work, vacation

and recovery of wages, and on many more recommendations, since Professor Arthurs made 172 of them in his report.

I would also like to mention the Wage Earner Protection Program. I know that the hon. members of this House voted unanimously, under the previous government, for wage earner protection legislation when a company goes bankrupt. The purpose of this important program, as I was just saying, is to protect those who are most vulnerable in a bankruptcy situation. We anticipate being in a position very shortly to table a bill in this House to protect workers.

An hon. member: When?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: My colleague opposite just asked me when that will happen. It will truly be very soon.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Tomorrow?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: It will be very soon—in a matter of weeks.

An hon. member: This evening?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Also, as part of the reform of insolvency legislation, the Wage Earner Protection Program Act was adopted earlier, as I mentioned, although it has yet to be promulgated. As with any new law, a great deal remains to be done before it is implemented. This is the context for stating that we should be ready in the very near future.

Finally, I would like to discuss the upcoming parliamentary review of the Employment Equity Act. This year will mark the 20th anniversary of the original legislation. We can be proud of this milestone and remarkable progress has been made.

Four months ago, I tabled in the House the annual report on employment equity and the results are rather encouraging. They show how the law has helped improve employment of members of the designated groups—women, visible minorities, the disabled and aboriginals.

As required by the legislation, this was the second five-year review of this act. It was favourably received and we are prepared for the task at hand.

As I mentioned in my introduction, we continue to focus on Canada's workplaces. These workplaces are only the best they can be when their partners—management and workers—work together like true partners, to solve their problems.

● (2050)

As minister, my main task is to bring them together, to act as an honest broker and to do my best to settle their differences. At the same time, I want to ensure that workers have the best—

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I apologize to the minister, but the time for his speech has expired.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the Minister of Labour to tell us about the practical measures our government plans to take to apply existing pay equity regulations to employers.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, hon. members know that our government is really on the side of women on this issue, and we hope to move forward on pay equity. Our government decided that it was not necessary to introduce a new bill and needlessly delay acting on this issue by engaging in potentially endless debate. We therefore decided to use section 8 of the Canadian Human Rights Commission legislation to move forward on this issue.

We currently have 90 inspectors in the labour department who go into companies. Previously, when these inspectors went into companies, they did not look at pay equity. These inspectors will receive special training and, when they go into companies, will ask employers whether they apply the principles of pay equity. That is how we will move forward in the coming months.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have another question for the Minister of Labour. I would like him to explain in more detail the disadvantages of applying possible rules regarding replacement workers at the federal level.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, I would like to verify something with you. When a member puts a question to us, can we take longer to answer than the time it took the member to ask his question?

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Chair: According to the order made earlier today, the answers are supposed to be roughly equal in time. So, if a member asks a very short question, the answer should be similarly brief.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, then, in this context, I obviously cannot go into more details. For example, I would have a lot more to say about pay equity. Perhaps hon. members can ask me longer questions.

Balance in the workplace is something sacred. We must not pass legislation to protect only unions, or employers, because that balance would no longer exist. It is with this balance in mind that, currently, companies can use replacement workers, but they cannot do so to undermine the union's status. When the strike is over, those employees who were outside go back to their jobs. That is very important.

• (2055)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Chair, with respect to replacement workers, my understanding of some of the studies that have been performed seem to indicate that in spite of what members of the opposition may think, in fact those companies who have not used replacement workers during a strike situation actually settle their strikes faster and with a settlement higher for the workers than those

companies that actually have utilized replacement workers. Could the minister comment to the veracity of those studies?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, I do indeed have some figures, and these might be of interest to those who are listening to us.

In 1976, there were 46 work stoppages in Canada involving workers governed by the Canada Labour Code, that is workers who come under our jurisdiction, while there were 282 in Quebec. This was one year before the act came into effect in Quebec. In 2005, there were 4 work stoppages involving workers under the Canada Labour Code, compared to 76 in Quebec, or 20 times more.

I have other figures relating to the duration of labour disputes. Between 1975 and 1977, the average conflict lasted 33.4 days in the case of those who were under our jurisdiction, compared to 37 days for workers in Quebec. Between 2002 and 2005, the average was 43.9 days for workers under our jurisdiction, and 46.6 days for those in Quebec.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will give a brief overview, and then put questions to the minister.

Let me remind the House that the end of the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, or SCPI, is fast approaching, on March 31, 2007. The impact of this decision or, more to the point, this decision vacuum concerning homelessness is starting to be felt.

The Appart Adojeune organization, in the Outaouais region, will be forced to close down on December 31 because of this heartless government's lack of action. In addition, I have learned that the staff of affected organizations in my riding and across Canada have already started looking for alternative employment, in the event that their place of work closes down.

Does the minister consider that helping the homeless is an area of provincial responsibility? Is her government trying to ditch it?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, since this government took office we have been very committed to helping the homeless, which is why we extended the SCPI program as part of the national homelessness initiative with full funding, to which we added \$37 million in August, money that the previous government had allocated but did not spend. That is the level of our commitment and we are going forward honouring that commitment.

However, after almost 10 years of this program having no changes, we think the responsible thing to do is to review the program and look at options to see if there are better ways to help the homeless, ways that we can address the root causes of homelessness.

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[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my speaking time with my hon. colleagues from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and Beaches—East York.

I have learned that several projects, whose renewal for 2006-07 had already been announced, have been cut back or rejected after having been approved at every stage before that. In Montreal, four projects have been cut back and one rejected. In the Montréal region, one project has been rejected, while in the Mauricie region, another initiative was rejected.

The minister knows full well that never before in the history of the SCPI have previously approved projects been cut back or rejected.

What for? Why reject them? Why cut them back? Is this a preview of what is in store for 2007?

• (2100)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I explained, when we took office we extended the SCPI program, which was set up by the previous government, and we ran it exactly the same. We did not change any rules nor did we change the process. We left everything intact because we wanted to give it a fair evaluation.

The process works such that projects are funded but the applications are made at the local level. If the local authorities say that it is a good thing, then they pass it on to Ottawa. If it meets our criteria and we think it is a good project, then we fund it. Not all the applications do get accepted but the good projects get funded. There has been no change in how this program is operated or implemented.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, we have to understand that these projects are approved at different levels. There is the local level, then the provincial level and, finally, the federal level.

Never before have projects been cut back or rejected after having been approved at every level before the federal level. Could the minister list the criteria on which the decision to cut back or reject was based? What are the criteria?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I should explain that we do believe in accountability. If the hon. member is saying that the previous government rubber stamped applications once they arrived in Ottawa, that is a whole other issue. I am not sure I would want to do that because we believe in accountability. We want to ensure that the programs deliver real results in priority areas and that they adhere to very strict reporting requirements. We have turned down less than 20 out of hundreds and hundreds of proposals.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to speak about post-secondary education. I wonder if I could ask the minister what happened to Bill C-48, how much was it supposed to be, what was it intended for and where did it go.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, Bill C-48 was under the administration of the finance department. Tonight we are discussing Human Resources and Social Development.

If he is asking about our portion of Bill C-48, which is the \$1 billion trust for post-secondary education, those trusts have been honoured. I actually checked with the minister today and he advised me that those trusts have been established for the provinces.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, I would like to read Bill C-48 as it pertains to post-secondary education. It states, “for supporting training programs and enhancing access to post-secondary education...an amount not exceeding \$1.5 billion”, not \$1 billion.

Why is it not \$1.5 billion and why is it not enhancing access?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the terms that were set out were actually dedicating it primarily to infrastructure and accessibility to post-secondary education to be used for infrastructure enhancing access, such as libraries and laboratories. That is access. If people do not have buildings to go into there is no university to access.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, I would encourage the minister to read the bill and if she sees any mention of infrastructure perhaps she could let me know because it is not in that bill. This talks about access.

I wonder if I could ask the minister what the average university tuition is for post-secondary education in Canada.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I know we do have that information somewhere in our mountain of materials. If we cannot find it in a very short period I would be happy to provide it to the hon. member later on.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, the average tuition is \$4,347. I would think the minister responsible would know that.

What has the federal government's percentage of investment in post-secondary institutions been over the past 10 years? What is the trend?

• (2105)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I will not answer what the trend of the previous government was. We have been here for eight months. The trend starts now.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, if she read the budget documents, the answer is in there. These are her budget documents. It says that the total share of federal support has remained constant over the past 10 years at 25%.

We put money into research, bringing Canada from the lowest to the highest in the G-7 in publicly funded research.

The issue now is access for students. I wonder if she can tell me what she is doing to help low income Canadians get to university or community college.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we are actually doing quite a lot. In our budget, not only did we invest a billion dollars for the infrastructure, but we also increased eligibility for the Canada student loan program.

We have made scholarships and bursaries exempt from taxes for students. We believe that if they earned the money then they should be able to put it toward their education.

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We brought in the apprenticeship incentive grant which will help students get into the skilled trades. We did not want to just take an approach that kids need to go to university or college, we brought in the apprenticeship program. I would be happy to mention a whole lot more if the member would give me the time.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, what I would say is that about a year ago the previous Liberal government introduced into the House a bill that would give \$2.2 billion over five years to make post-secondary education more affordable for low income Canadians.

If the minister thinks infrastructure is all there is to access, does the government feel any obligation to help the students most in need? Does the government care or has it just not gotten around to it yet?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, quite frankly, it is rather rich hearing these numbers coming from the members opposite. That was the government that cut \$4 billion out of post-secondary education. We need to find a little consistency.

Let me explain what we are investing in. We are investing in aboriginal post-secondary education assistance, \$304 million; Canada graduate scholarships, \$25 million; Canada education savings grants to help those with low income, \$395 million; Canada student loans, \$794 million; plus, we brought in a textbook tax credit.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the Conservative government eliminated the early learning and child care initiative altogether. The taxable \$100 a month which the government is providing is not even enough to provide for one day of child care. It costs on average \$783 per month for child care. That \$100 creates absolutely no spaces whatsoever. In fact, in Toronto, increasing poverty has been tied directly to the fact that child care spaces are not available.

Will the minister tell us that she in fact has no plan for child care for this country?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, it was the previous government that cobbled together on the eve of an election funding agreements with only three provinces that had absolutely no guarantee of creating child care space anywhere in the country.

We, on the other hand, have provided significant investment. We have provided \$100 a month to every parent with a child under the age of six to help them access whatever child care meets their needs. It might be 9 to 5 Monday to Friday or it might be staying home with mom, dad, granny or a neighbour. The parents are the real experts on child care.

We will also be creating new spaces that will be in compliance with provincial regulations and helping parents meet all their different needs.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, a year into the making and it has been working but we are losing thousands of spaces.

The government also broke a promise from the election. It said that the \$100 would not impact the child tax benefit. In fact, the government eliminated the young child supplement program, and the modest income that Canadians are now receiving does nothing to help them. There is no affordable child care to boot and the money is taxable. This gives parents absolutely no choice.

What does the minister have against children and learning and providing them with the opportunities they need to succeed?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I might ask the hon. member why she does not believe that parents are good people to raise their own kids.

No one said that we would provide 100% subsidized day care, but that is not what most Canadians want anyway. We want to respect the choices of Canadian parents, parents like yourself, Mr. Chair, so they have the flexibility to put their young children where they need to be.

I have had a lot of parents, many of whom I have never even met before, come up to me and thank me for that universal child care benefit because they said it makes all the difference in the world to their families.

•(2110)

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, the minister is giving families no choice at all. The reason that poverty is up in Toronto is because there is no child care.

The Caledon Institute says that the Conservative plan discriminates against low income families. Indeed, the \$100 per month is taxed and the less people make the more they are taxed.

Why does the minister insist on continuously punishing the more vulnerable in our society? They have no child care and they have discriminatory income support. Will the minister fight for children or not?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I think that is a little backwards. We made it very clear that the child care allowance would be taxed in the hands of the lower income spouse. We worked very hard to get agreement from all 13 provinces and territories that they would follow our lead and not include that money when the social assistance programs and parents eligibility for those programs was being calculated. We were protecting low income Canadians because that is where the help is needed most and that is where we are delivering it.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, she is not protecting low income Canadians because being taxed on the lower income means that single moms who do not have a spouse pay taxes on everything they earn. In fact, the data shows that the lower the income the higher the tax.

The government says that the \$10,000 tax incentive to create child care spaces will be unused, and we know that. The sum of \$10,000 is a mere fraction of what it costs to set up a new space. In Vancouver it would cost about \$40,000 to create a new space in child care.

Why will the minister not realize her mistake and honour the agreement with the provinces?

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Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we do not pretend to have all the answers, which is why we go to the experts. The experts on what would motivate people to create spaces are the people we want to create the spaces in the first place, businesses and community groups, including child care providers who fit into both categories. Those are the people we are consulting with and those are the people who will be leading my ministerial advisory committee that will be designing the incentives to create the spaces. They will be coming up with recommendations because they are the ones who should know what works. I look forward to seeing the results.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am not so sure I am pleased for this opportunity tonight. I am pleased, though, to join in the committee of the whole proceedings alongside the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, whom I serve as parliamentary secretary.

During the course of my remarks, I will highlight the measures Canada's new government has undertaken to support seniors, those Canadians in need of affordable housing and caregivers. These measures represent a tangible demonstration of our commitment to those most in need, our most vulnerable citizens.

First and foremost, in recognition of the important contribution our seniors have made in building Canada, we are committed to ensuring they enjoy their later years in the peace and dignity they so richly deserve. Working in conjunction with our provincial and territorial partners, as well as others serving the needs and interests of seniors, we are continually seeking to address the growing and increasingly diverse needs of our seniors population.

Key among our priorities is ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the pillars of Canada's retirement income system: the Canada pension plan and old age security. As the chief actuary confirmed, the CPP and the old age security are financially sound for the next 75 years, even after taking into account the pressures of our aging population.

At the present time, over four million seniors receive old age security benefits and over three million seniors receive CPP retirement payments. Canada's seniors receive over \$50 billion in public pension benefits each year.

Included in that figure are the 1.6 million low income seniors who annually receive the guaranteed income supplement at a total cost of \$6.5 billion. To further augment such existing support for low income seniors, the GIS was increased approximately \$18 in 2006 for single recipients and \$29 for couples.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thanks to the Liberals.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: An identical increase will again occur in January 2007, thanks to the Conservatives.

We can take pride in the fact that poverty among our seniors has significantly declined to among the lowest levels in the world.

Hon. Maria Minna: There are Liberal spaces under the agreement. You are getting rid of it.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: As Dr. Chris Sarlo of the Nipissing University School of Business and Economics has noted—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (2115)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. Let us let the hon. parliamentary secretary finish her remarks.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Chair, as Dr. Chris Sarlo of the Nipissing University, school of business and economics, has noted, the precipitous decline in senior poverty to extremely low levels is clearly one of Canada's great success stories, thanks to the Conservatives again.

Canada's new government wants all seniors to receive benefits to which they are entitled. Consequently, the Government of Canada has made a concerted and ongoing effort to inform seniors of their GIS eligibility. For instance, direct mailing and application forms, information campaigns and partnerships have been used to contact vulnerable seniors who may be difficult to reach. Likewise, in the past four years, nearly half a million preprinted applications have been sent to seniors who have not applied for the guaranteed income supplement and who might be eligible. As a result, approximately a quarter of a million seniors have been added to the guaranteed income supplement rolls.

Furthermore, in budget 2006 Canada's new government increased the maximum amount of eligible pension income that can be claimed under the pension income credit, from \$1,000 to \$2,000, effective for the 2006 and subsequent taxation years. This increase, the first since 1975, will directly benefit 2.7 million seniors receiving qualifying pension income and completely removing 85,000 pensioners from the tax rolls.

Moving forward, we continue to work on the creation of a seniors council that would be instrument in helping Canada's new government meet the challenges and opportunities of an aging population.

Through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Government of Canada plays an important role in helping seniors access and maintain the safe and affordable housing critical to ensuring they remain active members of the community. Moreover, we acknowledge many seniors want to remain in their homes as they grow older. One program that helps seniors to continue living independently in their homes is CMHC's home adaptations for seniors' independence. This program helps homeowners and landowners pay for minor home adaptations, such as handrails and lever handles on doors.

CMHC also provides broader support to assist Canadians in need of housing to acquire homes that are safe, decent and affordable. Under the residential rehabilitation assistance program, or RRAP, financial assistance is offered to low income households to improving their housing conditions. In April 2006 Canada's new government renewed funding for RRAP, along with several related housing renovation and adaptation programs, at a cost of \$128.1 million.

Business of Supply

Another key component of CMHC's assisted housing efforts is directed toward the needs of aboriginal people, both on and off reserves. Through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and CMHC, roughly \$261 million a year is provided to address the housing needs of aboriginal peoples. These funds support the construction of about 2,300 new units, the renovation of some 3,300 units and ongoing subsidies for about 25,000 units of existing rental housing.

All these programs strive to assist some of the Canadians most in need. These programs make our communities better places to live, work, learn, grow and to raise our families.

Before I conclude my remarks, I will address an issue that is becoming increasingly important, and that is caregiving.

As the former official opposition families and caregivers critic in the previous Parliament, this issue was of particular interest to me. Our aging population means that more and more Canadians in the coming years will join the nearly one million Canadians who already serve as caregivers for chronically ill family members or friends.

Canada's new government recognizes and respects the intense emotional and physical demands that caregiving involves. It also respects the tremendous contribution these often invisible heroes make to Canadian society.

Among the supports offered to such caregivers is the compassionate care benefit. A program introduced under employment insurance in 2004, this benefit enables eligible Canadians to provide care or support to a gravely ill or dying family member without the fear of jeopardizing their economic security.

● (2120)

Eligible workers have access to up to six weeks of EI income benefits when they take a temporary absence from work to provide such an essential care. However, soon after its introduction it became apparent there were certain deficiencies with the benefit, chiefly, the provision which restricted access based on outdated notions of who qualified as a caregiver. Despite the efforts of myself and many of my Conservative colleagues, especially the member from Langley, in pressuring for a revised definition of a caregiver that would allow the terminally ill to name an individual of their choice, the former Liberal government steadfastly refused.

I am proud to report that within months of taking office Canada's new government took swift action to immediately implement the necessary regulatory change to expand access to this benefit. Because of our actions, no longer is the eligibility restricted. The terminally ill now have the freedom to name the caregiver of their choice.

This change demonstrates that Canada's new government has placed on supporting caregivers. Indeed VON Canada has stated that it represents an important step in the area of caregiving, recognizing the modern family by extending to those who can claim the benefit. CARP, Canada's Association for the Fifty Plus, applauded this very welcome reform that will benefit millions of Canadians who are unpaid caregivers.

To conclude, will the minister comment on what action she is taking to ensure that human resources and social development programs provide value for money? Why does the minister believe

that taxpayers expect our government to be accountable to Canadians?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, there are a lot of aspects to social development and caregiving. I guess in some ways that is what our entire department is about. It is about taking care of Canadians, particularly when they cannot take care of themselves.

I was very pleased when we were able to announce, as one of the first things this government did, that we would expand the definition of who was eligible to be a caregiver to a terminally ill person in this country. The way the program was set up before we took office was that it had to be an immediate family member. What we said was that in today's world, all too often, people are not near family anymore. They have moved away. Perhaps people never married. There are no kids nearby who can help out.

We expanded the definition to include anyone that the caregiver chose to treat like family. Now those individuals can collect up to six weeks of employment insurance benefits while they are helping care for their friend or family member. That is a good thing. That is a very compassionate thing to do. That is one example of a lot of initiatives that the government is undertaking.

We are helping seniors in so many ways, one being with the new announcement today that we are increasing the age allowance for their tax situation. We are also allowing pension splitting, which is going to help two million Canadians right across the country. I believe that is what the number is. That is huge. Right across this country, they are going to better off because of that.

We are looking at a number of ways to help students. I spoke about several of them just a few minutes ago.

I also spoke about what we are doing for older workers who have been suddenly displaced through no fault of their own, displaced because their company was shut down, because of global market situations or for whatever reasons. We are going to be helping them, not to sit at home and feel that they are not contributing members of society, but to get them retrained and re-skilled and work with them, their communities and our other partners on economic development in their areas so that they have the opportunities to get new jobs.

Obviously we also are helping children and parents with young children to get the choice in child care that they need, whatever that is, whether it is parents staying home with the children themselves or whether it is nine to five, Monday to Friday. Perhaps it is evenings and weekends. Maybe they work part time.

I cannot tell you, Mr. Chair, how many people have thanked me for this. I have one couple at home who said that with three children under the age of six they are now going to be able to afford to have one of the parents stay home to raise the kids. That was their choice. I am just so pleased that it is going to work for them.

Business of Supply

What I am saying is that we are working to help Canadians of all origins, in all locations and in all circumstances, right across the country, because that is a good thing and that is what a responsible government should be doing. We should also be doing it responsibly. That is why we make sure we review our programs. It is to make sure that the services we provide, and the ones we are paying for, are actually getting delivered to those for whom they are intended.

As we go forward, we are going to be focusing on the labour market and helping make sure that employers can get the skilled workers they need, where they need them and when they need them, and also on making sure that our workforce has accessibility to the jobs they need.

We will be working on behalf of the disabled to help reduce barriers to employment for them. We hope to be bringing in a national disabilities act which will be working in that direction.

We are also working with aboriginals to get their schooling levels and their skill levels up. We have a number of partnerships that we are working on there.

We want to work with youth at risk, because if they are employed and earning an income, their self-respect and self-esteem go up and the incidence of crime goes down.

There is a lot that we are doing. We will continue to do it.

• (2125)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Chair, if I may, I would like to make a presentation because, judging by the answers I have heard so far, it would be better that I put forward my arguments and views.

Last week, the Minister of Labour e-mailed all members a study a few pages long, which tortures the statistics to the point of making them confess to very weak arguments against anti-strikebreaking legislation.

This eleventh-hour rotten trick of distributing the minister's study to members just a few hours before last week's historical vote failed. Indeed, 20 Conservative members, 20 of his own colleagues, voted in favour of the legislation. These members have voted with their ridings in mind. They are well aware of the merits of this legislation and they want to see it enforced in their own ridings. By the way, 166 members of this House have voted in favour of this bill at second reading.

According to the analysis carried out by the Minister of Labour, who blithely distributed it left and right, and based on other statements made publicly in this House and at committee, banning the use of replacement workers would have no positive impact on labour relations and provide no advantage. That is surprising, because the Minister of Labour and member for Jonquière-Alma voted in favour of this bill when he was the member for that riding, one of the most heavily unionized in Quebec and Canada.

This departmental analysis has extremely questionable foundations. I have taken a very close look at the figures. Using figures, arguments and data from the Canadian Labour Congress's response which, incidentally, is very well put together, I have cross-referenced

this CLC analysis with relevant data just as carefully collected and rigorously substantiated by Bloc Québécois researchers.

The minister makes several mistakes in this study, for instance, when he compares Quebec and the rest of Canada with respect to work stoppages. First of all, the study's authors claim that, in the last few years, there were more work stoppages in Quebec than in British Columbia or under federal jurisdiction. These statistics, however, explain absolutely nothing.

In fact, it is only normal that there are fewer strikes in jurisdictions in which there are no anti-scab measures, because there is no real balance of power. Therefore, employees do not really have the right to strike. Since they can be replaced by scabs, employees have no real balance of power. There is no balance—a word the minister seems to like very much—between employees' rights and those of companies.

The number of days lost per person is much lower in Quebec jurisdictions than in federal jurisdictions. That is the correct statistic. Also, we must not rely on the length of strikes or the number of labour disputes, rather, the number of working days lost per person, and establish a comparison, within the same province, between the provincial jurisdiction where anti-scab legislation exists, and the federal jurisdiction.

According to the Labour Canada database on work stoppages, between 1999 and 2004, just over 2.54 million working days were lost in Quebec because of labour disputes. During the same period, more than 7.92 million—8 million—working days were lost in the federal sector, a difference of 300%, even though the labour force under federal jurisdiction in Quebec accounts for less than 8% of Quebec's overall labour force.

I will provide another sort of statistic so that the Minister of Labour has a good grasp of the statistic in question. I will give two or three examples. This is what is known as “crossover skills”.

In 2004, when workers under federal jurisdiction in Quebec accounted for less than 8% of the overall labour force, as I mentioned earlier, they were responsible for 18% of the person-days lost during labour disputes. In addition, the Labour Canada database reveals that between 1999 and 2003, just over 1.13 million working days were lost in British Columbia. The minister should feel free to take notes. During the same period, more than 5.5 million working days were lost in the federal sector, a difference of nearly 500%.

• (2130)

As I said earlier, the best statistic is the number of person-days lost. It is not possible to compare provinces on the basis of the length or the number of labour conflicts. The situations are too different and do not give a true picture.

The studies that the minister is so fond of quoting include the Gunderson study in 1999. Can we say that this study is outdated and therefore does not reflect Canada's recent experience with replacement workers in the federal sector? The minister also likes to quote two other more recent studies: the study by Landeo and Nikitin in 2005, which is limited to the education sector, and the study by Singh, Zinni and Jain in 2005, which clearly explains, contrary to what the minister would have us believe, that using replacement workers is harmful. He will have to redo his homework.

Business of Supply

It is disturbing to see that the minister quotes several times from studies by J. Budd, one conducted in 2000 and the other in 1996. This man is a partner in one of the toughest and most openly anti-union companies in the United States. His firm—Clifton, Budd and Demaria—has consulted on various disastrous labour conflicts in the United States, where the voice of reason has been ignored and companies have opted to use search and destroy tactics against workers.

It should be noted that the minister's analysis makes absolutely no mention of the very lengthy labour disputes at Quebec companies under federal jurisdiction. Even though I have statistics and have already provided statistics, what we need to understand is that in Quebec things are clear and simple. We do not need statistics to understand that. When there is a labour dispute that is drawn out unnecessarily, or a violent labour dispute involving vandalism, it soon becomes clear that the company in question is under federal jurisdiction.

I will give you some examples. In the case of Vidéotron, the dispute lasted from May 2002 to March 2003, or 11 months. In the case of Cargill, in Baie-Comeau, the dispute lasted from 1999 to 2003, or three years. As far as Radio-Nord is concerned, a more recent example, the dispute lasted from October 2002 to August 2004, or 22 months. These are three companies under federal jurisdiction that had extremely lengthy disputes.

The minister's statistics were distorted to say what he wanted us to hear, but they do not reflect the reality we experience in Quebec.

Furthermore, the Minister of Labour points out that 97% of labour disputes are settled at the negotiating table and that less than 1.5% of the employers use replacement workers. The minister comes to the false conclusion that this proves that the status quo is satisfactory. He is mistaken. The Sims report of 1996 came to the opposite conclusion, as did the minority report prepared by Dr. Rodrigue Blouin in 1996.

Let us now talk about balance, since that is one of the minister's pet subjects. He came to our committee on October 17 or 19 to tell us that balance is the employer having the right to continue operating his business when there is a strike. That is this minister's definition of balance, but that is not it. Balance in labour relations is when pressure tactics to resolve a dispute are shared equally and fairly by the employers and the employees. In a labour dispute, employees go without their income and their work. In order to resolve disputes quickly, employers must also feel pressure by going without their production and the revenue from their production.

I had more to say, but I have a few questions, if I still have time. Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

• (2135)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: You have one minute remaining for your speech and then five minutes for questions and comments.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Let me get right to the questions.

Does the minister plan to give parliamentarians what they want by asking his government not to slow down the work in committee and to enact Bill C-257 when it is passed at third reading?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, I think all of those present in this House are well aware that union movements in this country have put a lot of pressure on all parliamentarians with respect to this bill.

I would like to remind the members that balance is important in the workplace. If we made a law that satisfied only the unions, we would have anarchy. If we made a law that satisfied only employers, we would also have anarchy. Both parties need power to maintain the balance in labour relations.

In 1977, Quebec passed its anti-scab law. In the 29 years since then, only Quebec and British Columbia have passed similar laws. If it were a good law, the other provinces would have adopted it years ago. But they have not.

In 1995, even Ontario—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Chair, I am glad I took my first 10 minutes to present my arguments, because the minister did not even answer my question. I will therefore repeat it. Perhaps he needs to hear things twice.

What I am saying is very serious, and I would like a short and serious answer. My question is clear and I would like a direct answer.

Will the minister promise not to slow down the committee's work? Will he promise to enact the bill when it is passed at third reading?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, my question for my honourable colleague is this:

Will the members of the opposition take the time to call a number of experts from both sides to hear the employers' arguments about why there should not be anti-scab legislation in Canada and the other side's arguments in favour?

I think this is important. We have to have a balance.

Mr. Yves Lessard: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The rules of the game are clear: the answer must be the same length as the question and must constitute an answer. He cannot answer with a question.

• (2140)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I appreciate the member's assistance on that. There has to be some flexibility in the length of the question and the length of the response. Often you can have a very short question on a complicated issue where the minister might need more time. In fact, the minister had not taken any more time to respond and I do not think we want to get into regulating how ministers do respond.

I recognize the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Chair, since my question had two parts perhaps it was too complicated for the minister.

I will repeat only the first part this time.

Business of Supply

First, does he promise to not slow down the work of the committee? Yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, I will reiterate my comments. I hope that, in committee, all parliamentarians will listen to the representatives of both employers and unions in order to be in a position to properly assess the advantages and disadvantages of implementing an anti-scab bill in Canada.

In my opinion, if we listen carefully to the arguments, we will ascertain that, in 1999, when parliamentarians changed the law, it was balanced—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Chair, I realize that, even when I restate my questions so that they are simpler, I do not get an answer. I do understand, however, that the minister is not making any promises and I am quite worried about what will happen next.

Since I am an incurable optimist, I will nevertheless ask my second question.

Will the minister promulgate Bill C-257 when adopted at third reading? I would like a yes or no answer.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, I cannot foresee or control the votes in this House. Decisions are made by a majority of parliamentarians. After the vote, if the bill is passed, it will go to the Senate, and we will see what happens next.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Chair, I guess I will never get a clear answer from this minister. Nevertheless, as I said, because I am always so optimistic, I will continue to talk to him about Bill C-55.

In the Estimates, I did not see adequate financial reserves to implement Bill C-55. The previous government had told us that the wage earner protection program would cost between \$30 million and \$50 million. If I divide by the number of months left in this year—because the minister told me that it was a matter of weeks—can he tell me in which part of the budget I can find the wage earner protection program for employees in businesses that have gone bankrupt?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to confirm to the hon. member that, indeed, the budget provides \$32.2 million for that purpose, for the years 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

So, \$32.2 million is indeed allocated to that purpose. In fact, \$28.7 million will be used to pay employees who lose their jobs following a bankruptcy, while \$3.5 million will be used to manage the program.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate tonight. I would like to speak to the importance of supporting the trades and encouraging apprenticeships.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources and Social Development, I have come to better understand the significant labour market challenges facing Canada during the course of this committee's employability study, specifically the testimony we heard last week as we traveled through eastern Canada, and

specifically the ones I attended in Toronto and Montreal where there were certainly some impassioned discourses with the committee.

The reasons for these challenges are well known. One is demographic. Canada's workforce is aging. Large numbers of our workers in the baby boom generation are now close to retirement age and because of the low birth rate since that era, sufficient number of new workers have not been coming into the labour market to replace them.

Another reason we are experiencing labour shortages in key trades has to do with the booming regional economies. In Alberta, for example, the economy is creating more demand for workers than available in supply. In other areas, such as B.C. or parts of central Canada, skilled construction workers are in short supply. Factors like these are coming together to produce considerable challenges for our labour market.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, within the next 25 years, we will face a skills shortage of 1.2 million workers.

According to Len Crispino, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, my home province will face a shortage of 100,000 skilled workers within the next 15 years in the manufacturing sector alone. Moreover, Mr. Crispino has noted these challenges have extended beyond what we consider traditional trades. He stated:

It isn't just tool and die makers — or plumbers — or electricians. Ontario has a diverse — and diversifying — economy. That's one of our great strengths. But it creates challenges. We love attracting new sectors to the economy...but we need to create the workers to build and expand those sectors. Look at Niagara, a world-class wine region that has a shortage of vintners and a shortage of winery technicians. And yet we know that the wine industry will need to triple its number of employees within the next 15 to 20 years.

Clearly, the Government of Canada is concerned about the situation for two fundamental reasons. First, we have a duty to ensure our national labour market works efficiently and effectively. Second, we have a responsibility to work with stakeholders to identify and help the labour and skills needs of Canadian employers now and into the future. Nowhere are these responsibilities more important than in the area of skilled trades and apprenticeships.

We have relied and continue to rely upon the skilled trades to build our great country. For example, stop for a moment to consider the extent we rely upon skilled workers and rely upon each other as a team in the process of constructing a house. As the *Calgary Herald's* Tyee Bridge noted, building a single house requires the services of about 360 tradespeople. What is more, every tradesperson is dependent upon the previous trade. Tyee Bridge went on to say:

The carpet guy can't lay carpet if the stairs guys haven't done the stringer caps, the stairs guys can't start until the drywall's done, the drywallers wait on rough-ins by the electricians, plumbers and HVAC guys.

Skilled trades themselves rely upon the apprenticeship system to train and equip the succeeding generations to carry on in this tradition, but emerging traditions and trends within the trades have brought cause for concern.

Business of Supply

A July 2006 Canadian Council on Learning apprenticeship training in Canada study made two interesting observations I would like to note today. First, among many of the skilled trades, the proportion of workers aged 55 and over is greater than that of the overall workforce. Second, the number of young workers available to replace those retiring is lower than the overall workforce. In some, the demographic trends contributing to labour market shortages are having a more pronounced impact on the trades.

The research also indicated that many young people and women are disinclined to enter the trades, mainly on account of outdated societal conventions. For far too long, young people have been counselled to avoid the trades in favour of white collar occupations. This was largely due to negative perceptions that such work was dangerous and low paying, a perception that does not bear out in practice. As Dave Benbow, president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, noted, "We as adults never discussed the trades as a career option for our children".

I look at my own family. My grandfather is 89 years old. He was involved, and still is, in the skilled trades, a small business in the automotive sector. He has 16 grandchildren, five kids, and none of them went into the trades. We see that generational divider where there are not enough young Canadians entering the skilled trades.

● (2145)

Moreover, women are not represented in the trades in sufficiently large numbers. As *Toronto Star* columnist Carol Goar remarked:

Gender roles haven't caught up to the reality of the marketplace. Although employers are willing to hire female electricians, carpenters and millwrights, many young women still consider these male occupations.

Without a doubt, Canada's new government recognizes that we must be proactive in encouraging entry into these trades. Entry into the trades traditionally occurs through apprenticeship. If we want to address these trends, we can start by encouraging apprenticeships. This is exactly what Canada's new government is doing, despite what Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty would suggest.

Budget 2006 introduced new measures to provide strong incentives for both employers to hire new apprentices and to encourage young Canadians to pursue apprenticeship training opportunities. The budget created a new apprenticeship job creation tax credit, providing employers with up to \$2,000 per apprentice for each of the first two years of their contract in a red seal trade. It also introduced an apprenticeship incentive grant to provide apprentices with \$1,000 for each of their first two years in a red seal apprenticeship program.

These two measures amount to more than a \$500 million investment over the next two years that will benefit over 100,000 apprentices annually. On top of that, we brought in a tax deduction of \$500 against the cost of tools over \$1,000 that will benefit some 700,000 tradespeople, representing an additional investment of \$155 million in the trades over the next two years by Canada's new government.

The reaction to these measures was overwhelmingly positive. Scott Macivor, chief executive officer of the Ontario Construction Secretariat, welcomed the higher profile given to the skilled trades than under the previous Liberal government stating, "We're very positive about these initiatives".

Leah Myers, president of Durham College, was quoted as saying the budget 2006 measures were "an important step toward helping Canada develop a better skilled and educated workforce that is able to compete in today's global economy".

In my own riding of Barrie, Ontario, Georgian College has a specific focus on the trades. The current Prime Minister in December visited Georgian College and told students that he was going to make this a priority. The trades were important to the Prime Minister. I can say there is a tremendous appreciation that we have a government that has kept its word and delivered for those involved in this important sector.

Peter Woodall, chair of the Automotive & Motorcycle Programs at Centennial College in Toronto lauded the emphasis placed on supporting employers and new apprentices, noting this is exactly what the industry really needs.

That is not all we are doing. As many members know, the Government of Canada is a strong supporter of the interprovincial red seal program established to provide greater mobility across Canada for skilled tradesworkers.

The preceding represented just a few examples of how Canada's new government is moving to address labour market pressures through targeted support for the trades and apprenticeships. Moreover, it is part of a broader commitment made by this government to invest in people, so that they in turn can help contribute to a more productive, competitive and sustainable future.

As I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to ask the minister to comment on the work of her department through Service Canada.

● (2150)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I wonder if we were like the official opposition when we had committee of the whole.

Hon. Judy Sgro: You were much, much worse.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I would really like to applaud the member from Barrie for her outstanding remarks. The member from Barrie has been a wonderful addition to Parliament. I find he is conscientious and industrious in the approach that he has to parliamentary duties. His constituents in Barrie have been well served.

I would like to respond on behalf of the minister and explain some of the ways Service Canada is working to make it easier for Canadians to get the programs and services they need, as well as some of its accomplishments over the past year.

Simply put, Service Canada's mandate is to improve service to Canadians. In a nutshell, the goal is to give people a single place to go for government programs and services.

Hon. Judy Sgro: It's a great Liberal program.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: It is wonderful. The idea is to bring various government programs and services together so people no longer need to run from one department to another level of government looking for what they need.

Today Service Canada offers Canadians access to more than 50 programs and services. Canadians can go to Service Canada to get a social insurance number, check up on their pensions, apply for employment insurance or fill out an application for a passport, and the list is growing. Best of all, Canadians can get access to the programs and services they need at any time and in any way they want to.

Hon. Judy Sgro : That's the way the Liberals designed it.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes, they can visit Service Canada on line, they can phone, they can write, they can visit the Service Canada centre. In just a few years we have may have reached the point where accessing all government programs and services could be as easy as just one call, one click or a visit away.

We are not quite there yet, but Service Canada is moving in that direction.

Over the past year, Service Canada has added 157 points of service to its delivery network. Most of that increase has been achieved through outreach and mobile services.

We are very fortunate tonight to have officials from the department with us here. I cannot help but wonder what they think, with all that noise that is coming from across there. These lovely ladies probably will never go into politics.

• (2155)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: We are going to try to keep the responses somewhat in relation to the question that was asked and we will keep them at least similar to the length of time it took to ask the questions.

The hon. member for Barrie.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Chair, I am fascinated by the response of the parliamentary secretary. Could I hear further from her on the great work of this Prime Minister and this government.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Chair, over the past year Service Canada has added 157 points of service to its delivery network. Most of that increase has been achieved through the new outreach and mobile services. As of September, Service Canada has had a total of 477 points of service to better serve Canadians wherever they live.

To facilitate access to programs and services, Service Canada has also brought together the 1 800 O-Canada telephone line and 23 other call centres.

I thought it is a good idea and I am glad that we have Service Canada for the increased number of points of service. It is a remarkable achievement in itself and I am confident there are more savings as we—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Barrie.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Chair, I appreciated the response from the Parliamentary Secretary.

It is interesting to hear the Liberals make remarks from across the floor when for 13 years skilled trades were not a focus. I heard it referenced as 12 years and 2 months and I think a lot of Canadians would have preferred that it was even shorter than that.

Would the parliamentary secretary to expand on what Service Canada also offer.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Chair, I think Service Canada was an excellent idea. I am glad we are going to implement it. I will say it was not looking good for a while.

However, one of the things we need to do is ensure that we involve the provinces and the municipalities so we truly have a one stop shop. I was encouraged when I met with Service Canada in Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan they do—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: That is the end of the time slot. We are going to try to keep it moving here.

The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke North and the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Is the minister aware of the letter from the leader of the Conservative Party, dated January 18 to the Premier of Ontario?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, no, I am not aware of any such letter.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Mr. Chair, as a member of Parliament from Ontario, I always made it a point to fully appreciate the agreements that were made by my leader and my prime minister.

Let me explain the letter. The letter is from Stephen Harper to Dalton McGuinty, dated January 18, which is during the election, which commits—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I remind the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora not to use member's names, but their riding or title.

• (2200)

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Mr. Chair, it says, “we will be fully funding this agreement”; that is the Canada-Ontario agreement.

When will the government honour the Canada-Ontario agreement, the labour market partnerships in particular?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as the hon. member can recognize, I am sure, the LMPA with Ontario is part of the broader agreement. Perhaps she heard in the House today that the finance minister acknowledged the program was truly and fully funded.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Mr. Chair, maybe the Minister of Finance should indicate that to the minister responsible, Minister Bentley, that this agreement will be fully funded. I am sure he would be happy to hear that. As of today, he had not heard that this funding would flow toward the Ontario agreement and the labour market partnership agreements.

My second question is this. If he is going to honour those agreements, is he going to honour the labour market partnership agreements for Saskatchewan and Manitoba as well?

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as the House is aware, we are here to discuss the programs for Human Resources and Social Development. Just now the member for Newmarket—Aurora was asking me about the intentions and the plans of the Minister of Finance.

I am sure she is well aware that I am not in a position to comment on the actions or the intentions of the Minister of Finance, even as they relate to this department. She has acknowledged that this is his decision.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Mr. Chair, let me simplify the question. Will this minister commit to funding the labour market partnership agreements for Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba? The Prime Minister, the leader of the Conservative Party, indicated in the last election that those commitments, those agreements, would be fully honoured.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I am sure one of the concerns the hon. member has is that education and training skills are developed.

I would like to read something if I may. It says:

It is in large measure lack of federal leadership that has made post-secondary education the poor second cousin in public policy and the country will pay a price for that lack of vision. As a reflection of Liberal priorities, the budget abandons education.

The LMPAs are about education. The hon. member Newmarket—Aurora made that statement.

Ms. Belinda Stronach: Mr. Chair, let me ask that question again. Will the minister commit to honouring part of the Ontario agreement, the labour market partnership agreement, that was signed in November with the Ontario government for \$1.4 billion over six years, which addresses apprenticeship programs, new Canadians, literacy, workplace skills development, programs for aboriginal Canadians, barriers to employment for older workers and persons with disabilities?

Will the government honour those agreements that were signed with the Ontario government, with the Saskatchewan government and with the government of Manitoba?

Ms. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I indicated to the member just a few moments ago, the finance minister indicated in the House today that the Canada-Ontario agreement would be fully funded.

Given the broader fiscal balance issue, no decision has been made on the Manitoba and Saskatchewan situation.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, earlier I heard the minister talk about how she wanted to focus on the labour market, ensuring workers had the skills they needed.

I heard the member for Barrie say that we needed to encourage the trades and apprenticeships and he talked about the shortage of workers. As I listened, I could not believe my ears. At the same time those members are saying that, they are cutting programs that are accomplishing exactly those objectives.

We just officially opened a training centre in my riding of Etobicoke North. It is the Sheet Metals Workers International Association, Local 285. It benefited from the training centre infrastructure fund, which enabled it to buy a welding shop and some other equipment to the tune of about \$180,000. That program

has been unceremoniously cut. I know my colleague from York South—Weston had a number of projects in his riding that were unceremoniously cut.

How can the minister rationalize those cuts when she says she wants to focus on the labour market and developing the skill sets that are needed?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, Canada's new government has taken decisions that will make substantial investments in developing the skills of people in the skilled trades. These are investing in the people through our apprenticeship incentive grant, our employers incentive grants to hire employees and our the tool tax deduction for those working in the trade. That will benefit 800,000 tradespeople.

● (2205)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Chair, I do not follow that rationale at all. Maybe it is the same rationale for cutting the summer work student exchange program, a program where young people could get work experience and travel across the country.

I know in my riding of Etobicoke North I have had young people from outside come into Etobicoke North and people from Etobicoke North went across Canada. It is a great opportunity for them to get some work experience and see part of the country.

Why would the minister cut a valuable program like that?

Hon. Diane Finley: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, the hon. member did not hear when I explained earlier that one of the problems with the summer works program, as well intentioned as it is, is that it is providing benefits right across the country, regardless of need.

Frankly, we have extremely tough times filling jobs in high employment areas like Calgary, Edmonton and Fort McMurray. Employers there were getting these same subsidies to hire students when they could not even hire students without a subsidy. We will be refocusing that money on helping the students who really need the help getting jobs, those in rural areas, those facing disabilities and those at risk.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, earlier the minister talked about the guaranteed income supplement, a Liberal initiative, and increases that our Liberal government brought in.

Earlier this year, roughly 148,000 of the 1.6 million guaranteed income supplement recipients were advised in late June that they would be cut off because they did not complete the application or a tax form process or because their income status had changed.

How many of the 148,000 seniors, who received the warning letters, have had their GIS cut off?

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we are making every effort to ensure that all Canadians who are entitled to GIS receive it. We send out four notices a year. We rely on income tax filings for information. We send four reminders to encourage seniors, who are in need of this, to apply. They must apply because every year the financial circumstances change.

We are looking at technological ways to improve that because we want to get as close to 100% as we possibly can.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, provincial and community sources in the province of Manitoba have told many people in the province that at a recent federal-provincial-territorial meeting, the minister advised her counterparts, when she was pressed on the creation of child care spaces, "That under this administration there would not be one red cent go to a program or service that would support women from being anywhere but in the home".

Is this the rationale for the cancellation of the early learning child care initiative and is this reflective of the government's ideology?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I categorically deny ever making a statement like that. If the member has any evidence to the contrary, please present it to me. I have never taken that view and I certainly never expressed that view because I do not believe in it.

What I said was here would not be any money going toward operating costs of the child care spaces that we intended to create. We have made it very clear from the beginning that our intention is to provide capital money to get the spaces created.

What we believe in is freedom of choice, freedom for parents to choose the child care that meets their the needs of their families.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, there is no choice if there is no choice, and what the minister indicates she said is not what was heard.

I want to move on to the labour market agreement that my colleague asked about. The \$153 million in cuts is not the only attack on the most vulnerable.

As we heard earlier, the labour market partnership agreement signed by the federal government with the province of Manitoba in November 2005 has not been honoured. We have heard much tonight about support for aboriginals, for persons with disabilities, for immigrants and for apprenticeship programs. This is what that program was designed to do and yet it has not been honoured.

What plan does the minister have to support the labour market agreement in the province of Manitoba? She indicated that the Ontario agreement will be honoured. Will this agreement with Manitoba be honoured?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I made clear, that is within the discussion of the fiscal balance. My colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, is undertaking those discussions. Until that conversation is held and settled, I am not in a position to give the hon. member opposite the assurances for which she is looking.

• (2210)

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, what I am hearing the minister opposite say is that Ontario is far more important than the province of Manitoba and the province of Saskatchewan. That is shameful.

Given that 250 first nations currently do not have regulated child care and that first nations were not adequately consulted during the child care spaces initiative regional consultations, what is the next step for the minister's department in terms of working with first nations to work toward the creation of child care spaces for first nations?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, in fact we are working to find the best way to create spaces on reserve and off reserve for aboriginals. That is part of the mandate that has been assigned to the ministerial advisory committee on the space creation initiatives. I am looking forward to seeing the results of those consultations.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, there is currently an important lack of trained first nations early childhood development service providers. Given that the Conservative government's mandate for employment is related to employment and training as well as child care for first nations and Inuit communities, how are the department and the minister planning to work with first nations to overcome this training gap in early childhood development?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, one of the things we want to do when we create these spaces is make them sustainable. That means having qualified people working within them. We are working with the various programs. We have several within my department that help aboriginals learn.

I was speaking with a group a few months ago. We are looking at a partnership where we could do just what the member is suggesting within the context of creating new child care spaces. These people are really excited because they believe that the \$100 a month aboriginals are receiving for their children under the age of six through the universal child care benefit will go a long way to help them.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as part of the Conservative government's \$18 million cut to literacy, British Columbia, and in particular Literacy BC, will lose support for a number of specific activities, including training and development for literacy practitioners in the field and a project working with community literacy groups to define and measure outcomes for their work. This government cut will undermine the ability of literacy groups to measure and to be held accountable for the results.

Why does the government keep talking about accountability and then turn around and cut programs that create accountability?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, all existing commitments are going to be honoured when it comes to literacy. Programs that are currently receiving money will receive it until the end of their term because this is important to us.

Business of Supply

Going forward, we are going to be exercising more stringent control over projects that are funded, for the simple reason that we want to make sure we are targeting our national priorities, getting value for money and funding programs that achieve real results.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear here tonight.

I especially want to thank both our ministers for coming before us tonight and taking the opportunity to enlighten the members of this House about the vision they have for this department and this country.

I am here today to talk about something that the human resources committee has agreed is a very important issue for our country. As we all acknowledge, our economy works best when everyone is participating and working to their potential. Currently, Canada's labour market is among the most resilient in the OECD. With among the highest participation in employment rates, we also have one of the highest post-secondary education completion rates.

While these figures bode well for our future prosperity, Canada's new government recognizes that there is always room for improvement. Where can we improve? Where do we need to focus our attention? A quick scan of the newspapers from across this country paints a particular picture.

The following are examples of some headlines I have selected from coast to coast: "New Brunswick faces labour crunch", *Moncton Times and Transcript*; "Trade sectors vying for trained workers", *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*; "Help (desperately) wanted", *Winnipeg Free Press*; "Jobs going begging", *Regina Leader-Post*; "Seller's market is looming for talented job seekers", *Vancouver Sun*; and "Job fair garners little interest", the *Calgary Herald*.

I could go on all night about just my own small riding on how important a topic this is. There can be no doubt that we face certain labour market challenges, especially given Canada's declining birth rate alongside an aging population. While our labour force grew 200% in the last 50 years, in the next 50 years growth is expected to plummet to a mere 5%.

Another challenge that we must face is increased global competition, including that from emerging competitors such as China and India. This increased global competition has resulted in an escalating search for talent and skills.

In Canada, labour and skill shortages are challenges that are being increasingly reported from coast to coast and across multiple sectors of our economy.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in my home province of Alberta, where the provincial government is forecasting a human capital deficit of 100,000 people over the next 10 years. That is right: 100,000 people over the next 10 years.

As a recent *Calgary Sun* article noted, "In city malls, sales banners vie for space with help wanted signs while radio ads troll for recruits almost as much as for buyers". In my riding alone, there are 8,000 to 10,000 new jobs being projected in the next five years.

This is a major labour shortage and a major issue for those employers that are trying to continue to help promote our Canadian

economy. Indeed, a 2006 survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that more than 80% of small business owners in the province had difficulty finding workers. These pressures have made the recruitment and retention of skilled labour an exceedingly pressing concern, especially in Alberta's oil and gas sector.

According to Mr. Ali, president of Petro Staff International, oil and gas companies have a limited timeframe to make hiring choices. "They have to make a quick assessment within hours of getting a resumé, because there are 10 other companies looking at that resumé," he says.

Such realities have ratcheted up the cost of doing business. Since 2002, the average hourly wage has gone up by 10% nationally. In Alberta, it has gone up 17.4%.

Canada's new government recognizes the importance of taking steps to address our labour market challenges by taking concrete action in three key areas: first, boosting the quantity of workers; second, enhancing the quality of their skills; and third, strengthening our economic union.

In optimizing the quantity of workers, we recognize the need to increase the participation of those presently under-represented in the workforce, particularly aboriginal Canadians, persons with disabilities, recent immigrants and older workers.

That is why I am proud to say that our new government is taking concrete steps to meet the labour market challenges that our country currently faces.

Let me briefly illustrate a few examples that highlight what Canada's new government is doing in advancement of such objectives.

● (2215)

Just recently, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development approved three-quarters of a million dollars in funding to help increase aboriginal Canadian participation in Alberta's trades and apprenticeships. This is particularly important in my riding of Westlock—St. Paul.

Through the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, we invest over \$220 million annually to support provincial labour market programs and services for people with disabilities.

We have also committed to setting up a national credential recognition agency, ensuring faster integration for qualified, internationally trained recent immigrants so that they can more fully contribute to Canada's economic prosperity.

Business of Supply

Our government recently announced the targeted initiative for older workers. This initiative clearly demonstrates our commitment to older workers, because Canada's new government values their talents and skills and recognizes the importance of doing all we can to retain, retrain and reintegrate older workers into our labour market. In conjunction with the provinces and territories, this new \$70 million initiative will provide income support for older workers while investing in skills assessment and upgrading along with work experience to help older workers remain active and productive participants in our labour market.

We are also encouraging our youth in their pursuit of post-secondary education, either at community colleges, private institutions or universities. In budget 2006, we made it easier for young people to gain access to learning by introducing a new textbook tax credit for both full time and part time students and expanding eligibility criteria for students seeking Canada student loans by reducing the amount parents need to contribute to their children's education.

I have talked to a lot of parents about this issue. They say that if we can reduce the amount they have to pay for their children's education just a little bit, it would make life a lot easier for them. They are average, everyday Canadians.

We have also introduced an exemption of scholarship and bursary income for taxes. This helps the post-graduate students in particular.

In pursuit of improving the quality of our workforce, in budget 2006 we also announced important measures making apprenticeship and the skilled trades more affordable and accessible. The apprenticeship job creation tax credit encourages employers to give young workers an opportunity by providing them with a tax credit of up to \$2,000 for each of the first two years of their participation in a red seal designated apprenticeship.

Likewise, commencing in January 2007, the apprenticeship incentive grant will provide prospective apprentices with \$1,000 for the successful completion of each of their first two years in a red seal apprenticeship program. Moreover, we also introduced a \$500 tax deduction against the cost of tools in excess of \$1,000 required as a condition of employment. Taken together, these three measures will benefit over 800,000 apprentices and tradespeople per year.

Finally, our government recognizes the importance of a strong economic union in Canada, one that supports flexible labour mobility across sectors and regions. A key tool in this respect is our work with the sector councils to increase pertinent labour market information. For example, the construction sector council has created a labour market information forecasting model that informs and supports long range human resource decision making.

We also play a leadership role in resolving the interprovincial barriers in regulated professions and trades, actively supporting the interprovincial standards red seal program in the skilled trades.

In addition, the Minister of Industry and his provincial counterparts recently committed to an ambitious action plan to improve labour mobility across Canada. By the spring of 2009, it is expected that all existing regulated occupations will comply with the labour mobility obligations of the agreement on internal trade, allowing

Canadians the freedom to work and live wherever they wish without restrictions. That is very key.

This also demonstrated Canada's new government's commitment to working with our provincial partners in a collaborative manner in this area. As even NDP premier of Manitoba Gary Doer admitted:

This has been debated in our country since 1994 so this is a significant step forward to get action on this item. Labour mobility in Canada will be quite different 30 months from now.

Canada's new government is clearly working on many fronts toward a more efficient labour market, one that can adjust quickly to new realities so employers can fill jobs and workers can take advantage of job opportunities.

● (2220)

As I conclude, I would like to ask the minister to further elaborate on what initiatives Canada's new government is taking to encourage more Canadians to enter into apprenticeships and the skilled trades.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for that fine presentation of some of the things that Canada's new government is doing to promote the skilled trades and participation in them.

What he did not mention was that we did all this within the first 100 days of taking office. We are investing over \$500 million in these bold new initiatives to encourage people to become apprentices, and we anticipate to take up to 100,000 apprentices between these two programs. That is really a good start.

We have just announced another program for which we are providing support. It is women building futures. It is in conjunction with the Canada-Alberta affordable housing program and Western Economic Diversification.

● (2225)

The Deputy Speaker: The minister's answer is supposed to be approximately the same length as the question. It was a very brief question. The answer is already considerably longer than the question so perhaps the member for Westlock—St. Paul has another question.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I would like to hear the minister continue on that very important topic.

Business of Supply

First I want to say how much admiration I have for the minister, Mr. Chair. I sit on the human resources and skills development committee and I have had the opportunity to do a little bit of work and a little bit of research into this. I found out through my own research that it took five ministers and ministers of state in the former Liberal government to do what the minister is doing now. Actually, I do not know if any of them got re-elected so I will go to a different question.

Could the minister please give the House a recap of the 2006-07 report on plans and priorities?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the planned spending reflected in the RPP is \$79.7 billion. That is up \$4.9 billion over 2005-06. Of that increase, there is a \$3.6 billion increase in statutory payments, an increase of \$1.1 billion in the Canada pension plan, an increase of \$220 million in other statutory payments and an increase of \$158 million for planned employment insurance account benefits and administration spending. There will be an increase of \$71 million in consolidated revenue operating expenditures and an increase of \$24 million in voted grants and contributions. These increases are going to be offset by net decreases in other programs.

We are very pleased with the proposals with which we are going forward because they are in the best interests of all Canadians, providing benefits and value for money spent.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I would like to say, as this is my first opportunity to speak in committee of the whole, that I am very proud to be a part of a government that is actually getting things done, as we promised. We are getting things done with the universal child care benefit. The minister has got more things done in the first six months of her term than the former Liberal government got done in 13 years. It is very important to mention that.

I would just like to give the minister my remaining time to talk a little bit more about the apprenticeship and training programs that we are putting forward and some of the things that we can look forward to in this department.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his fine words and his generous words.

I would like to share a little information about women building futures, a new program to which I referred a few minutes ago. We have invested over \$3.4 million from the Canada-Alberta affordable housing program and another \$850,000 from Western Economic Diversification in a program that is going to help women succeed in the construction trades. It is going to help hundreds of low income women prepare for entry into construction related jobs and apprenticeships.

We are really excited about this program because it gets women out of the traditional thinking and into jobs where they may not have been historically. That is a good thing. We all need to broaden our horizons that way. In fact, the program will allow 400 women each year to access the 16 week journeywomen start program which will provide apprentice ready employees to the construction trades. It actually goes beyond that. This will allow them to expand their programs—

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the minister but her time has expired.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Chair, I asked the parliamentary secretary some questions last night and unfortunately she failed to answer them. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the minister the same questions in the hope of getting a response and not just a repetition of the same old speaking points that the parliamentary secretary used.

On October 25 I asked the minister for her funding plans for SCPI for the 2007 to 2009 fiscal years. The minister stated that this program is still under review. It was also indicated by the President of the Treasury Board that the government does not intend to cut SCPI. There are several things on which I would like clarification.

I read the financial tables from Treasury Board. Could the minister please explain, if there is no intended cut, where the money for SCPI is found, or where money for another federal homelessness program is? I cannot find any indication in the budget or the estimates as to where this money has been allocated.

In a recent release from the minister, she announced four new projects, which is great for those communities, but what about the remainder of Canada? Where is the core funding for SCPI?

● (2230)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the reason these numbers do not appear in the RPPs is, as I explained, the decision has not yet been made whether to continue with SCPI or with some other program that would be even better in helping the homeless.

As I have explained several times this evening in fact, we are looking at SCPI. We are using it, because we want to make sure that there is programming, but we also want to take this opportunity to see if there is something better. I would hope that the hon. member would be all for improving the existing programs.

As for the second part of her question, we did announce recently four new projects that had been funded. As the member knows, SCPI is allocated on a project basis. Those are four of many programs that have been funded and approved lately. The money is flowing. All of the money that was originally allocated to this program is still available, plus we have added \$37 million in additional funding that was unspent by the previous government. That money is available too.

There is a process through which projects have to apply for funding. It works its way up from the local level to us and once agreements have been signed, the money flows. Nothing has been changed in the process since the Liberals ran it before.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, the minister announced \$1 million for four projects. That does not tell me anything in terms of all the rest of the projects.

Business of Supply

There is no money indicated in the estimates for future projects. I want to know what is happening to homelessness projects beyond March 31, 2007. I have seen nothing but cuts to the program. The truth is that right now, these programs which deliver services to vulnerable youth, to mentally ill people who need help and support, are closing down. They need to be able to plan for the future. There are projects in my riding that are prepared to close their doors on December 1 because they do not know where the money for the next year is coming from.

I want to hear from the minister where that money is in the allocations. I do not want vague promises about programs that may be created in the future. I want to know about what is in the works right now.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I think we are working at cross-purposes here. This evening we are here discussing the estimates for this year's spending, not next year's. Next year's program spending has not yet been determined. The hon. member has received numerous assurances that we are going to continue with supporting the homeless. We just have not decided how yet.

We are trying to improve upon this program if it is possible, but we are funding numerous programs right across the country, good programs such as the Native Men's Residence shelter facility in Toronto and the Helping Spirit Lodge Society in Vancouver.

The announcements I made recently were just four examples of many, many good programs that are going on across the country, programs that I would like to see continued. I want to make sure that we are supporting those programs in the best way possible. When we prepare the numbers for next year, those numbers will be included.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, the minister is missing the point. The agencies are closing down now. They cannot wait. They have to be able to plan for the future. This is not something that can be put together at the last minute.

These are agencies that have people's lives in their hands. They need to know when the money is coming. They need to know about the future beyond March 2007. This is not a game of semantics. This is about what will happen when SCPI is ended in March 2007.

These are agencies that need to know now. I want the minister to tell us now what is going to happen.

• (2235)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I said, the funding is there this year. We have increased the funding by \$37 million. The member asked where she could see that. It is on page 96 of the RPP. She can feel free to look it up there.

We are under an obligation in the House to tell the truth. If I were to tell the hon. member about some program for next year that has not yet been decided on, that would not be the responsible thing to do in the House, nor would it be a responsible thing to inform Canadians of. We are evaluating the program while we are delivering it and we are looking for even better programming, if that is possible.

I expect that the hon. member, given the number of times she and her party criticized previous Liberal programs, would like to see us try to improve help to homeless people because they need it and deserve it.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, I can see I am not getting anywhere with this line of questioning. The minister does not seem to understand that these so-called better programs will not exist if all of the agencies close their doors in December of this year. At any rate, I will continue.

The minister has also claimed that she met with homelessness advocates and groups. I would like the minister to tell me which groups she has consulted. I also held a round table just last week and no one at the round table mentioned meeting with the minister. These were groups that work on the ground every day to help the homeless and people at risk. Who were they and when did she consult with them?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we meet with a lot of people. I meet with a lot of people and so do my officials. I do not divulge the details of my personal meetings because many of the people with whom I meet regard them as private meetings and I respect their privacy. I think that is only fair and reasonable.

I can tell the member that we did have a round table in September here in Ottawa with officials and my office.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, I did not ask the minister to divulge anything personal and private. I just asked who these groups were that she met with. I simply want to know if she is talking to the same people that I am talking to because I am getting an entirely different message than what is being indicated here.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, even identifying people with whom I have spoken could be considered an intrusion into their privacy. Quite frankly, I respect their privacy and intend to continue doing so, but that does not mean that I cannot listen, because I do. We have had a round table meeting. I have met regularly with a lot of people because this issue is important.

Some people think that homelessness only affects the big cities in our country and that is not true. It is not true. That is why we have programs even in rural areas for the homeless. I would like to think that the hon. member is as concerned about rural homelessness as she is about homelessness in the urban centres. Even in my area there is an issue with the homeless and we are trying to address that as well.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, I am still looking for answers.

I have two additional questions on housing that came out of the parliamentary secretary's comments last night. The parliamentary secretary stated that the Conservative government is now reviewing policies, approaches, partnerships and delivery models and that Conservatives are taking action. I understand that reviewing programs is important and that the Conservative government is trying to desperately differentiate itself from the former Liberal government.

Business of Supply

The SCPI program won an award at the United Nations for best practices. This is an international award winning program. How many more months does it need to be reviewed? Is the Conservative government stalling and what does it hope to achieve by prolonging this review?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we could have said right at the beginning that we do not know the program, that we cannot trust it and that we should cancel it but we chose not to do that because helping the homeless is important to us as a new government. In the very early days we said that we would extend this program simply because it was there and it was the best we had to work with.

However, that does not mean that it is the best it can be. It means that we have an obligation to the homeless and to Canadians to see if there are more effective ways. Are there ways that we can be getting at the root causes of homelessness? Rather than treating homelessness itself, what about eliminating the root causes? Would that not be a good option?

I would hope the hon. member would support that notion because those are some of the options we are considering. We have the time to do this. We are sensitive to the time lines and the dependency of various groups. We have five months before the program runs out. We kept it going last year and we have every intention of continuing to support the homeless this year.

• (2240)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, I could not agree more. Let us get to the root of the problem.

I would suggest that one of the most salient solutions is a national affordable housing program for this country, very much like the one that we had beginning in the early seventies when a minority NDP government pushed the Liberals to bring in a national housing program.

When can we expect that permanent solution? When can we expect to get at root causes of homelessness by installing a national affordable housing program in this country?

Hon. Diane Finley: In fact, Mr. Chair, we have several programs for affordable housing. CMHC provides \$2 billion a year in support of some 633 low income households in terms of social housing. We also announced \$1.4 billion this year in the 2006 budget to go toward social housing and three different trusts for the provinces and territories for northern housing and for aboriginals off reserve. We are doing a lot to help Canadians secure their homes.

CMHC also has other programs, such as the 5% minimum requirement for a down payment, so that Canadians can access home ownership on their own. We also provide significant rental housing. I was recently—

The Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, I heard the list but this is piecemeal. I want to know when we will have a national affordable housing program that is cohesive and that actually prevents and helps those who are homeless.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I just said, we already have a program. There are 633 low income families out there right now who are being helped directly just through the one program, plus there are the other programs that we are administering on and off reserve.

The new trust is a one time strategic investment that we are making to get over homelessness. It is an investment in our communities and in our citizens, providing safe, affordable housing for them.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, there are 200,000 homeless Canadians in this country and we need something more substantive than that.

I would like to ask the minister about a program in Toronto that I am very concerned about. It is called the PAID program, which stands for Partners for Access and Identification. It was funded under SCPI but those funds have evaporated. As a result, it will be scaling back and laying off workers as of December 1.

This project serves 1,200 people each year and it is crucial. It is an identification replacement program. As I am sure the minister is well aware, without ID, people cannot work and they cannot find a place to live.

By allowing such a program to shut down there will be more people on the streets of Toronto this winter, leaving the burden of housing to the police and the hospitals. This is much less cost effective than funding the program that helps people get off the street and participate in society.

By allowing—

The Chair: I am sorry again to interrupt the hon. member for London—Fanshawe but if the minister is going to be able to respond she must respond now. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, unfortunately, we have a great need for assistance with homelessness in this country.

As a result, we have almost 400 different funding partners with whom we work. Unfortunately, I am not aware of the details of all of these programs. I am not aware of the specific program to which the member is referring but if she would like to approach me outside of the chamber I would be happy to check into the details of it for her.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would first like to mention that I will be sharing my time with some of my colleagues, namely, the hon. members for Churchill, Richmond and Labrador.

Yesterday, during the most recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the minister came to answer some questions. It was certainly very difficult to get any answers.

I will therefore start today by asking some relatively simple questions and I need only simple answers.

I would like the minister to tell me the following. Does she know the number of weeks it takes for workers who are eligible for employment insurance to receive their first cheque?

Business of Supply

• (2245)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we make every effort to get the cheques out to EI claimants as quickly as possible. We do have a 28 day standard and we try to stay within that at all times. Unfortunately, from time to time there are great peaks in demand, particularly seasonally, for example, in agricultural areas, and at that time we do take measures to deal with the situation so people get their benefits within the 28 days.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, given that the minister does not know, perhaps this explains why there were more departments and ministers in the past. It meant that ministers were more likely to know what was going on in their department.

For the minister's information, it takes eight weeks for an unemployed worker to receive the first EI cheque.

Since it takes eight weeks, I have another question for the minister. How would she feel about having absolutely no income to pay for her rent, her heating, her groceries and to be able to feed her children? Could the minister accept this in her day-to-day life?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, eight weeks is a very high number but it is an exception. Our performance rate shows that 80% of EI claimants receive their cheque within 28 days. We are putting in a lot of effort to get that higher than 80%. However, unfortunately that is the system we inherited from the previous government.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, if it is an exception, then I invite the minister to actually come to my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche, to come to New Brunswick, where the average waiting period is eight weeks. It is not 28 days, it is eight weeks.

People have to wait up to eight weeks to get their first cheque.

My question will be brief. Does it take so long because this minister and her department are waiting and are going to centralize services and people in specific regions, and leave the rural areas of our country and of our province without the necessary resources?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, it is exactly the contrary. We have improved our standard of delivery to 80% within 28 days since the departments were combined. Last year, when I was sitting on that side of the House and those people were over here, people in own riding were waiting 10 to 12 weeks when there were five departments handling this portfolio.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I would just like to keep talking about employment insurance, because it is a very important issue.

Some members, namely those representing Kitchener—Conestoga or Fort McMurray—Athabasca, came up with an idea. They are asking the department to have a plan, a system to transfer people from a high unemployment area to other regions of the country.

Does the minister have the same vision for people in the Atlantic region? Does she want to take people from the Atlantic provinces, who are able to live at home, and make them work elsewhere in our country? Does she want to more or less deport people from the Atlantic region to other regions of the country, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we are trying to ensure that employers have access to the skilled workers they need and that workers have access to the jobs where their skills can be used. There are a number of ways to achieve that. One that I have mentioned several times this evening is through economic development. I have several colleagues who are working on economic development, particularly in vulnerable communities. We hope to implement our older workers initiative so that jobs can be created for them. However, we need to break down the barriers of people moving from one area to another and not having their credentials recognized within this country.

• (2250)

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is passing strange that the minister recently spent \$3,000 to fly to Winnipeg, Manitoba for a symbolic \$100 cheque presentation, which, I might add, would have covered 30 universal child care benefit payments.

In my riding of Churchill, Manitoba, dozens of communities, including first nations, towns and cities, have lost child care spaces and have no indication or consultation that there may be support forthcoming for child care spaces after March 31, 2007.

They maintain that early learning and child care spaces, which currently are available, will not be available after March 31, 2007. Why did she not make the announcement here in Ottawa and spend the \$3,000 consulting with even one of the groups that provides early learning and child care in rural Manitoba?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, between myself, my officials, my department and the ministerial advisory committee, we are consulting with Canadians right across the country on how best to design the incentives to create the new child care spaces, the ones that the Liberals promised for 13 years but, oops, did not deliver. We are working on that.

Quite frankly, when we presented that symbolic cheque that was to ensure parents knew this program was available to them.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Chair, the people in my riding relied on the national child care strategy to build spaces.

On the pressing matter of the precarious feature of the early learning and child care spaces, the minister cannot tell us how the government proposes to address the tax credit proposal to build child care spaces within first nations that have a different tax environment and are the fastest growing demographic in the country.

Business of Supply

The minister has identified that a ministerial advisory committee exists to examine the development of child care spaces. Would the minister tell us how many members of that committee are first nations?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we do not do racial profiling when we put together a committee. What we do is we engage experts who have a compassion within the subject area.

The hon. members may want to listen to what I am about to say. We have also consulted with aboriginal Canadians in regional meetings. We have had two meetings with the AFN. My officials launched aboriginal specific consultations two weeks ago to ensure we understood their needs and try to find the best way to meet those needs.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Chair, it would be nice to get an answer.

The Manitoba-Canada labour market partnership agreement was a valuable resource for the people in my riding as well. It was designed to address current and emerging labour market challenges and to create an inclusive labour market. It meant \$129 million over five years in Manitoba.

For youth at risk, aboriginal youth, who had programs to develop literacy skills and essential skills that would give them the opportunity to step into the labour force, the loss of their programs is devastating.

Would the minister explain why she has not honoured this agreement?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as I explained to the hon. member's colleagues a little while ago, the discussions about those agreements are resting right now within the department of the Minister of Finance. They will be discussed and are being discussed in the context of the fiscal balance. I am sure those arrangements will be made as soon as possible.

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Chair, does the minister remember that during the campaign seniors issues were a big thing in the Conservative Party's platform? Does the minister remember that item in her party's platform?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I am not sure I understand the question as to whether I remember a specific item or another item.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Mr. Chair, the minister does not remember one thing in the campaign platform that supports seniors during the campaign. I can understand that.

I want to remind the minister that during the campaign the Conservative Party said that it would support seniors. What did it do? It eliminated the secretary of state for seniors and denied seniors a seat at the cabinet table. Is that how the minister's government supports seniors?

• (2255)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, one thing we did commit to in our platform, another promise made another promise kept, is the creation of a seniors council to ensure that the interests of seniors are not only recognized, but respected. We will be drawing on that and making an announcement on that in the future. I can assure the hon. member that seniors are important to us. That is why we are doing this. That is why we gave them the tax relief yesterday.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Mr. Chair, I would like to remind the minister that under that platform was a promise to seniors that the government would not add tax to the income trust. The Conservatives have just broken that promise. I would like to ask the minister, did she object when the cabinet talked about this issue?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is asking me to breach the confidentiality of cabinet. I am sorry but I am not prepared to do that.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Mr. Chair, since the minister did not object to the added tax on the income trust, I would like to ask her something that she claimed to know. She said she would develop the seniors council. How much money has been allocated to that seniors council and when will she establish that council?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, that money will be coming from existing resources within the department.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the minister said that the miserable Conservative price of a cup of coffee cuts will not have any impact on literacy programs at the grassroots level. How can the minister square this statement with the fact that partners in learning is a Labradorian's right?

The Port Hope Simpson learning centre along the coast of Labrador, with at least eight other literacy organizations across Labrador, is closing its doors. Does the minister even know what impacts the cuts are having on literacy programs?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, literacy and getting people to read, making sure they can read, write and count is important to us. It is a fundamental thing for creating a society where we have people who can be gainfully employed. We are honouring all existing commitments so that any programs—

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. minister, the hon. member for Richmond.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Mr. Chair, I am really disappointed that, after 10 months in her job, the minister does not remember a damned thing about this issue. The Conservatives do not remember a thing about a tax on seniors and they did not do anything about it. The only thing the minister remembers is the seniors council. She does not know how much will be allocated to it and she does not know when it will be established. I am very disappointed by her performance.

Hon. Diane Finley: I am sorry, Mr. Chair, I could not hear the questions because of the noise. Can I ask the hon. member to repeat the question, please?

Hon. Raymond Chan: Certainly, Mr. Chair. I am very disappointed that the minister, after 10 months in her job, does not know about a single item that the Conservatives promised during the campaign for seniors. The only thing that she remembers is the seniors council. She does not know how much money she is allocating for that and she does not know when it will be established.

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, regarding the seniors council, we are not creating a whole new department to do this. This will be based on volunteers. We are meeting with people now to see who will be involved. The fact that I am not announcing it yet is simply because we are not ready to make an announcement yet. The government has a habit of announcing things when they are done, not when we are only planning to do them.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will ask a short question regarding employment insurance.

If it is true that the minister wants to help seasonal workers, is she prepared to support my bill to eliminate the two-week waiting period in order to give seasonal workers a sense of pride and a chance to survive?

• (2300)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Actually, Mr. Chair, we are of the opinion, as the member opposite was, at least a while ago, that we needed to have a two week waiting period. In fact, I would like to read a quick quote, “The two week waiting period is like a deductible in an insurance program; it is there for a purpose”. The person who said that was the former minister of human resources, Jane Stewart.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to take part in tonight's discussion in committee of the whole. I wish to thank the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development for coming here tonight. I appreciate the lucidity of her answers and I apologize for some of my opposition colleagues and their lack of constructive comments and contribution to this debate.

Tonight, I would like to focus my comments and remarks on the subject of older workers. Make no mistake, older workers are a key concern for Canada's new government.

Our new government recognizes and appreciates the hardship faced by older workers who face unexpected changes to their work environment, especially when they live in communities and regions with limited employment alternatives.

Furthermore, we believe that older workers are a valuable and untapped resource in addressing labour market shortages in all industries. We believe that we should continue to encourage them to share their skills and talents well into retirement age.

That is why Canada's new government recently launched a new program to assist older workers in selected communities throughout Canada. In designing this new initiative, we considered the large labour market picture and the important role played by older workers.

Canada is currently undergoing a period of labour shortages. Employers are crying out for skilled workers. We recognize that this situation will only worsen if we do not act now to find solutions, solutions for today. Older workers form a major part of that solution, especially in my home province.

According to recent Statistics Canada findings, Nova Scotia currently has the second oldest population in Canada, with an

average age of 41. In addition, we also have the second highest proportion of people older than 65 in Canada at 14.6%.

At a time of labour shortage and a shrinking labour supply, older workers are becoming a critical source of future labour force growth, growth that is critical to our prosperity, not just of Nova Scotia but the entire country.

Indeed, Judy Cutler, director of CARP, Canada's association for the 50-plus, has asked, “We have older workers who want to work. Why not embrace their expertise?”

Clearly, it is essential that we keep older workers active in the labour market. As a recent editorial in the *Halifax Daily News* indicated, “Giving older workers incentives to postpone retirement, or work part-time while collecting pensions, would at least temporarily ease the coming worker shortage”.

Moreover, Canada's new government has confidence in the continued ability of older workers to contribute to our future prosperity, and we are not alone. A recent OECD study strongly indicated that more focus should be given to the strategies that retrain, retain, and reintegrate older workers into the labour market as they represent “tremendous potential value to businesses, the economy and society”.

I am happy to report such positive assessments of older workers' potential contribution to the labour market. More and more organizations are eager to reintegrate such workers looking for meaningful employment. According to Brad Donnelly, an employment services manager with Manpower Incorporated in Atlantic Canada, tapping into older workers is something companies are increasingly looking to focus on. He said:

They're the target audience we're trying our hardest to recruit. We're seeing a lot more early retirees re-entering the workforce. They're looking to expand their horizons, not just to fill the time, but to learn a new skill.

It may be that the Liberals and the NDP do not believe that older workers are retrainable and can continue to make a contribution to society, but that is not the opinion of the Conservative Party. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm we have for retraining is not shared by the opposition parties and their assessment of the prospects of older workers is excessively bleak and negative.

The NDP member for Acadie—Bathurst believes attempting to retrain and reintegrate those 55 years of age older in the labour market is a waste of time. He said, “—at age 55. Are they supposed to finish grade 12 and then go to university? That makes no sense”.

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• (2305)

We have to realize that many people retire at age 55. They have many years left ahead of them to contribute to the workforce. A few short years ago, in the age of our fathers and our grandfathers, and our mothers and our grandmothers, people routinely worked well up into their seventies and even into their early eighties. They expected to. They made a major contribution to society and to this country. There is no reason to think that someone 55 years of age cannot continue to contribute to society. I would say there are quite a few people in this chamber 55 years of age and older who continue to contribute to society.

Listen to the Bloc member for Drummond commenting on the usefulness of retraining older workers. She said:

They want these workers to go back to school and learn a new trade. Let us be logical: that is impossible at 58. What is more, employers are hesitant to hire older workers, and the only way they can manage is to go on welfare.

I fundamentally disagree with that. We have many examples and many opportunities for potential employees, people who have left the workforce or need to be retrained, many of them, quite frankly, do not need to be retrained. They can continue to work in the field that they are already in. They have a lifetime of experience and expertise that they can share to retrain new workers to enter the workforce. They can assist younger Canadians, and in many instances new Canadians, to learn the skills and the trades that they need to become competent workers and successful members of society.

Make no mistake, Canada's new government does not share this negative assessment of older workers expressed by the NDP and Bloc members. On the contrary, older workers represent a key concern for our government. That is why we pay close attention to the insights gained following the conclusion of the older workers' pilot project initiative this past spring.

From this initiative, we learned that success stems from the approaches that include employment assistance services with some combination of training, job search techniques and work experience leading to new jobs. Flexibility in programming, attention to individual needs and learning new skills, practical and relevant to today's economy, were also deemed essential.

While this is true for workers across the country, we determined that older workers, particularly in communities with traditionally high unemployment, often have a harder time finding jobs. That is just the reality of the situation. We have to find ways to mitigate those realities.

That is why Canada's new government has now taken action based on evidence and lessons learned, as I mentioned earlier. We recently announced a new national cost-shared program with the provinces and territories for older workers in vulnerable communities.

To help meet the needs of workers aged 55 to 64 who have lost their jobs, we are investing \$70 million in this program called targeted initiative for older workers. That is a substantial amount of money which we expect will help older workers to continue in the workforce.

This initiative will target communities that are experiencing ongoing high unemployment and/or communities that are reliant on

a single employer or industry affected by significant downsizing. Under the initiative, older workers can receive income support while receiving various types of assistance such as skills assessment, counselling, skills upgrading and work experience for new jobs.

This initiative is in addition to the support provided through the employment insurance program, which currently provides \$1.4 billion in income benefits for some 230,000 unemployed older workers annually. Moreover, through part II of the EI program, 80,000-plus workers aged 50 and over have received assistance in obtaining the skills necessary to get and maintain employment through training, work experience and aid to starting a business.

I would like to emphasize that given Canada's complex economic and demographic environment, it is critical that we fully access the longer term needs of all older workers and the potential effect on the labour market of any additional measures that we may undertake. That is why, as promised in budget 2006, Canada's new government will undertake a feasibility study of measures to better understand older workers' needs and potential measures to assist them.

• (2310)

It is clear that our government is attuned to the needs of older workers. We have programs in place now. We are working to address immediate needs and we are planning for the future.

We will continue to provide support to older workers. We will continue to work with our partners so that older workers, wherever they live across the country, know that this government has devoted its full efforts to finding the best long term approach. We will continue to meet the needs of older workers and, most importantly, we will continue to believe in older workers.

I will mention that the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont has been in the House all evening. If there is time for a question, he would certainly appreciate the opportunity to ask one.

As I conclude, I would ask the minister to further elaborate on the targeted initiative for older workers, understanding that older workers face challenges in the work environment in Canada regardless of where they work—

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but his 10 minutes have expired. He really should put a question to the parliamentary secretary. After that, the member he mentioned can rise and participate.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Chair, my question is a direct one. Quite simply, could the hon. parliamentary secretary more fully elaborate on the targeted initiative for older workers?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is my pleasure to rise this evening to elaborate on the targeted initiative for older workers. This particular program is cost shared federally, provincially and territorially. It is an employment program created to provide a range of employment activities to older workers who live and work in vulnerable communities and who have lost their jobs.

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The projects will include activities such as assessment counseling, skills upgrading and work experience for new jobs. It will target communities experiencing ongoing high unemployment and/or high reliance on a single employer or industry. The census metropolitan areas with populations greater than 250,000 are now eligible for the programming.

I would like to say that we already have an agreement with Quebec, and six more provinces and two territories are already interested in working with us.

It is essential, we have found, that we keep older workers active in the labour market. We need to find ways of working with our provincial partners to reintegrate older workers into the workforce as quickly as possible. Not only does this supply the labour market with much needed workers, but it allows older workers to continue their contributions to their communities and to share their wisdom with others.

I am not alone in saying this. In a recent job strategy and thematic review, the OECD strongly indicated that more focus should be given to strategies that retrain and integrate older workers into the labour market.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Chair, earlier tonight the member for Oakville implied that in order for our children to be “the best and the brightest”, they need to be cared for by a massive government child care system. I want to take issue with that statement on behalf of stay at home parents across Canada.

My wife Debi and I have two kids. Early on, we made a decision that she would stay home with the kids. At the time we made the decision I was making a little under \$40,000 per year, so it was a sacrifice for us. My wife did an absolutely amazing job. In my mind, she works as hard as anybody who actually gets paid for full time employment.

My daughter Jenaë is now seven years old. She is in grade two and, in my mind, is among the best and the brightest. I often tell her that when she grows up she will be able to do anything she wants to do.

My questions are the following. Did we make a mistake by choosing to raise our own kids? Should I lower my daughter's expectations? Can she perhaps not do anything she wants to do because she was raised by her own parents? In the government's mind, who is best able and responsible to decide and choose how to raise our own kids to be the best and the brightest?

• (2315)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the foundation of our whole universal child care plan is that parents are in the best position to make the best choices in the best interests of their children.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Chair, just yesterday, the minister gave an uninspiring account of her department's plans and priorities to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today she is giving us more of the same.

Yesterday, at least, the minister spoke of allocations for child care, old age security, affordable housing, training, the fight against homelessness and older workers. However, I have a string of regrettable examples from this department. I only have to think of the cuts announced on September 25, cuts in the order of \$55 million to investment in youth.

Can the minister explain how she intends to provide skilled labour when she is cutting programs that allow thousands of youths to have an interesting first job experience leading to a future career?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we are ensuring that funds are available to help those students who need help to find summer jobs. We believe it is important that they get the work experience that helps them in the future and also that they have opportunities to earn the money to help them pay for their education.

We are going to be focusing our efforts and our dollars on areas where students need help to overcome barriers to finding summer employment. We do not believe we should be helping employers who would hire students anyway.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Chair, the minister rejected out of hand the 14 recommendations of the committee on the summer career placement program. Can she tell us why she rejected outright these 14 recommendations even though members of her own party supported them?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: In fact, Mr. Chair, we are focusing on the students. We are going to be making changes to the program. I am pleased to announce that we will be issuing a call for proposals for this program in January 2007.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Chair, I am very happy.

The government announced that it was cutting funding for unnecessary and inefficient programs. From what the ministers said, the government was trimming the fat. If the government had consulted a bit before making the cuts, it would have understood that the programs it gutted have a positive impact on organizations in Quebec including tourist centres, non-profit organizations and many others.

In light of this, can the minister tell us why she decided to slash nearly \$18 million from adult learning, literacy and essential skills development programs? Does she feel that literacy is no longer necessary to acquire the skills needed to enter or re-enter the labour market?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we decided to stop funding programs that were not delivering results to Canadians. We are no longer going to fund programs to the tune of \$350,000 a year so they can answer 300 phone calls at \$1,000 a call and one call per day. That is not efficient. That is not effective. That is not teaching anyone how to read or write. We are going to focus on programs that will help people learn to read and write.

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[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I received an open letter to the Prime Minister from 24 organizations that were never consulted on literacy. The minister may not be able to produce a list of the people she contacted, but I can provide her with a list of the people she did not contact.

The Minister of Human Resources and Social Development has specific objectives, but with the cuts announced over a month ago, it will not be possible to achieve all those objectives. I want to come back to the department's priorities, because with the cuts made on September 25, it will be impossible to improve Canadians' quality of life, build a highly skilled workforce, eliminate barriers to work and learning and ensure that programs in place produce the desired results. On the contrary, the government's plans are nothing less than impediments to the most vulnerable in our society, who are trying to get ahead.

The \$13 billion surplus, \$2 billion of it from the employment insurance surplus, does not seem to have been enough for the current government, because it has cut another \$1 billion from programs that benefit the poor and the most vulnerable in our society.

How can the minister explain that she is cutting funding for employability programs, when \$2 billion from the employment insurance fund is already being used for a purpose other than the one it is intended for?

● (2320)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, as the member is undoubtedly aware, the surplus or deficit in the EI account does not correspond directly, yet, to EI programming. That is the target. We are trying to achieve break even with the new rate setting mechanism where the rates that are charged match the benefits that are paid out. That is the sensible way to do it. In the meantime, we are working on other program.

However, we are investing in our EI programs. We have announced several new programs recently such as the compassionate care benefit, extension of the definition, the five weeks program and related to that, \$70 million for the older workers program. We are trying to make these programs innovative, ensuring that they meet the needs of Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Chair, in order to help people, one of two things is needed: either the sovereignty of Quebec or the correction of the fiscal imbalance. As you know, I wish for the first with all my heart, but in the meantime, the Bloc Québécois will fight to correct the fiscal imbalance.

Despite the government's lofty promises, the federal withdrawal from the field of human resources is only adding further to this imbalance. As far as the Bloc is concerned, skills training is a matter of Quebec jurisdiction.

Rather than cutting funds related to skills training, why were they not simply transferred to the provincial governments?

Does the minister understand that, with the most recent cuts, her government is only adding to the fiscal imbalance?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, when the hon. member does her arithmetic, I ask her to add in the \$100 a month for each child under the age of six being delivered into Quebec. This is money is going directly into the hands of parents and directly into the economy. If people need to spend it on a specific program, they have that freedom, they have that flexibility because it is their choice to help with the education of their children.

When it comes to the other programs, we are investing significant dollars and we are investing them wisely in literacy programs so people in Quebec and other Canadians can become employable.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Chair, I will ask one last question, then turn it over to my colleague.

Has the government completed the feasibility study on the income support program for older workers, which was included in the budget?

When does it intend to make it public?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, no, we have not yet completed it. We believe it is essential that we take the time to really understand the depth of the issues and we look at the wide range of alternatives available to us.

In the meantime, however, we have brought in the targeted initiative for older workers so we can know that these workers were getting some assistance right now without waiting for the longer term. We do not want to keep them waiting. That is why we brought in this program, to give them the help they need now.

I encourage the hon. member to encourage her provincial government to sign on to this agreement so we can get the projects started to help these individuals.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Chair, two days ago, the chief actuary of the Canada employment insurance commission submitted his annual report. Under the regulations, the minister must, by October 15 of each year, give the chief actuary the plans for employment insurance changes.

However, we have learned from the chief actuary that the minister did not submit any plans. Therefore, he concludes that the minister has no plans for the coming year.

How can the minister justify the decision not to make any changes to the employment insurance program when we are hearing from all sides that the program no longer meets current requirements?

● (2325)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I believe what the chief actuary said was that the minister provided no additional information beyond what was already announced. I think that was the clarification, if we were to check the record.

The new numbers in the report of the EI commission are due to be released later this month.

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[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister to reread the text. In it, the actuary said that the minister had not requested any modifications for the coming year. The actuary therefore concludes that no changes will be requested for the coming year.

Having clarified that, my second question is about income support for older workers. All evening, the governing party has talked about reintegrating older workers, as though that were a possibility for all older workers.

The Bloc agrees that there should be reintegration programs, but we must also recognize that some people cannot be reintegrated for a number of reasons. Retraining can be a problem because of age, work experience and lack of jobs in the regions.

The Conservatives have a magic formula. They say that if there is no work in one region, all we have to do is send those workers, including older workers, to Alberta. This implies that older workers are the solution to the labour shortage in western Canada. They are refusing to acknowledge what is really happening in the regions where older workers do not have work or cannot get back into the labour market.

Will the minister introduce an income support program for older workers as Quebec is now doing for older workers in the softwood lumber sector?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we have already done that. In our targeted initiative for older workers there is income support while these displaced older workers learn, get new skills, develop job hunting skills and even gain work experience.

However, the targeted initiative for older workers was designed to be flexible so that it could work with any wide range of economic development initiatives that the hon. Minister of Labour, as the regional minister, might be developing in conjunction with groups, provinces, communities or other partners right across the province of Quebec. We want these things to work together, not in silos. All these programs need to be flexible enough to meet the overall needs, with everyone playing the role that they need to play, whether federal, provincial or local.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chair, I think the minister, in her response, has just confirmed what I am saying. She has just one solution to reintegrate older workers into the labour market.

With respect to older workers who can no longer return to the labour market, who have no income after their employment insurance benefits run out and whose only future is to become welfare recipients, Quebec and the provinces will have to take care of them. As a result, this will accentuate the fiscal imbalance and will shift responsibility to the provinces and Quebec for which the federal government is withdrawing money from the EI fund.

What will she do for workers who no longer have a future at work, who are older and who need income support to bridge the gap between losing their job and receiving their pension?

● (2330)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we will be taking full advantage of the wide range of programming that we have available to help people in those circumstances to acquire new skills, get retrained, get new jobs or create jobs by becoming entrepreneurs. We have programs within our EI that help people go into business for themselves.

We cannot rule out this talent because the country needs it. We just need to ensure we give them the tools they need to succeed and to meet this demand.

[Translation]

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the 15 minutes are up.

The hon. member for Don Valley East.

[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Yukon and the member for Labrador.

The minister in her remarks claimed that the new Conservative government was investing in the vulnerable. I would like to ask her how the vulnerable are being helped by eliminating 14,000 child care spaces in Ontario. As well, these vulnerable are the working poor and new immigrants where both parents must work.

How will the net amount of \$60 help the vulnerable when it does not even pay for one day of child care?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, the existing spaces were created by the Ontario provincial government, not by the previous Liberal government, and it is up to the provincial government to be responsible for these spaces.

Our new child care initiative is designed to create the spaces. That is why we are working with so many groups to make that happen.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, on October 27 the MP for Edmonton Centre said that no literacy programs had been cut. That is absurd. Yukon is losing family literacy programs. NWT is losing community outreach programs. Alberta is losing tutor training programs. Saskatchewan is losing the Learners Speakers' Bureau program. Quebec is possibly going to lose the Literacy Alliance. Seven projects ended in Nova Scotia. The alliances and coalitions in P.E.I. and Newfoundland could close, as well as all sorts of other programs. Nunavut is losing most of its training programs.

It is an offence to purposely mislead the House that no programs have been cut. If the government did not purposely mislead the House, then it did not understand it was cutting these programs. If the government did not understand it was cutting valuable programs, will the minister commit to reinstate the funding for these very important coalitions, alliances and projects?

Business of Supply

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, we are honouring all existing commitments. We recently had a call for proposals. We are processing those applications. We are going to be focusing on giving the money to programs that will deliver actual measurable results for literacy and numeracy.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to ask the minister a very important question.

Many people tonight have mused openly about the concept of unexpected work loss as a benefit for those in the EI system. I want her to talk about the concept of those who face expected work loss. In particular, I am talking about seasonal workers. Before she is handed any notes to read from, I want her to talk openly and tell me how she feels about seasonal work. Not once tonight have I heard anything that would reassure anybody in the seasonal industry, which is a vast amount of this country's workforce.

There has not been one word tonight about that. I would just like to hear how she feels about seasonal work. This is all about unexpected work loss, but what about the expected work loss?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Chair, I am sorry if the hon. member did not hear earlier when we were talking about it. I know I was and I thought I heard other members in here as well.

I come from a rural area where there is a lot of agriculture. It had a huge fishing industry for a number of years as well. I know about seasonal work and the challenges that are faced. That is why we brought in our five weeks pilot program to help bridge the gap for seasonal workers so that they will be entitled to another five weeks of EI to help them through the cycle and help them stay solid between their seasonal work.

● (2335)

The Chair: Order. It being 11:35 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) all votes are deemed reported. The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

The Deputy Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:36 p.m.)

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