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Monday, March 19, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 19, 2007

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

REVISED RESPONSES TO ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS NOS. 13 AND 33

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to correct answers to questions previously given to the House.

While I issued a public statement on March 8 to correct the record, this is my first opportunity to address the House. In statements to the House and in two replies to order paper questions, I inadvertently provided inaccurate information relating to the role, relationship and responsibilities of the International Committee of the Red Cross with regard to Canada and detainees turned over by Canada to Afghan authorities.

I fully and without reservation apologize to the House for providing inaccurate information to members. I regret any confusion that may have resulted from these statements. The answers I gave were provided in good faith. I take full responsibility and do so without hesitation.

I would like to be clear. The International Committee of the Red Cross is under no obligation to share information with Canada on the treatment of detainees transferred by Canada to Afghan authorities. The International Committee of the Red Cross provides this information to the country that has the detainees in its custody, in this case, Afghanistan.

The arrangement between the Canadian Forces and Afghanistan recognizes the right of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit detainees at any time they are in custody, whether held by Canadian Forces or by Afghanistan.

Flowing from that correction, I am also tabling revised responses to Order Paper Questions Nos. 13 and 33 which state, “—the ICRC would advise the Afghan authorities if they had any concerns about detainees whom we transferred to Afghan authorities”. And that, “The International Committee of the Red Cross would advise Afghan authorities if they had any concerns about detainees”.

These revised responses will ensure that the House has accurate information.

In addition, today I am tabling a letter from two senior officials to the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence correcting information they provided to the committee on December 11, 2006, regarding Canada's notification to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission of detainee transfers.

Defence officials and I have appeared regularly before the Standing Committee on National Defence to provide parliamentarians with information and will continue to do so.

The letters establishing Canada's subsequent arrangement with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which I would now like to table, are posted on my department's website. To be clear, this arrangement, which has taken many months to negotiate, provides that Canada will notify the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the AIHRC, of any detainees transferred to Afghan authorities and the AIHRC will inform Canada should it learn that a transfer detainee has been mistreated.

Our government is committed to the goal of ensuring that each Afghan detainee is treated in accordance with international law. The protection of human rights is a central value to all Canadians and our government's commitment is to ensure that these values are held no matter where our forces serve.

To reinforce that, I personally met with the Kandahar representative and the national representative of the commission, the Afghan minister of defence and President Karzai, in which I received their personal commitments to ensure that the agreements will be honoured.

I believe that my statement this morning clarifies our important relationships with the government of Afghanistan, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

The Speaker: I thank the honourable minister for his clarification. The documents that are answers to questions that he has tabled will either be treated as tabled documents, if the original answer was in fact tabled, or, if they were printed in *Hansard*, they will be printed in *Hansard* accordingly.

[*Translation*]

It being 11:07 a.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***CANADA LABOUR CODE**

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers), as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to complete my commentary on Bill C-257, an important private member's bill dealing with the federal Labour Code.

The last time a major consideration of the federal Labour Code was undertaken there were extensive consultations over a number of years. Private members' bills have a limited amount of time to address things. I will move quickly to what I believe is the essential element with regard to the debate on this bill, which has to do with the concept of essential services.

I think all parties, whether they be labour, management, members of Parliament or the Canadian public, agree that essential services must be continued in some fashion in the event of a labour disruption or dispute.

During the committee stage hearings on Bill C-257, amendments were tabled to introduce the elements of essential services. The committee, under the direct testimony of expert witnesses, found that the current provisions under the federal Labour Code did not include a definition of services but included only the concepts of safety and health. That means that railways, telecommunications, post offices, et cetera, are not included under the rubric of safety and health.

In an attempt to add the essential services element to the bill, the Liberal members introduced a variety of amendments to put that in to ensure the federal Labour Code would cover the so-called essential services.

The Speaker, after taking advice from the House officials, officers and legal counsel, determined that those amendments were out of order because they tried to introduce a new element into the federal Labour Code that was not previously there. This is extremely important because it changes the whole focus and the whole consideration of Bill C-257. Based on the ruling of the Chair, Parliament now has to understand that essential services are not covered by Bill C-257.

I would like to indicate that many members of Parliament were pleased to receive input from the labour sector and they agree that it is very important that we protect the delicate balance between labour and management and respect the collective bargaining process.

I will read from one of the letters here that states that "Section 87 (4) of the Canada Labour Code was specifically written with essential services in mind". That is a very interesting way to describe it, "in mind" but not "in fact". Essential services are not in the federal Labour Code. Unfortunately, that is the case and it is something we need to reconsider.

It is my recommendation that the inclusion of essential services in the federal Labour Code is an important element. We certainly do not want to disrupt the flow of cheques to seniors for their benefits, nor

the transport of important materials to our vital manufacturing sector. That would damage jobs and hurt the labour force and I do not think anyone wants to do that.

I believe that Bill C-257 does not meet the need but we do need to address the elements of the federal Labour Code.

• (1110)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the NDP and to make it clear, as we have from day one, that we are 100% in support of Bill C-257, a bill that would ensure replacement workers are not allowed to be brought in during a strike situation.

After listening to the member for Mississauga South, I am quite appalled at the excuses being made by some members to slide out of supporting the bill.

I want to put it on the record that essential services have been in the Labour Code for the past 10 years. In fact, it was the former Liberal government that produced section 87.4 that spells out the provisions and the process for dealing with essential services during a strike.

For that member or any other member of the Liberal caucus to stand and say that somehow the bill is flawed and that it does not meet the tests of essential services is completely false. I want that to be very clear. Either they have not read the Labour Code or they do not understand that section 87.4 lays out the provision for the union and the employer to designate what essential services are before a strike begins. There is a provision for the board itself to do that if there has not been an agreement. There is even a provision for the minister to ask the Industrial Relations Board to make that designation.

If those members have not read the material, I hope they will today because many activists from the Canadian Labour Congress are on Parliament Hill today to provide that information. I hope they are not deliberately misleading the House by saying that the bill does not cover essential services. The provision was good enough for 10 years in the Labour Code, which the Liberals wrote, so why is it now suddenly a problem?

There is no question that the CIRB has ruled numerous times on essential services. In the code, it designates maintenance of activities but it is the same as essential services. If we read the rulings in the CIRB, we will see that it uses the words "maintenance of activities" and it uses the words "essential services".

This is a process that is already in place and it is working very well. It has never been identified as a problem. I am astounded to hear members using this mythical issue as an excuse to slide out of supporting the bill.

This bill, which came from the Bloc, has been through the House 10 times. It is a bill that would produce a fair balance in labour relations.

The committee heard from over 100 witnesses. During 33 hours we heard from numerous employer organizations and employers. Probably about 80% of the witnesses were from employers. Only about 20% were from the labour movement. We did very thorough research on the bill.

At the end of the day, the bill is about establishing a very important principle, which is that when workers go on a legal strike they have a right to know and to expect that replacement workers will not be brought in or that people will not be able to cross the picket line, which are important rights for workers.

As we know from the history of what happened in British Columbia and in Quebec, this law has worked for years and years and actually works very well. It produces labour relations stability. Unfortunately, we have now come to a position on the bill where all kinds of fearmongering and misinformation is being put forward.

I would like to put forward another reason that the bill in no way impacts essential services. Even if the bill were approved, and I hope that it will pass today at third reading, it would not remove the rights of the federal government during any labour dispute, under federal jurisdiction, to bring in back to work legislation. The bill would not impede the right of the federal government to do that.

• (1115)

We recently saw the situation with the CN Rail strike and the legislation that was proposed to deal with it. This bill would not in any way remove the capacity for or the right of the federal government to do that. I personally do not support back to work legislation, nor does the NDP, but nevertheless the right of the government to do so would still exist.

This bill has had a lot of attention. It has had enormous debate in committee. It is very unfortunate that now as we near the end of the process there are members of the House and big employers who are trying to provide misinformation about the bill, because the essence of this bill is that it will establish a very important right for workers and produce a level playing field, as we have seen in B.C. and Quebec.

I am from British Columbia. We have a right-wing Liberal government in my province. British Columbia's legislation has worked very well. It was brought in by the previous NDP government but was left in place by the Liberal government because it understood that the legislation was producing labour stability. I think that is really what we want to see here in terms of labour relations in this country.

I urge members of the House to focus on the merits of the bill and not get bogged down in some of what I think is the political positioning that has taken place. I believe that the information provided by the Canadian Labour Congress will answer all the questions that members may have about the bill. This information shows that it is a very sound piece of legislation that provides the balance and the fairness we want to see.

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I will end my remarks by saying that I think we are going to hear a number of times today about this question of essential services. We will hear members say they cannot support the bill because it does not cover essential services. I want to emphasize the fact that it is abundantly clear that the issue of essential services and the process for designating essential services are already in the Canada Labour Code.

In fact, one of the approved amendments to this legislation says that this bill would be subject to section 87.4 of the Labour Code. This is the section which outlines the steps that can be taken to designate essential services to protect the public's health and welfare and the public interest. That is very clear, so if people begin by providing further misinformation and organizing a campaign around this, it will clearly be politically motivated.

I urge members to look at the merits of the bill and to look at the principles of what is taking place in terms of protecting workers' rights and dealing with what sometimes in the past has been violence on the picket line. When replacement workers are brought in, they become the focus of the strike, and this actually prolongs the strike rather than having people focusing on the issues and ensuring that a fair collective bargaining and negotiating process is in place, which is what we want to see. That is why there should be a ban on replacement workers. That is why 100% of the NDP members will be in their places on Wednesday to vote in favour of the bill.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to Bill C-257. I would also like to thank the hon. member for Gatineau, who introduced this bill which the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert has masterfully shepherded along. We would not be here today, debating Bill C-257, were it not for the work of the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

My remarks will be mainly directed to the public and the viewing public. I think that the minds of the political parties concerned, the Conservatives as well as the Liberals, are pretty much set. But it is the citizens who are watching us debate this Bill C-257 with respect to replacement workers who will have the last word. We may be going to the polls again shortly, and it is my understanding that this will be an opportunity for the public watching us at home to punish these two political parties for their lack of action on the issue of replacement workers. Let us start by looking at what the use of replacement workers is all about.

Workers are unionized. They have the right to strike, the same way that the employer has the right to lock them out. They may exercise this right upon the expiry of their collective agreement; but for the entire life of the collective agreement, the only right they have is to abide by the agreement and do as they are told by the employer. We must not forget that, when bound by a collective agreement, one has to abide by it from the day it is signed to the day it expires.

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Only once the collective agreement has expired can workers stand up to their employer and tell him that, during the life of that agreement, there were things they liked and others not. They put all aspects into perspective. They are basically without rights while the collective agreement is being negotiated, especially since the Canada Labour Code is completely different from the labour code in Quebec. They are without rights in the context of a strike in particular. What happens then? Negotiations go on for a certain period of time. If they eventually fail, the workers end up on strike.

Today we are discussing the issue of replacement workers. In the Canada Labour Code, the employer has all the rights. Even if the other opposition parties think that the poor employers do not have all the rights, we firmly believe that these employers have these rights. The proof is that if at the end of negotiations an agreement is not reached, the workers vote either to return to work or to go on strike. In the case of the latter, these workers find themselves on the street and the employer has every right to hire other people to replace the strikers.

This is where things get difficult. Why do we want to take up this issue? Because it is wrong that workers have the right to strike, but that they are the only ones punished.

Why does the employer have all the rights? If I understand correctly, the two other parties agree with giving all the rights to employers. Maybe there is something we do not know. Maybe something was said that we did not hear and that made the Liberals change their minds mid-stream. I do not understand. I think that everyone here has the right to their own opinion and that they have rights. We want to protect the rights of workers.

I come back to the situation I was just talking about. These workers are out on the sidewalk without pay. When they are not working they are not being paid, unless the union has the money to pay them during strike weeks.

• (1125)

These people earn no salary during the entire period. This can lead to some friction at home, since the father is not working and stays home. The children wonder what is happening and why their father is at home rather than at work. A loss of earnings leads to family conflict. All of this because of a strike.

What of the employer in all this? In the factory, the employer hires management personnel and has the right to use them to replace the workers, like in any other factory—including factories in Quebec.

The thing is that people from anywhere who do any kind of work are being brought in to do the work instead of using the workers who are on the picket lines.

Imagine, for just a moment, that you are a factory worker and you are not happy with the working conditions of your work place. You are on the picket line and you see a bus load of people who are coming to replace you in your job, often at a salary that is lower than yours was before you left. Thus, you find yourself in a situation in which the employers hold all the cards.

Why should an employer agree to negotiate in good faith with workers when he can do without those workers because the factory is still in production?

The employer never has to deal with problems. What could happen? Workers could be out in the streets for months and months. There have even been cases where workers were out in the streets for years.

During that time, these people go without work and without money because they want rights under a collective agreement and they want to improve their lot. Is there anyone in this world who does not want to improve their lot and their working conditions? We all want to improve our working conditions.

I do not know anyone who would negotiate a pay cut or poorer working conditions with an employer unless that employer was up against a wall and could prove to workers, in black and white, that there were serious problems. Then the employer could propose cuts to pay or benefits. Usually it is during bargaining that workers would make their demands known.

Earlier, I listened to the Liberal member talk about measures taken and essential services. Since 1999, rulings have indicated that section 87.4 of the Canada Labour Code is a provision to maintain essential services.

The June 30, 1999, ruling in *Aéroports de Montréal vs. Public Service Alliance of Canada*, CIRB File 20258-C, contains 15 references to section 87.4 of the code as pertaining to essential services.

The June 22, 2001, ruling in *Atomic Energy of Canada Limited vs. several trade union organizations*, CIRB File 21134-C, contains 60 references to section 87.4 of the code as pertaining to essential services.

The March 26, 2002, ruling in *NAV CANADA vs. Canadian Air Traffic Control Association and several trade union organizations*, CIRB File 21881-C, contains 30 references to section 87.4 of the code. This is nothing but an excuse the Liberals are using to justify supporting Bill C-257.

• (1130)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak this morning to this important bill to foster more harmonious labour relations between workers and employers under federal jurisdiction.

First, I want to congratulate my colleague from Shefford for his speech, which, in my opinion, put the entire issue into context quite well, and my colleague from Gatineau who agreed to champion this important bill. He did so with much dedication and skill. Since I represent the neighbouring riding, I have the honour of rubbing shoulders with my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, who also championed this bill. She did so not just during the debate, but she also contributed to preparing it and ensuring that all parliamentarians were well aware of the extent of the problem.

Today, some are still against this bill, but not for lack of trying by my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert to make them understand. In my opinion they are against it because they did not want to understand.

We are dealing with a situation that is unacceptable on many levels. First, we are repeating what is happening in a number of other jurisdictions when it comes to sharing power between the provincial, Quebec and federal governments. We see what an imbalance this causes. We have seen this with the fiscal imbalance and with various positions on health, education and national defence. In that sense, a certain number of provinces, but Quebec in particular, have values and principles that often differ from those that are defended in this House and that do not represent what the public wants in any way.

We know that the Bloc Québécois circulated a petition to support Bill C-257. Some 46,000 people signed it in order to call on the House of Commons to pass this bill. It is therefore surprising today, after trying 10 times to get a similar bill passed, that the hon. members of this House are still opposed to it.

The purpose of this bill is to civilize labour relations among a certain number of employers because employers in businesses operating under federal jurisdiction do not all act accordingly. On several occasions, my colleague has mentioned a number of conflicts that have dragged on for a very long time but that should not have lasted for such a prolonged period. She has spoken of the conflicts at Vidéotron, Sécur, Cargill, and Radio-Nord Communications—which lasted 10, 3, 38 and 20 months respectively—and we could add others.

These conflicts were marked not only by their duration but also by the events that took place during the conflicts. The use of scabs—or replacement workers for the purists—leads to deep animosity, not only between the replacement workers and the strikers but also between the strikers and their employers. We must remember that, once the conflict is over, the parties that make the company function must resume harmonious labour relations and contribute to the profitable operation of the company.

Some employers give little thought to this. They are the employers who habitually use an iron hand, ruling by decree, and who rely on the fact that, once the strike is over, they will succeed—through the governance structure or even by outside means and often by long legal disputes and proceedings—in imposing their will even though labour relations remain strained.

● (1135)

In this House, worst case scenarios were described in an effort to get parliamentarians to vote against the bill. But none of those related to actual events. They remain hypothetical situations.

At the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, of which I am a member, we studied this bill and heard from 13 or 15 unions and other organizations which support the bill. Three times as many people appeared before us to oppose it; they did so at the request of the Conservatives to try and justify maintaining the status quo.

We heard the same bunch of examples that do not hold water, like the one about banks no longer being able to operate. The fact of the matter is that less than 1% of bank employees are unionized, and there has never been a single dispute.

We also heard the one about railways. Even without anti-scab legislation, locomotive operators and railway employees, who are

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skilled workers, could not be replaced in the event of a work stoppage.

We saw it recently. There was a labour dispute that lasted two weeks. The employer could have replaced these employees with replacement workers. The problem was that, in fact, there were no specialized workers with similar skills to do the job. This resulted in a shorter conflict. But had replacement workers been available, and considering that the act still allows the use of such workers, the CN labour dispute would still not be settled, based on the examples that I mentioned earlier.

They are also giving us the example of telecommunications, including the 911 line, which comes under provincial jurisdiction. That is not a good example. During the debate, when they saw that the testimonies given by these companies and organizations were not going anywhere, they talked about the mines that could stop operating. We were given the example of a diamond mine in the far north. They gave us a spiel about how tragic it would be if we did not manage to get the diamonds out of there at the same pace. It would not be possible to use winter roads, because these diamonds can only be transported over ice bridges.

They never cared about the people living there. They never used these people as an example. Yet, when it comes to essential services, the provisions of the Canada Labour Code, particularly section 87.4, do provide such measures. The legislator included these measures to help those who could become more vulnerable following a dispute. The Canada Labour Code already provides that.

I find it unfortunate that they invoke the fact that it was not possible to insert a provision on essential services into Bill C-257 and say this prevents the provision of essential services. But such a clause already exists. It would be better for those members who are opposing the bill on the grounds that it does not include a provision on essential services to say openly that in fact they oppose the principle of anti-scab legislation. Their position in this debate would be clearer for everyone, and also more honest.

● (1140)

Like all my fellow Bloc members, I will support Bill C-257, and I invite other members—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to speak to this bill.

Perhaps some of my colleagues are unaware that in a previous life, before I was elected to this House on October 25, 1993, I worked in labour relations for 16 years in the pulp and paper industry for Abitibi-Price and in the food industry at Métro-Richelieu headquarters in Montreal.

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Unfortunately, during my time in labour relations, I experienced some labour disputes. As you may know, workers in these two sectors are governed by the Quebec Labour Code.

It is important to note the similarities between this bill, which was presented by the Bloc Québécois, and the replacement workers provisions in the Quebec Labour Code. These Quebec Labour Code measures came into force before 1977. As an aside, in Quebec, this replacement workers bill is part of the René Lévesque and Parti Québécois legacy.

As we may recall, and I believe my memory is correct, Pierre Marois was the labour minister who reformed the Quebec Labour Code. The replacement workers measures were a critical part of his reforms.

Members may also recall that in 1976, in Longueuil, in a company now known as Pratt & Whitney—if its name has not changed due to acquisitions—and known at the time as United Aircraft, workers governed by the Quebec Labour Code experienced what happens when scabs literally cross the picket lines every day. At the time, the company decided to continue operating.

Since this law came into force in 1977 or early 1978, and since the Quebec Labour Code reforms, violence on the picket lines has dropped significantly, and labour disputes are now much shorter.

Imagine participating in a union meeting where it was decided that the balance of power was such that there was no choice but to confront the employer. I may be repeating myself, but I want to make the point that I always worked on the management side, unlike some of my colleagues in this House who were CSN vice-presidents or held permanent union positions in the FTQ or worked in the education sector. My perspective is that of someone who spent his career in labour relations on the management side.

I was at the bargaining table. In the pulp and paper industry, there was a strike from July 1, 1980, to December 16, 1980. When they were not in negotiations, managers were crossing the picket lines every day. This was done in a civilized manner.

The company, which manufactured cardboard, did not try to operate with replacement workers or managers. Instead, they thought that a balance of power needed to be established, and that negotiations would eventually produce results. In this case, it took five and a half months.

This is how a balance of power works. The company stood its ground, while the unionized workers and the CSN stood theirs. With the help of a negotiator, they eventually resolved the strike issues. The workers shut down the mill from July 1 to December 16, 1980, and it was all done without violence.

• (1145)

This was a long strike. Imagine what would have happened if they had used replacement workers.

Mr. Speaker, you seem like a rather peaceful person by nature. Say you have been picketing for five and a half months, and that every day workers go by in school buses with bars on the windows. They give you the finger—among other things—and literally insult you. Although you seem peaceful, as I said earlier, I think that after a

while, it would only be human to get upset with the situation. This is exactly what happened before the new Labour Code in Quebec.

That brings me to my question. If this is true for workers in Quebec, and for workers in British Columbia, why would it not be so for workers whose company comes under federal jurisdiction? This legislation has had a positive impact on the violence and duration of disputes. However, if someone has the misfortune of being unionized in a company under federal jurisdiction, they are not entitled to this protection. This allows for replacement workers to cross the picket line every morning in front of the workers.

I will not repeat the list of disputes my colleague from Chambly—Borduas provided. They included Vidéotron and the dispute at Cargill, in Baie-Comeau, which lasted 42 months, I think.

Not having these anti-scab provisions upsets the balance of power to some extent. By definition, the balance of power involves two entities facing one another as equals. One party decides to close the plant, and thus, the plant cannot operate as long as that no one goes in to work. We cannot have a situation where a company continues to operate while the other workers are on the sidewalk. In that case, the balance of power no longer exists, or, at least it is quite skewed.

That is all we are asking for. I know that other hon. members want to say a few words on this. I think a member from the NDP wants to support the bill. I do not want to unduly prolong my speech. However, I am calling on the good will of the hon. members of this House, from all parties, even my colleagues from the Liberal Party who have heard the siren songs of the chambers of commerce and various lobbies. My colleagues from the Liberal Party have workers under federal jurisdiction in their ridings. Let them ask those workers whether they would like to have the same protection that exists elsewhere. Let them ask whether they agree to considered second-class workers and second-class citizens. Let them ask and we will see how those workers respond.

In closing, I am also calling on my colleagues from the Conservative Party to do the same. We know the right-wing philosophy of the Conservative Party. However, let the members of that party not forget that they were elected by workers, unionized or otherwise. By the way, some non-unionized workers agree with the anti-scab bill.

For all these reasons, I will vote with my party in favour of this bill and I am appealing to the good will of all the hon. members of this House.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-257, a bill that has historic significance for working families across Canada.

I come from the region of Timmins-James Bay and the people there have a long, historic memory of the need to fight for legislation like this because they remember their grandparents and parents telling them about the Noranda strike, the Kirkland Lake strike and the Dome strike in 1990. They have seen strikes in our lumber and paper mills and the incredible damage that has been done when scabs are allowed to cross picket lines.

There was a truce of some sort in the northern mining industry after the 1958 Inco strike for years. It never attempted to bring replacement workers through mine properties, not until Peggy Witte in Yellowknife broke that unspoken covenant. We saw the horrific damage that resulted. We saw it in Falconbridge in 2002 and in the Ekati mine recently in the Northwest Territories.

New Democrats know there is a need for legislation across this country that brings fairness. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about fairness and the need to have labour settled at the negotiating table where it needs to be done.

We were proud as New Democrats in October 2006 to see 167 members of the House stand and recognize the principle that fairness for working families and our union brothers and sisters is a principle that the federal government should stand up on. However, I began to worry after that because the numbers we were seeing in the House did not seem right.

We know where the Conservative Party stands. No matter what we agree or disagree on, the Conservative Party will at least say whose side it is on. It is very clear. It attacks working people straight, with no chaser. It is very up front.

I was interested with the position of our Liberal brothers and sisters. They were suddenly on the side of and concerned about working families. They sat hour after hour in committee and heard the recommendations. They were there for the planning of this bill.

They stood up at second reading in record numbers to say they were suddenly on the side of working families, but then they had a problem because they knew it was coming to third reading and they would actually have to make a decision as to whether they were finally going to stand up for working families or do what they always do, which is sell working families down the river. They needed an excuse. They needed to find a way to do their usual flip-flop.

In the Liberal back room, and people at home may not realize this, there is a glass case which has a sign that says, "In case of emergency, break". It contains all the Liberal excuses that can be used. The new Liberal leader went to the back room after second reading, broke the glass and asked what was in it that the Liberals could use to damage the rights of working families. He said, "Why do we not offer an amendment on a provision for essential services and that way we will look like we are standing up for all Canadians? We will be sitting on the fence post once again where we normally are".

However, what was understood was that this provision already exists in the Labour Code. It was a meaningless provision. What has been shown is that the Liberals are raising a chimera to the Canadian people, pretending that somehow they are taking a principled stand

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when everybody knows that once again they are selling working families down the river.

The new Liberal leader has a dog named Kyoto. I can tell everyone that his dog will not hunt. I bet that dog is like rest of his pack of hounds. I understand he now has a dog called "Tax Cuts" and another called "Maybe I am Tough on Crime but Maybe I am Not". It depends on which way the dog is walking. Now we have a new dog in the pack.

The Liberal Party hates working families. We have to get a shorter name for the dog, but I can say that it is one ugly mutt, just like the rest of the broken promises that he carries around with him, with his little collar and chains. That is what we are seeing.

The people back home need to ask themselves a question. It is all about strategic voting. Who makes strategic votes in this country? It is people sitting in Calgary boardrooms asking whether they want to attack working families and take money out of their pockets, straight with no chaser, or with a little green scarf when they do it? That is what is being offered by the Liberal Party now. It has stood up with its green scarf and made a bunch of vague and empty promises that it has absolutely no intention of living up to because it never lives up to any of its promises.

• (1155)

This is the party that year after year floated the greatest fraud in Canadian history, called the red book. It just changed the numbers year after year. It changed the dates every year and so it was the 1993 red book, it was the 1998 red book, it was the 2000 red book, it was the 2003 red book. It was the same red book of empty promises.

The best thing of all, when the Liberals were finally exposed, the Canadian public finally said, "Do you mean year after year we've been listening to this same line and we never got anything delivered?"

Then the Liberals did something different and it is absolutely fascinating. They turned around and took the red book off and referred to the promises that they have delivered on. Now they are going across the country telling people that they had a plan for the environment and they were actually saving the planet. They blamed those rotten Conservatives, and they are very rotten as a party, but at least they are telling people where they are coming from.

The Liberals had child care fixed. They had everything fixed. Everything that they did not do year after year after year.

Why am I picking on the Liberal Party? It is very simple. The Liberals are standing up here today and betraying the working families of this country. One more time they are going to say, "On this day we're going to stand with you but when push comes to shove, when the time comes to stand up, when it is what side are you on", we know what side they are on. They are not on the side of working families. They are not on the side of fairness. They are definitely on the side of putting it to average Canadians, like you and me, Mr. Speaker.

Private Members' Business

I am telling people back home to watch this vote. Watch to see if the new Liberal leader will have to whip the few members that he has with good conscience into voting to kill a bill that works for Canadians and a bill that the Liberals fundamentally do not want to have happen because they have stood against this legislation time and time again.

In conclusion I would like to say we have been through this bill ten times in the House. Ten times the working families of Canada have brought this bill forward. Ten times we have gone through all the arguments. Ten times we have heard the various excuses and reasons why it would not work.

However, we know at the end of the day those excuses do not hold water. The bill is a reasonable bill. The bill will bring labour peace rather than labour conflict. This is a bill that has been thought out. This is a bill that certainly will not in any way hinder the ability of the federal government to bring back to work legislation if it deems necessary. This is a bill that in no way will limit any minister's decision to say whether something is an essential service or not.

If members are hearing anything else on the bill then they are obviously hearing it from a Liberal because the Liberals do not believe in these things. They do not believe in putting into law the rights that will protect working families.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thought for a moment that, in his fervour, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay was going to take all of my time. I would not have been able to speak to this bill, which is so important for my riding.

First and foremost, I would like to respond to the Leader of the Opposition, who wrote a letter to Buzz Hargrove about this bill. He tried to explain that he could not vote in favour of this bill. I would like to call him to order. I would remind my hon. colleagues of the Liberal Party that the legislator does not speak in vain. Section 87.4 of the Canada Labour Code states:

During a strike or lockout not prohibited by this Part, the employer, the trade union and the employees in the bargaining unit must continue the supply of services, operation of facilities or production of goods to the extent necessary to prevent an immediate and serious danger to the safety or health of the public.

I will interpret this for my Liberal friends: these are known as essential services. Since the legislator does not speak in vain, that is what this means. It would therefore be a false pretext to now say that they will not support this bill, because the Speaker of the House did not find in their favour. The Speaker of the House used that section to demonstrate that everything already appears in the Canada Labour Code. They are looking for an excuse.

I would like to talk about my riding and Radio Nord Communications. Few members in this House have experienced disputes similar to those in Abitibi—Témiscamingue regarding televised communications. Imagine, if you will, a strike that lasts 20 months, leaving an entire region without any televised information. For 22 months, no one knew what was going on in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. If for that reason alone, we must vote in favour of this bill. As explained by my hon. colleague, the chief whip of the Bloc Québécois—whose riding I cannot recall, since the name is so

long—things can be extremely difficult for the region when a dispute arises.

In my riding, scabs would come to the radio station and provide a sketchy kind of news. There was no longer any news on television, there was no longer anything news on what was happening in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. For 22 months, the only television news we were getting in Abitibi—Témiscamingue was on what was happening on the Jacques-Cartier bridge, on the Mercier bridge, on the Champlain bridge, or in the Laval area. Because of this lack of televised news, we no longer knew what was happening in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. I entered politics with the goal of having this bill passed. We have every reason to support this legislation.

Since 1977, labour conflicts in Quebec are more civilized, thanks to our anti-scab legislation. From 1992 to 2002—a period of 10 years—under the Quebec Labour Code, with an anti-scab act, the average dispute lasted 15.9 days. Let us round that figure to up 16 days, to please Conservative members. During that same period, under the Canada Labour Code, the average conflict lasted 31 days.

Some might say this is not significant. In my opinion, it is a huge difference and this is because there is no anti-scab provision preventing the hiring of replacement workers. When such a provision is not included in the legislation, it creates an imbalance between the two sides. This is what happened at Radio Nord Communications. Every morning, scabs—this is what they must be called—crossed the picket line. They crossed the picket line. We are talking about a small region. We are not talking about Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver or Quebec City. No.

● (1200)

We are talking about towns like Rouyn-Noranda or Val-d'Or, where everybody knows one another. Cars, vans and pickup trucks came in, their windows tinted but not barred, hiding the scabs who were going to replace the striking workers. Everyone knew one another. Everyone in the area knew who was going to work, who was crossing the line that morning to steal the workers' jobs. I believe that for this reason alone this social measure is so important.

This bill has been brought forward in the past 10 years because it is vital to a region such as ours as well as to other Canadian regions. It has been brought forward so that a law can emerge that will ensure that labour conflicts do not last indefinitely and that individuals do not destroy property, as was the case with Vidéotron, which suffered damages of about \$42 million. These damages were not necessarily caused by the workers.

The same thing happened in the case of Radio Nord: damages were incurred. For years, Cargill suffered damages. And what were we told? We were told that—it may be possible, possibly, perhaps, coincidentally—it could be that this law does not cover all circumstances. A law adapted to the circumstances enables us to meet society's needs.

Government Orders

As I have been signalled that I have less than one minute, and since I know that I am the last speaker in this debate, in closing I would like to sincerely thank the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for her extraordinary work on this bill. She is at the heart of this bill and she has the workers' interests at heart. On Wednesday, the final vote will take place, and then we shall see the true faces of the two parties who believe they will one day form the government: the party now in power and the party that hopes to gain that power. We will truly see if the rights of workers are their priority.

I urge them to reflect on this matter. They have 24 hours to take a position. I invite the Liberals to redo their homework and revisit the legislation and to vote in favour of this bill. I hope that everyone in this House will at last respect the rights of workers.

•(1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 12:07 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour 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:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The recorded division on Motion No. 1 stands deferred.

[*English*]

The next question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Galipeau): The recorded division on Motion No. 3 stands deferred.

[*Translation*]

The House would normally proceed at this time to the taking of the deferred recorded division at the report stage of the bill. However, pursuant to Standing Order 98, recorded divisions stand deferred until Wednesday, March 21, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

The House resumed from March 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Victoria has the floor. When she last spoke on the bill she had 16 minutes left.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

As I was saying when we left off, this bill does tinker with a few administrative issues, but it does not address the substantive issues that seniors are facing. It really is the incredible lightness of Bill C-36 that best characterizes it. There is so much more that could have been done. Perhaps seniors will be listening very closely this afternoon during the budget to see if everything that could have gone into this bill but was overlooked and forgotten might be addressed by the budget. We can always hope.

I would like to talk about three issues: eligibility, retroactivity, and the clawback.

Large numbers of people are eligible but are not receiving benefits. According to Statistics Canada, right now there are 130,000 low income seniors who are eligible for the GIS but are not receiving it. Eighty per cent of those missing out on the GIS are women, most of whom are very elderly. There are also about 55,000 who are missing out on CPP retirement benefits. For the average riding, that works out to about 200 seniors who are not getting their CPP. That means 200 seniors in Victoria.

The comparable number missing out on the Quebec pension plan benefits is apparently zero. Why are there no people missing out on the Quebec plan but so many elsewhere in Canada? Apparently the answer is that they receive phone calls or even visits by officials to let them know how to apply for these benefits.

There are no legislative impediments to Canadian officials advising seniors who appear to be eligible for OAS, GIS and CPP benefits. Files are used to identify seniors who have received overpayments. Computer files such as income tax returns are used to automatically reduce OAS payments to those subject to the OAS clawback. The same files could be used to identify those seniors who should be receiving benefits but are not.

Government Orders

This legislation ensures ways of securing interest on payments owed to the Crown but does nothing to ensure payments owed to seniors by the Crown. For example, the government has now admitted on three separate occasions that seniors have been shortchanged for the last five years because Statistics Canada miscalculated the consumer price index in 2001.

Bill C-36 enhances the government's ability to recoup money from seniors when they receive too much money due to government error, but when seniors receive too little due to government error, the government refuses to reimburse them. That is shameful. That is precisely the kind of thing that the government, when it was the Reform Party or the Alliance or whatever it was, would have gone after, but now, for some strange reason, it has become silent on this injustice.

I would also like to talk about retroactive payments. The current legislation does not remedy the case when seniors apply late for payments. The OAS is notionally a universal program, payable based on the number of years one has lived in Canada. It is an entitlement based on past residency. The OAS, at one time, had a five year retroactive period. This period should be more than the 11 months that it is now and perhaps should return to the five years.

The CPP and the QPP are quite different. Here, the funds disbursed do not come from the consolidated revenue fund but are made up of contributions from employers and employees, contributions that have actually been made. These benefits are funded from contributions from Canadians. Here there is a fiduciary responsibility by the government, and the appropriate period should be full retroactivity, plus interest.

There is a private member's bill before the House that would do just that and would provide full retroactivity for the CPP, and since the government did not do it, I would urge all members of the House to support that bill.

• (1210)

In addition, this legislation does nothing to address the GIS clawback. Earnings, RRSP withdrawals and CPP benefits for those on GIS face an effective tax rate of 50% to 100%. This is because GIS is reduced by 50% for every dollar of income, including RRSP withdrawals. The structure of the current clawbacks for GIS makes it virtually impossible for GIS recipients to enjoy the benefits of any RRSP savings they may have. In a similar fashion, any employment undertaken by seniors who are on GIS will lead to GIS clawbacks.

The right enshrined in the seniors charter was to income security. We are still very far from that. We have asked for a seniors advocate to help look into the adequacy of the programs available to seniors. Instead, the government provided a committee. We have to go much further than that and ensure that our seniors have income security and well-being in this country.

• (1215)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member wanted to talk about seniors as a vulnerable group in society and particularly about the issue of poverty among seniors. As well, there is the aspect of some 130,000 seniors who are not able to collect the guaranteed income supplement, I believe.

I wonder whether the member is aware of what actions the Government of Canada has taken to contact those Canadians to ensure that if they are eligible for such benefits they in fact are appropriately instructed on how to apply.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, 130,000 low income seniors are now eligible for but not receiving GIS benefits, so much more than that, and 55,000 are missing out on CPP retirement benefits. This is quite a significant number.

As far as I know, the seniors are not being advised in any way on this aspect of what is their entitlement. After seniors have worked their whole lives, the government is turning a blind eye to this benefit that Canadian seniors have a right to. Right now in Victoria there are about 55,000 seniors and 5,600 of them are living in poverty. They are living month to month, in some cases with great difficulty where rents are very high in one of the most expensive cities in Canada, yet about 200 of them are not advised in any way by the government about the best way to benefit from what would essentially lift them, at least partially, out of the extreme poverty that some of them face.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this issue about the CPP, the OAS and the GIS is really near and dear to my heart. We are returning from two constituency weeks and I spent the better part of that time knocking on doors, meeting with seniors' organizations and meeting seniors in their homes.

I must say that one of the most important issues for seniors is their ability to live out their retirement with dignity and respect. In my hometown of Hamilton, 25% of seniors live in poverty, 36% of them women, and when the member for Victoria talks about the 55,000 people who are not able to access their benefits, she is talking about many people in my community.

I know that the poverty rates are much the same for seniors right across the country. Since the member for Victoria represents her constituents so amazingly effectively in this House of Commons, I wonder if she can tell us what the situation is in Victoria and whether she thinks this bill helps those seniors and lifts them out of poverty in any way at all.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, during the break I also spoke to many seniors. In particular, I spoke to an organization called the Greater Victoria Seniors, which advocates for seniors who are not receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

The stories I heard are really very troubling. At a time in their lives when they have finished working and are looking forward to this time, many seniors are still facing incredible poverty. We are all aware of the enormous contributions seniors make to their communities. They are looking forward to enjoying that time of their lives when they have finished working. Many seniors are still facing incredible poverty or, if they are not facing poverty, they are in some cases living from month to month. This is what this bill could have addressed and chose to sidestep.

Government Orders

Yes, the bill does tinker with and improve the service delivery of the GIS, removing the need to reapply, but on the substantive issues it is virtually silent. For example, one of the demands made by seniors across the country, not just in Victoria or in British Columbia, was that they need a seniors' ombudsman, someone who will advocate for them and who will look into the adequacy and fairness of our programs. The government has again refused to respond to this demand.

• (1220)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate on behalf of the NDP caucus in the third reading debate on Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act.

I know that the government wants the bill to pass through the House expeditiously. With an election perhaps just days away, the government desperately needs something to hold up to seniors to say, "See? We acted on your concerns". However, every time I have pushed the government for action on issues like fully pension retroactivity or reimbursement of the money owed to seniors as a result of the CPI miscalculation, it has responded by dodging the issues at hand and instead has pointed to this bill simply as a placebo.

That is all this bill is, a placebo. It is a placebo that has all the right things in its title. It references the three cornerstones of most seniors' retirement income, namely the GIS, the OAS and the CPP. In doing so it raises hopes among seniors that this legislation will finally take the necessary steps to lift them out of poverty, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Despite the bill's promising title, it does little to improve the lives of the vast majority of seniors in Canada. Instead, it engages in administrative tinkering that serves the government more than it serves its purported target audience. There is only one section in the entire bill that is truly laudable, and that is that the government is finally going to waive the requirement for a renewal application for the GIS and allowance benefits after an initial application has been made. That change, quite frankly, is long overdue.

Once seniors have applied for and received the GIS, there is absolutely no need for them to fill out subsequent applications. Their income tax forms give the government all the information that is needed to determine continued eligibility. Removing this burden from seniors is indeed a welcome relief.

Sadly, the bill is more remarkable for what it failed to achieve than for what it accomplished.

During the past few weeks I held consultations with seniors throughout my riding of Hamilton Mountain. It did not matter whether I was talking to seniors on their doorsteps, at a meeting of the residents' council of Swansea Apartments, at a gathering of active seniors at the Sackville Hill Seniors Recreation Centre, or at a meeting of over 150 seniors at St. Elizabeth Village, the message was always the same. Seniors are concerned primarily about the adequacy of their incomes and about the need for improved health care.

I recognize that health care issues are beyond the scope of this bill, but suffice it to say that huge numbers of elderly people in my

community are suffering. They are suffering because they cannot afford the diapers for their incontinence. They cannot afford the new lenses for their glasses that would allow them to carry on their normal independent lives. They cannot afford the dentures that are so crucial to their nutrition and to their overall health.

The seniors who told me those stories were shy about admitting those problems publicly. Most of them came up to me privately at the end of meetings and tearfully told me of their personal care needs. In many instances they had to swallow their pride to reach out for help.

That is not the retirement with dignity and respect that the government promised to seniors when it voted for my seniors charter. This House has adopted the charter as a statement of fundamental rights that each and every senior in Canada deserves to enjoy as a contributing member of our society. The time to enact those rights is now.

The other concern that is top of mind for seniors not just in Hamilton but right across the country is income security. Seniors everywhere told me that they are worried about the solvency of their private pensions, the adequacy of survivor pensions should they predecease their spouse, the sufficiency of CPP and public income supports, and their ability to cope with what Statistics Canada confirms is a higher rate of inflation for seniors than for average Canadians.

Since the mid-1990s seniors' incomes have reached a ceiling. The gap between seniors' revenues and those of other Canadians is increasing. According to the National Advisory Council on Aging, between 1997 and 2003 the mean income of senior households increased by \$4,100 while the average income of other Canadian households increased by \$9,000.

The situation is even more pronounced for seniors living alone. In total, over one-quarter of a million seniors live under the low income cutoff, or as we more commonly say, below the poverty line. In 2004 about one-third of seniors, most of whom were single women, had little other income and were dependent on OAS and GIS for an average annual income of only \$12,400.

Living in poverty is hardly a retirement with dignity and respect. So when seniors learned that the government was finally going to open up the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act and bring in amendments, they greeted the news with cautious optimism. They eagerly awaited a sign that the government understood the financial plight of seniors and that it would do the right thing for those who built our country.

Government Orders

•(1225)

However, when seniors had a chance to review the bill, they felt cheated. The programs that seniors rely on most for their financial security are finally being amended and yet nowhere does the bill address the most urgent needs articulated by seniors. The bill does not increase benefit levels to lift seniors out of poverty. The bill does not allow seniors to claim retroactive benefits, even if they are just trying to access their own money, as is the case with the Canada pension plan. The bill does nothing to foster a higher take-up for those unaware that they are eligible for government benefits.

Yes, we will be supporting Bill C-36 because we must at least ensure that the poorest of seniors will have easier access to the GIS, but for everything else, we must now pin our hopes on this afternoon's budget. Perhaps it will live up to the spirit of the seniors' charter and see the government walk the walk.

Seniors are still waiting to be reimbursed for the StatsCan error in calculating the consumer price index that has shortchanged seniors for years on the increases to their CPP, OAS and GIS entitlements. Will the government's budget this afternoon fix this egregious wrong? Will the government allocate resources to re-establish the government specialists within Services Canada who can help people access their pension entitlements fully and in a timely fashion? If not, will the budget at least contain provisions that mirror my private member's Bill C-336 and allow for full retroactive benefits plus interest when someone applies for the CPP?

CPP is a pay as you go, contribution based program that is funded solely by employers and employees. It is absurd that a person who is late in applying for his or her pension is only entitled to 11 months of retroactive benefits. It is that person's money. It is not the government's money.

Will the budget live up to the other commitments the government made to seniors by voting for my seniors' charter in the House of Commons? Will it invest in accessible, universal, public health care by increasing funding to primary care, home care, palliative care, pharmacare, preventive care and health promotion? Will it support secure, accessible and affordable housing? Will it create lifelong learning opportunities? Will it finally create the office of the seniors advocate to ensure that seniors are involved in policy making and have access to all government programs and services? This afternoon the proof will be in the pudding.

If the government wants to be taken seriously with respect to its treatment of seniors, it needs to do more than talk the talk. It needs to walk the walk. Bill C-36 left seniors feeling betrayed. It is not too late to do the right thing. Let us listen to the voices of seniors in Hamilton and right across the country. Let us give them the support they need to retire with the dignity and respect they deserve. We owe them at least that much.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech about the situation facing our senior citizens. I was very moved by the clear passion and commitment she shows for senior citizens.

Across my region of northern Ontario I am seeing a terrible situation. Senior citizens, people who built this country, are slipping into poverty. There are families whose parents are living in terrible

conditions. After putting years into building our economy and their pensions, the time has come for the government to support them, but they are being left behind. I was astounded by the stories that I heard just this past week in Kirkland Lake, Iroquois Falls and Timmins. I met senior citizens and heard their stories. It is a disgrace for a country with a surplus that we have to leave these people behind.

Given that it was the New Democratic Party that brought forward a seniors' charter to defend the rights of senior citizens so that they do not have to come begging to politicians every time, and that there will be guarantees for senior citizens so that they do not live in poverty, how does the member look at the bill before us? The bill does nothing to address the growing gap and it does nothing to address the basic issue of fairness for senior citizens. What do we need to do to ensure that senior citizens have a reason to trust politicians, to believe that politicians will actually stand up and fight for a fundamental belief which I think all Canadians agree with, that the elderly should be looked after because they helped build the country?

•(1230)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. This bill is a little bit of flag waving to try to placate seniors and for the government to say that it did something in the House of Commons to address their concerns.

Substantively the bill does very little. The seniors in the member's riding of Timmins—James Bay are like the seniors of Hamilton Mountain and the seniors in Victoria that my other colleague spoke about. They do not need more rhetoric. What they need from the government is action.

We have the capacity to deal with those things in the House. I tabled a motion asking that the House of Commons review the income needs of seniors on a regular basis, that we establish adequate benefit levels and that we say to seniors that it is unacceptable that they are living in poverty after all the contributions they have made to build this amazing country. If we are not going to do that, at a minimum we should take seriously Bill C-336 which I introduced so that seniors can access their CPP entitlements retroactively.

It is completely insane that we rely on funeral homes to let people know about their survivor benefits when a loved one passes away. Why can the government not engage in active outreach? It used to do that. There used to be people in Services Canada who counselled people with respect to their pension entitlements. Those people are now dealing with everything from boat licences to employment insurance. That is not good enough.

Government Orders

Our seniors deserve the kind of hands on specialized attention that gives them access to their benefits in a timely fashion. If that is not provided, then at a minimum seniors should be given full retroactivity for their benefits so that no matter when they find out about their entitlements they can get the money that is legally and legitimately theirs. That is the minimum of what we need to do to lift seniors out of poverty.

When the government supported the seniors' charter we all saw that as beacon of hope. We thought that perhaps just for once this House would move forward and take the right steps on behalf of seniors. Clearly that has not happened yet. On the eve of an election I am not optimistic that it is going to happen, but boy, I know that the government is going to be out there waving the flag and saying, "Trust us. We will do it next time".

I do not think seniors are so trusting any more. They cannot be fooled. They deserve action now.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member referred to a charter of rights for seniors. It is an interesting concept and something which I actually tabled back in February 2004.

Could the member explain very briefly how that relates to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I would think that after the lengthy debate in the House about that charter in June of last year which actually led to the adoption of this charter by the House the member would be aware of the rights that were enumerated in the charter. Those rights are the right to income security, the right to health care, the right to wellness, the right to lifelong learning and above all, a mechanism to give real access to seniors for all of the government programs and services that the charter outlines.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate at third reading of Bill C-36. It is an important debate notwithstanding that the parties are supportive of the amendments to the Canada Pension Plan Act and the Old Age Security Act, and some of the provisions of senior security.

Interesting enough, members have spent a fair bit of time talking about seniors, poverty and vulnerability. I will not change that because it is well worth speaking to those. However, I will speak briefly to the intent of Bill C-36.

As we all know, the Canada Pension Plan Act and the Old Age Security Act provide the basis for government sponsored social benefit programs that offer a minimum level of supplementary income to senior citizens, retired or disabled individuals and their dependants following a loss of income. An important point to note is that our seniors population will double over the next 25 years.

When I was first elected in 1993, the seniors' proportion of my constituency was approximately 15%. It is now over 20%. Based on the latest information available, there is no question the senior population is rising. I will be faced with a populace that is very vulnerable and has a significant amount of needs. I have seen it in the level of activity in my riding. Many people in my community have reached retirement age. My community is the most mature community in the city of Mississauga. Many of these people do not

live in the dignity in which I believe Canadians would wish them to live.

The bill addresses a couple of things.

With regard to the Canada pension plan, I played an important role with respect to Bill C-2, which was the last time major amendments were made to the Canada Pension Plan Act. Some members may recall that back in 1997 a lot of Canadians said that the Canada pension plan was bankrupt. They believed it would not be there for them in the future and therefore could not depend on it. That is no longer the case.

The government of the day brought in important changes to the Canada Pension Plan Act which, in particular, dealt with the premiums that were received from those who contributed to the Canada pension plan. Rather than loaning those premiums to the provinces at low or no interest, the whole funding of the Canada pension plan was put on an independent basis. The moneys collected were invested in the public marketplace in a fashion that would not disrupt it. A tremendous amount of capital was invested, but it was set up through a special investment board.

As it turns out that plan has done very well. The most recent actuarial evaluation of which I am aware indicates that the plan is on a very sound footing and has been for over 90 years. That is very significant and Canadians should understand the Canada pension plan is there for all of them.

With regard to Bill C-36, there are a couple of amendments of note. The first one has to do with disability benefits. Members will note that currently disability benefits are available after four years of participation in the labour force if individuals are members of the plan. That will be changed to three years.

•(1235)

It should be noted that the Canada pension plan and the old age security, together, pay out over \$50 billion a year in support. This is a very large number. It probably makes most people's eyes roll back at the magnitude of it, yet people within our society do not benefit to the extent necessary to ensure they can live in the dignity and the respect to which they should and are entitled.

With regard to the guaranteed income supplement, it currently pays out \$6.2 billion a year. Right now roughly 12% of our population is seniors. That figure is expected to double in the next 25 years. We understand the demands an aging society can have on these important programs. Even now there is evidence of that, as we have already heard from members with regard to the guaranteed income supplement. For instance, some 130,000 seniors, who are eligible for those benefits, have not applied and have not received them. Why have we as a country, as parliamentarians, as government not found a way to be in touch with every Canadian, particularly the most vulnerable in our society? I refer to seniors collectively because they have the least opportunities and tools available to correct their situation. They cannot go back to work. They cannot somehow deal with inflation by themselves. Inflation generally eats away any income protection they have against inflation.

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For a person is on a fixed income it really is a challenge. Consider the range of needs of seniors, and we have all seen them in our ridings, whether it is pharmacare, or home care, or excessive medical expenses. With our tax credit system now, there is very nominal support from the tax system, such as the medical expense supplement. There are so many different ways. Housing is an extremely important issue, although the bill does not address it. However, we are talking about aspects that impact the lives of seniors in many ways. These changes will address some of those. It is not a short bill, but these significant amendments are very brief.

The second amendment, other than the Canada pension plan, has to do with the disability portion of the Canada pension plan. The disability portion provides disabled Canadians with income supplement. The proposed changes will make it easier for them to qualify for that benefit.

Under the current law, individuals have to be CPP contributors for four of the last six years before the disability makes us unemployable and takes us out of the labour force. The amendment would change that from four years to three years. This would bring another 3,700 people into eligibility for Canada pension plan disability by the year 2010, according to the government estimates. It would also provide additional benefits to a spouse and children.

This is all well and good. These are important changes. The accessibility and the sustainability of these programs would be enhanced by the bill, and I am pleased members are supporting it. However, I want to move even beyond Bill C-36, as other members have, and talk about the broader range of seniors' issues with which the House must be seized.

Back in February 2004, I tabled a series of motions related to seniors' health and well-being.

The first motion was to consider the advisability of a guaranteed annual income for seniors. We have talked about poverty for a long time in this place. Talk is cheap, but how do we get to where we want to go? We have to ask ourselves the rhetorical question. What is the level of poverty that we are prepared to tolerate in Canada? If the answer is none, as some members have suggested, then why does everybody who makes minimum wage automatically live in poverty? Why has the purchasing power of seniors been eroded by inflation? Why have things like GIS not been indexed? It was declining in purchasing power.

• (1240)

If we believe seniors are the most vulnerable, that they are the ones least able to deal with the challenge of financial need for basic necessities, then clearly we should talk about something like a guaranteed annual income.

I proposed another motion to eliminate mandatory retirement. We have seniors who, for whatever reason, were unsuccessful or unlucky during their working careers, or they were unable to have sustained work, or they had a family tragedy, or their financial base for retirement purposes was taken away because someone was very ill. We know many illnesses for which there is no coverage under insurance plans and the tax benefits are not enough to pay for substantial amounts.

My daughter was taking a drug that cost \$1,700 per month when she was fighting cancer. It was not covered by insurance or recovered through tax benefits. The money had to be paid, and it was not discretionary. The drug provided the only way for her white cells to recover quickly enough so she could withstand the regimen of chemotherapy.

I also know about seniors' issues. My mother is 82 years old and has a number of prescriptions, like many seniors do. Many of the prescriptions are expensive. Some are covered but not all. Even some of the basic ones, like calcium for bone strength, are not covered. It is hard to believe that these kinds of things can actually happen, but it is endemic in the system related to seniors.

Another motion was about caregiver tax credits. Although our system has caregiver tax credits, family members, usually a son or daughter, and if there is one of each usually the daughter, probably will have to withdraw from the paid labour force to care for the parent. Let us consider that. They withdraw from the labour force, do not earn income, do not participate in the Canada pension plan as fully as they could have and therefore defer the buildup of their own pension benefits. There is a ripple effect when someone has to provide care, for which we know the system does not provide.

Caregiving for those in need in our society, particularly seniors, is generally not available. As a jurisdictional responsibility, it falls on the provinces, but I will never ever use the argument that it is one jurisdiction over another. The issue is seniors. The issue is the need for caregiving for those who are most in need.

I proposed a motion to provide EI benefits for caregivers who withdrew from the paid labour force to care for a family member. Why should they not qualify for EI benefits? They are providing an important service. They are not withdrawing from the paid labour force for a discretionary reason. It is needed and necessary. It is the right thing to do. Why can we not support those who provide care through the EI program?

I also proposed a motion for a refundable medical expense supplement. There is a provision for extraordinary expenses, but I believe it only covers 25% of them. I wanted to double that to 50%. Again, medical expenses are not discretionary. When they are digging into the pockets of fixed income earning seniors, we can understand how we could have a very good debate and argument for doing this.

I had another motion to amend the Canada pension plan to permit those who withdrew from the paid labour force to provide for an agent or infirm member. They are withdrawing. Under CPP, why could it not be deemed to be work? Why can they not pay into CPP during the time they are caring for a loved one, a senior, and continue to earn CPP credits? It makes so much sense to me. We have the tools to work with if we could only get these things on the table in terms of a comprehensive strategy to deal with seniors.

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•(1245)

I also wanted to introduce a motion that would take the necessary steps to improve accessibility to home care, to establish meaningful guidelines to ensure that the number of hours of care available are sufficient and to expand home care to include chronic care. Chronic care is not part of the home care model. Chronic care is a different situation. It is a lot more intense and involves a lot more time. It falls through the cracks.

We could work with the provinces to strengthen the pharmacare system and that would ensure all medically necessary drugs were available to seniors without cost? Why is it that we cannot define medically necessary? In the Canada Health Act, medically necessary is not a defined term. I remember talking with Roy Romanow about this one day and asking whether we should do it. He said that if we were to open that up it would really cause some problems. I am not afraid of problems. I would like Mr. Romanow to come here and explain it to parliamentarians. Maybe the health committee should call him and ask him why we should not be talking about medically necessary services, especially as it relates to seniors. Why should we not talk about supporting seniors who need medically necessary drugs?

Many of the tools are here. We could look at working with the provinces to expand and improve accessibility to affordable housing. The Government of Canada has more work to do on the affordable housing file.

I spent five years on the board of the Peel Regional Housing Authority. I know a lot about rent geared to income. I know a lot about subsidized housing and government housing and how important it is. Half the units in my community are seniors' units and the other half are mostly for families led by mothers. The seniors' units are there but in the last report I received from the region of Peel, the wait list can be anywhere from four to seven years, depending on one's rating based on need.

Affordable housing obviously comes in there. This is all part of this theme that Bill C-36 brings to the House about dealing with sustainability of and accessibility to the tools or benefits that seniors need. This is also part of the model.

I have another motion to establish guidelines for the care of the chronically ill and those who require continuous care and for the regulation of the nursing home industry. I am sorry I had to raise that one in Parliament by way of a motion but members may recall that we had gone through a period of time where seniors' abuse in some of the caregiving facilities was an issue. It is an issue that does scream out for guidelines within our caregiving institutions. It is another way in which we can help seniors.

We could also amend the Criminal Code to recognize that taking unfair advantage of a vulnerable senior represents an aggravating factor which warrants stiffer sentences for those convicted of that abuse. Can anyone imagine seniors being taken advantage of by people who recognize their situations and defraud them of money? That is an aggravating circumstance. They are taking advantage of a situation. Our Criminal Code should take that into consideration.

I want to add one last element that has to do with something to which a previous member had spoken, and that is a charter of rights for seniors.

I asked the question earlier about how a charter of rights for seniors would dovetail with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and, as a matter of fact, it does not and it is not intended to. However, it should define the values and the attributes that we want to show in terms of the Canadian value system as it relates to seniors so that every time we introduce legislation in Parliament, we should always look at it with the lens of a seniors' charter that protects their rights and ensures we are not eroding them or attacking them but that we are somehow ensuring benefits go to them.

The seniors' charter is only a lens. Just as we use the gender analysis to ensure women's issues are properly reflected and cared for in legislation, seniors should have the same.

•(1250)

•(1255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my comments will be twofold. First, I am going to ask the hon. member to do something, and then I will put a question to him.

First, I am inviting the hon. member to reread the comments that he just made. He spoke as if he were a new member in this House. However, he is a seasoned parliamentarian who was a government member just a few months ago. During all the years when his party was in office, we put to him the same questions that he is now asking. When his party was in office, he could have settled the issue.

We in this House heard all this empty rhetoric about intentions. What is the member's intention? If his party is elected again to run the country, the member will again do what he did in the past. Who created the problem? In 2001, public servants admitted they knew that some low income seniors had not received the guaranteed income supplement. They even knew how many. The member mentioned that number. If the number is known, then we also know who these people are. Why? Because they can be identified by looking at income tax returns.

The previous government used a pretext, namely that access to information and confidentiality was the main obstacle. However, the information commissioner said that the act authorized such an exercise.

I now come to my question, which is twofold. When the Liberals were in office, why did they not give seniors the guaranteed income supplement to which they were entitled? These people are still owed \$3.2 billion. If the member's party is re-elected again, does he commit to act, as he is now claiming, to do something about this issue?

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We Bloc Québécois members did take action. In 2001, our former colleague, Mr. Gagnon, who was the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, led the campaign. When he first started, 68,000 seniors in Quebec had not received their guaranteed income supplement. We were able to track down 42,000 of these people, who were supposed to share a total of \$159 million. That is a huge amount. A large number of these people are still waiting for a sum of \$128 million that has yet to be given to them. That money has not been paid to these people in Quebec. I want to know why this was not done.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, politically the member needs to ask the question that way but he knows full well that I am a backbench member of Parliament, not the Government of Canada.

When I was on the government side I argued those things. In fact, I tabled 19 motions in this place dealing with seniors during the time the Liberals were in government. I advocated for seniors. As a matter of fact, I pulled out an old householder from mid-2005 in which I laid out the number of people who were entitled to benefits and had not received them.

We can ask why the government does not do this or that. I tell my constituents, who have moms or dads in their retirement years and who may be eligible for benefits, to ensure they are involved. When things do not happen it is not necessarily the fault of the government. The government can facilitate those things but it is the responsibility of families. Families must be engaged. If there are people who are eligible for GIS but who have absolutely no family members who love or care for them, then we have an even bigger problem.

I appreciate the member's comments. I am here today continuing something that I started many years ago, which is to advocate for the most vulnerable in our society. I have many tools that I have identified for governments to consider but governments must deal with certain priorities. In the case of why was it not done during the last government, I can say that when a government starts off with a \$42 billion deficit left by the Conservative government, it takes at least three years to clean up the financial mess. In order for the last government to do that it had to make enormous cuts to so many different things. One can imagine how difficult it was to claw our way back to the level of services that Canadians should have.

Subsequent to the previous government cleaning up the fiscal mess, tax cuts came, benefits improved, employment was up and interest rates were down. When we finished we handed over the strongest financial situation any government had ever inherited.

The money and the tools are there. I am waiting for the government to deliver in today's budget. Seniors deserve to receive a good share of that money.

• (1300)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that members of the House who have listened to my colleague have huge respect for his knowledge with respect to the guaranteed income supplement and those situations that seniors find themselves facing. I would like to take advantage of his knowledge and have him answer a question that has been asked in my office many times this week.

While keeping in mind those aberrations that occur under the Canada Health Act, how is it that in the province of Ontario there is what amounts to a tax on the health care premium? I know seniors who are much below the poverty line and they are being pressed because their taxable income finds that they actually must pay on their health care premium in the province of Ontario. How can that happen under the Canada Health Act?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the issue, unfortunately, has to do with a provincial initiative but a benefit nonetheless.

It does raise an interesting point about when something happens regardless of the jurisdiction. We have a situation where the tax implications with regard to the health premium in Ontario is a detriment to many seniors. I have often wondered why we do not have a system to check the implications of actions of other levels of government to ensure that when things happen that we as the Government of Canada can use the tools that we have available to offset, to subsidize or to refund through the federal system those kinds of implications.

What it gets down to is that we need to have a simple criteria. It may very well be that if it is medically necessary, if it has to do with seniors and it has to do with seniors who are in need, that is where we should set our priorities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is my second opportunity to speak about Bill C-36. I am happy to do so, particularly because I am the critic for seniors' issues.

I would simply like to remind members, as others have done before me, that in 2006 we introduced Bill C-36, but I think it should have been introduced long ago, since five years earlier the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities examined the guaranteed income supplement, a non-taxable monthly benefit, which is supposed to be paid, based on household income, to low-income beneficiaries of the old age security pension.

In its December 2001 report, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities observed a number of deficiencies in the application of the guaranteed income supplement program, which is among the three income-maintenance programs for seniors administered by the Department of Human Resources and Social Development. The three programs are not perfect, but today I will only address the guaranteed income supplement, because there are some serious deficiencies in its application.

First of all, in order to receive the guaranteed income supplement, citizens had to apply for it every year. Eligible individuals usually applied for a renewal when completing their tax returns. It is precisely this last point that is the source of a grave injustice.

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In its analysis of the matter, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities referred to a study conducted in Toronto in early 2001 by social statistician and policy analyst Richard Shillington. The study found that only 15% of seniors who were using food banks were getting the guaranteed income supplement, though nearly all were eligible for it. Furthermore, a news report in the August 23, 2001 edition of *The Toronto Star* stated that more than 380,000 Canadians eligible for the guaranteed income supplement were not receiving it.

Personally, I find these statistics appalling, since seniors are vulnerable individuals who are often unable to stand up for themselves.

The question was simple. Why did so many people fail to apply for the guaranteed income supplement, something that could be so beneficial to people who are poor and without resources?

The answer was equally simple. For one thing, it is not easy for elderly people with low literacy levels or failing eyesight to understand the complexity of the eligibility criteria, the content of tax returns and the information pamphlets written for them. For another thing, many people did not know that they had to renew their application every year.

The guaranteed income supplement is for seniors who have physical or mental health problems, physical limitations, language barriers, or limited literacy skills who receive complicated documents, written in language that is often inaccessible and difficult. It is therefore not surprising that 85% of eligible individuals do not take advantage of this income.

Furthermore, Human Resources Development Canada apparently had difficulty contacting particularly disadvantaged clientele, such as people who have never worked outside the home—often women at that age, and a significant number of them—, people who do not file income tax returns—also numerous—, aboriginal people, residents of remote communities, people with limited literacy skills, people who do not read or speak either official language, people with a disability or who are ill, and the homeless.

Most absurd of all is no doubt the fact that HRDC had been aware of the under-subscription of GIS since at least 1993, but never did anything about it, as evidenced by the fact that the problem persists, or at least did so at the time when Bill C-36, which has yet to come into force, was introduced.

There are not very many options to solve this problem. First and foremost, potentially eligible individuals, whether they file income tax returns or not, have to be contacted directly.

Naturally, it is easier to contact those who file income tax returns, given that their income is already known to the government. However, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities noted that the human resources department refrained from using information from tax returns for fear of contravening the provisions of the Income Tax Act governing the protection of taxpayer information.

• (1305)

Had this money been owed to the government, I think that this fear would have been quickly alleviated.

The Privacy Commissioner had to intervene to lift this fear, stating before the committee that, under section 241 of the Income Tax Act, the provision of information was allowed for the purposes of the administration of the Old Age Security Act, because the GIS is nothing more than a component of the OAS.

This means that HRDC had not only the means but also the authority to check. So, for the past 14 years, the department could and should have been helping tens of thousands of people among the least fortunate in our society, but has not. That is bordering on scandalous.

Simply put, by its lack of action, HRDC financially penalized individuals among the most disadvantaged. It is mystifying to see that, at the time when this study was tabled, in 2001, officials admitted that the government had been aware of the situation for at least eight years and, yet, HRDC did not manage to take appropriate steps to remedy the problem.

Luckily the Bloc Québécois was there. Over the past few years, the Bloc Québécois has noticed that seniors are among those the most affected by the federal government cuts to transfer payments. The quality of life of older persons quite often depends on the care they can receive. This quality of life also depends on their income.

That is why the Bloc Québécois harshly criticized the irregularities in the guaranteed income supplement program, which guarantees low-income seniors additional income. The negligence of the Liberal government in managing the guaranteed income supplement program was such that in 2001, more than 68,000 seniors in Quebec, who are among those who needed it the most, were still being short changed up to \$6,600 a year. I think that would be a significant amount of money to a low-income person.

A major operation by the Bloc Québécois has so far uncovered roughly 42,000 of these people, several of whom did not receive the money they were entitled to for years under the federal guaranteed income supplement program. This effort represents roughly \$190 million more, redistributed to the least fortunate in our society. What is \$190 million compared to the billions of dollars invested in the military?

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A lot of work still needs to be done. In the riding I have been representing for almost four months, I have been in contact with the owner of a retirement home, who is aware of the issue, to ask him to approach the seniors in his establishment to determine their financial situation. The man in question sent a short letter to all his residents explaining that if their income did not exceed a certain amount, they could verify whether they were entitled to receive the guaranteed income supplement. Believe it or not, after three weeks, we have already met three people who were entitled to this supplement who were not receiving it. And that is just in one retirement home. Imagine what we would find across Quebec and Canada.

That means that in Quebec, and elsewhere in Canada, a number of people have been swindled by the federal government. These people should be reimbursed.

The Bloc Québécois plans to continue its efforts to ensure that older persons who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement receive it, and that the government reimburses the \$3.2 billion that it stole from them over the years by feigning ignorance.

In 2001, the committee studying the guaranteed income supplement issued seven recommendations. I would like to review them briefly. Unfortunately, these suggestions and recommendations were not included in Bill C-36 as tabled.

The first recommendation in the committee's report was to ask HRDC, in conjunction with other relevant federal departments, to work immediately to develop an automatic notification process so as to ensure that all potential guaranteed income supplement applicants, prior to their 65th birthday, are apprised of the availability of this income support.

Second, the committee recommended that HRDC, in conjunction with the Canada Revenue Agency, take the necessary steps to develop an automatic process for renewing guaranteed income supplement eligibility, and that the department take immediate steps to simplify the initial application for the guaranteed income supplement.

• (1310)

Third, the committee recommended that the government consider adopting a variable retroactive guaranteed income supplement payment period.

The Bloc Québécois found that this recommendation could be improved and suggested that the committee recommend that the government pay out full retroactivity for the guaranteed income supplement and the allowance. Such a policy would have ensured retroactive payments for the entire period of entitlement. The Bloc Québécois' recommendation was not adopted.

Fourth, the Committee recommended that the Government of Canada define "occasional income" and exempt a certain level of occasional income for the purposes of the guaranteed income supplement and the allowance.

Fifth, the Committee recommended that HRDC undertake an extensive and systematic public awareness campaign to ensure that all seniors receive clear, simple and easily understood information on how to access information on the guaranteed income supplement.

Sixth, the committee recommended that HRDC and the CCRA continue to work together to identify and directly contact seniors who may be eligible for the guaranteed income supplement.

Seventh, the committee recommended that all future annual departmental performance reports of HRDC include an estimate of the number of eligible seniors who do not receive the GIS, the spouse's allowance, the OAS or CPP. In addition, HRDC should prepare a special report, to be tabled in Parliament by October 2002, outlining the progress it has made to address the GIS under-subscription problem.

After having been introduced, having received second reading on January 29 and having been referred to committee, the bill is now coming back to the House to be passed. The Bloc Québécois recognizes that Bill C-36 will make it easier for disadvantaged seniors to have access to the guaranteed income supplement program by allowing for automatic application renewal and payment of the guaranteed income supplement to couples on the basis of only one spouse's income tax return.

The Bloc Québécois also recognizes that Bill C-36 allows seniors who suffer a sudden reduction in employment or pension income during a fiscal year to submit a GIS application based on an estimate of their employment and pension income.

The Bloc Québécois further recognizes that Bill C-36 amends and fine-tunes certain sections of the Old Age Security Act in order to deal with inconsistencies that it contained.

Finally, the Bloc Québécois recognizes that Bill C-36 introduces certain measures amending the Canada Pension Plan, which does not at all affect Quebec and its constitutional jurisdictions.

Therefore, the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill. However, it is opposed to broadening restrictions on new Canadian citizens who have immigrated to this country. To the Bloc Québécois, there cannot be different classes of Canadian citizens, regardless of how they came to be here. Every citizen has access to the guaranteed income supplement.

The Bloc had also recommended that the committee look at requiring the government to pay full retroactive guaranteed income supplement benefits, rather than a maximum of 11 months, as provided under the legislation on guaranteed income supplement and allowance benefits. This would mean a retroactive payment covering the whole eligibility period.

The Bloc also had reservations about the discretionary power, about waiving the requirement for a renewal application for the guaranteed income supplement and allowance benefits, once an initial application has been made. The relevant wording reads, "The Minister may waive the requirement". We wanted it to read, "The Minister must waive the requirement", but that was rejected by the committee.

The Bloc Québécois will ask that the Privacy Commissioner testify with regard to the expanding the list of third parties to which the contributor's personal information may be forwarded. We will also ensure that amendments to the current regulations will not restrict access to the guaranteed income supplement.

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The Bloc Québécois will continue its longstanding battle with the federal government to ensure that it puts in place all the necessary elements to allow seniors entitled to the guaranteed income supplement to have access to it. With regard to interest charged on overpayments, the Bloc Québécois will ensure that the bill treats all taxpayers equally.

Lastly, the Bloc will make sure that the limitation period for claims of government overpayments is proportional to the period during which individuals can claim amounts owing. The government is not proposing full retroactivity, yet it seems to do away with any limitation period when it comes to the money it is owed.

In conclusion—as I know that my time is almost up—there has been progress. In fact, we are pleased to recognize that progress has been made on several points.

• (1315)

After the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was tabled in 2001, forms were simplified and sent by the Department of Human Resources and Social Development to pensioners who might be eligible for the guaranteed income supplement. Seniors only have to sign the document to give the Department of Human Resources and Social Development permission to examine their file.

Renewal application forms are now more readily available, especially since they are found on the Department of Human Resources and Social Development website. Unfortunately, seniors do not often use the Internet.

There is much more to be done. It is deplorable that, for all these years, the successive Liberal and Conservative governments neglected, muzzled and ignored the most vulnerable seniors in our society. Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois was there to ensure that our most vulnerable seniors were heard by the government. Through its numerous interventions in the House, in committees and in the media, the Bloc Québécois was able to keep the spotlight on a group of individuals excluded from the priorities of the Liberal and Conservative governments.

Some progress has been made. However, these few measures will not silence the Bloc. We will continue to fight the federal government in order to obtain justice for all those individuals who made it possible for Quebeckers and Canadians to form the nations that they have become.

[*English*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to speak to the bill. I would also like to report on my homework over the last two weeks listening to seniors and persons with disabilities who are indeed the experts on what the issue of old age security actually means, and what a fair and meaningful pension plan would mean for them.

It is quite interesting in terms of the housekeeping details that are in the bill that most people are very comfortable with this. People should not have to reapply for GIS, as we have known and as the important work of Richard Shillington has demonstrated. However, there are still too many seniors entitled to things such as guaranteed income supplement who are not yet receiving it.

We need to not only put things in a bill that explain a different entitlement, but we need to ensure that we are doing the outreach and apply sufficient resources to the department and regional offices to find those seniors who are entitled to these benefits but not yet receiving them. It includes helping them understand the importance of filling out their tax returns such that they can not only receive the guaranteed income supplement but also their GST rebate and a number of other things that are part of our security net here in Canada.

It was very inspiring however at the end of last week to be in St. John's, Newfoundland at the fabulous Aging Issues Network Conference funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. It was interesting that the issues around seniors and issues they care about keep coming up across this country. I will particularly this afternoon refer to what I have learned in Yukon, Alberta, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

It was exciting to see the original overview for the workshop in St. John's. It began with a quote from the Minister of Ageing in South Australia who said: "We must stop thinking old. The ageing of many countries...is one of the most significant social trends of our time...it gives us a unique opportunity".

This was brilliantly described by the Liberal renewal commission in Dr. Austin Bowman's report in his summary where he defined seniors as persons 65 of age and older, which is indeed 13% of the Canadian population and represents about four million individuals.

It is estimated, as the hon. member for Mississauga South said, that these seniors over the next years will comprise 25% of our population. They have accumulated a vast wealth of skills, experience and maturity which represent an enormous investment on the part of their employers and Canadian society in general. These extensive human resources should be available for the betterment of Canadian society and with declining birth rates may be required to keep our Canadian economy valued.

We know, however, that the security of seniors across this country is not even. In certain provinces only seniors already receiving GIS get the benefit of a pharma care program. It is only in Atlantic Canada where there is no such thing as a catastrophic drug plan. Seniors worry about different aspects of their security in different ways across the country.

The theme I heard most often was on the issue of affordable housing and the kinds of changes that would be required. There is a real need of an innovative and creative method of marrying the need for affordable housing with the need for social inclusion.

Government Orders

● (1320)

We know that social inclusion is now as important as smoking in terms of health outcomes. When I was in medical school, we referred to them as shut-ins, people who actually did not have the ability to get out and be with one another. Those people's health outcomes are indeed diminished.

I was sad to hear from the seniors in Whitehorse, at a time when they were celebrating the Canada Games, that a group of them had come together with the Legion and with other NGOs to buy an old hotel for them to all to come together. Somehow the financing fell through for that. Yet, it is something that again is the best of public policy, designed and created bottom up to meet the actual needs of these seniors who wanted to be able to live downtown close to supports and services. Somehow we do not have the flexibility to fund the kinds of things that clearly the market on its own has not been able to do.

In Alberta it was astounding to see what has happened after years of an ideology that thought the market would fix everything. I actually found a lack of housing even for those who are working. That is extraordinary. I met with healthy, strapping paraplegics who, because of a lack of supports and services, have had to sleep all night in their wheelchairs because there was no attendant care to get them to bed at night or to get them dressed in the morning. This is inexcusable in a country with our wealth. It is unbelievable that the downgrading of what was a long term care approach is now called assisted living. Seniors are now asked to pay for being fed, or clothed or helped into a wheelchair, or even charged to be wheeled down to the dining hall.

We need to provide supports and services for people with disabilities and for people who have given so much to our country and who are now senior citizens. How on earth can these people who have lived through the depression make a decision as to whether they can afford a bath this week or whether feeding is medically necessary? This was totally shocking to me and shocking to the very engaged seniors that I was able to meet with in both Calgary and in Edmonton.

The Kirby Centre in Calgary is probably one of the best examples of seniors coming together in the country. It started as a little kiosk. Seniors did not know what level of government to turn to. There is now a thousand people going through this centre daily, the first ever elder abuse hostel in Canada. This is a spectacular example.

However, when I talked to the people there, they know that so much more has to be done in terms of the role of government in people's lives. It is a positive role that must be there when the market chooses to build condos instead of affordable housing and when there is just not a sufficient ability to deliver supportive housing.

While I was in Edmonton I heard that the government had cancelled the national advisory committee on aging. This is extraordinary. It has been one of the most important pieces of social science research that goes on every year. It prepares our seniors report card and does studies on Alzheimer's. We know that we have to have evidence based policy. We have to have the ability to fund what works and stop funding what does not work. Without the kind of research that the national advisory committee on aging has done,

we know again that we are at tremendous risk in terms of appointed committees saturated with ideology. We are going to make bad decisions that really are not in the interests of Canadians.

I was astounded also to hear from some of the seniors in Alberta who expressed their concern about not only affordable housing but also the status of poverty. Alberta has the greatest gap between the rich and the poor. Some 42% of Canadians are still living at the poverty line. This is appalling. Some have full time jobs and are living in shelters with a packsack and an alarm clock in order to go to work. This is just unacceptable in our fabulous country.

● (1325)

However, I was heartened when I went to Atlantic Canada and met with the people at Mount Saint Vincent and at WorkBridge and other wonderful places in Halifax West. They really did make me feel that we had a chance of moving to evidence based policy and looking at some of the real needs of seniors in our country in terms of what old age security actually means. There is no question about the fact that old age security, in the definition of the seniors of this country, means having a roof over their heads.

I was very pleased to see a tremendous project under way at Mount Saint Vincent with the seniors housing and support services survey, which I think is one of the best pieces of work that I have seen in a long time. This was being done under principal investigator Don Shiner. The survey asks the kinds of questions we need to ask. It is exactly what we will require as a country to go forward. I hope these excellent pieces of work like this one funded by SSHRC will be rolled out across the country.

I was also pleased to meet with the people there who are working so hard on the social economy and sustainability in the Atlantic node governance structure. These people are working on important things like empowerment, inclusion, policy analysis in mapping, food security, natural resources, measuring and financing the social economy, communication, and the way this kind of bottom-up understanding works. This is being done under the leadership of Dr. Leslie Brown. She, like so many of us, is astounded that the Conservative government took the \$100 million that was destined for actually doing work on the social economy and exploring how seniors and persons with disabilities and many other Canadians could start contributing to the economy of this country and feel the full citizenship for which we hope for all seniors and persons with disabilities.

It was so amazing to see the kind of work on housing and what we learned at the subcommittee on persons with disabilities. The were terrific committee members, one being Wendy Lill. We heard about the kinds of things that we need to do in terms of having some lifelong housing standards across this country so certification for developers could be put on things that will be good for people's lives, such as having a 36 inch door so a wheelchair can get through, one accessible bathroom, one floor, and one bedroom. The idea is that there is a standard that exists, that people have agreed upon and that could be very easily rolled out as a national standard so that people would aspire in the development of the kinds of units that people could stay in for the rest of their lives and thus have supports and services come to them.

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Since 1973, with the first “Beyond Shelter” report, we have known that we have so much room to work. No matter what we do with today's bill on making income security a bit easier, we know that people's disposable income still is only there once they have a roof over their head. This was described often and poignantly wherever I went across this country over the past couple of weeks. It is amazing to see the kind of spectacular leadership like that of Sean Wiltshire of the Avalon Employment agency in Newfoundland and Labrador and the amazing work being done, both on accountability and on disability-related supports, at the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities.

To go back to the conference in St. John's last Thursday, working groups identified principles that I think all of us ascribe to, that is, that there has to be dignity for Canadians and that we have to find a way to understand that this is almost measurable. Mary Anne Burke, at the Global Forum for Health Research in Geneva, is looking at bias-free frameworks that could deal with things like gender and ageism and whether persons with disabilities are treated with dignity in society. Are they afforded self-fulfilment? Is there a real outreach in terms of social inclusion and an understanding of their need for independence? Is there also an understanding of the need for safety and security? Above all, is the Canadian value system fair?

● (1330)

It was very interesting to see their priority directions in terms of, number one, recognition of older persons, their value and worth, their social inclusion, and the fight against ageism. Their number two priority direction was in celebrating diversity. It was about understanding a lifespan perspective, a language and a culture. It was about understanding the role of elders in regard to our aboriginal peoples, the role that geography plays, the role for persons with disabilities and in gender. It was about understanding that this diversity needs to be celebrated and adds to the richness of the tapestry of this country, but also it was the understanding that one size will not fit all and that again there needs to be the kind of flexibility that allows the diversity to be celebrated.

In policy direction number three, they talked about supportive communities. Again, whether that is Jane Jacobs talking about neighbourliness or Robert Putnam talking about social capital, we know that in communities we need to be looking after one another. To me, the number one example of that was how upset we were in 2000 that Canada had been rated only thirtieth in the WHO standings on health systems performance and in health outcomes. Yet France had been named number one.

Then, in 2003, we felt terrible about the 44 people who died with SARS and also about the 14,000 people who died in the heat wave in France. These people were mainly elder women in attic apartments without a system for health to actually bring them together. Since that time, France really has moved on how to build systems for health that have inclusion but also include the kind of safety and security needed for people in a time of emergency.

It means that we need to have learned from Eric Klinenberg's work on the heat wave in 1995, in his anatomy of a social disaster, wherein they mapped Chicago and saw that the rich people did well because they had air conditioning and the middle class did well because they had minivans and could go camping. The poor people

died, except for the poor people in the Latino community who all knew one another and looked after one another. They even looked after the Polish seniors who had not yet moved out of that neighbourhood. That is what bottom-up and community based solutions mean. That is really the role of all levels of government coming together.

When we talk about a priority direction of supportive communities, it does mean that a lot of these solutions will be on the ground, but it also means that municipal and regional governments need the help of provincial and territorial governments and the federal government to make all of these happen together around transportation and housing, around working together in age-friendly communities, in literacy, education and communication, and in dealing appropriately with the unpaid caregivers.

It is interesting that in today's bill we are talking about financial security, but to these people that was the fourth priority direction. I think this speaks to the fact that we have done pretty well in terms of some of the financial security of most seniors, although we still have work to do. In terms of income, financial planning and gender differences, there is still a long way to go. Certainly the Money Matters program developed at the Kerby Centre, which actually helps the banking industry deal with the abuse of seniors, has been very important in terms of making sure that seniors keep the money they have.

It would be a whole different speech on health and well-being. At almost any meeting with seniors, three-quarters to fourth-fifths of the meeting will be on the issue of health and health care. I think we need to make sure from falls programs to making sure they get medication and end of life care. There are many things that are their security around these issues, but there are also dental care, vision care and all the things that we know we still need to work on. I hope that over this next little while their last priority, which was around employment, education and research, will go on in terms of how we train more people to be comfortable working with seniors, to be really good at it and to care.

● (1335)

Again, the conclusion was that of Cicero, who said that it is not old age that is at fault but our attitude toward it. I hope we know that we still have a great deal of work to do, even after today's bill.

● (1340)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time today with my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Last June, the NDP member for Hamilton Mountain introduced a seniors charter of rights. We are very proud and we want to congratulate her for that work. That charter of rights was supported by the government. The charter was passed by a vote of 231 to 52. It was a landslide.

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One of the rights outlined in that charter is the right of all seniors to income security. Yet, despite Parliament's clear message, this is the first legislative initiative that the Conservatives have introduced to enact any of the rights that the seniors charter guarantees. Unfortunately, Bill C-36 does not even deal with the real causes of poverty among Canadian seniors.

To date, the Conservatives have been disinclined to help seniors living in poverty. Of the few attempts that even come close to addressing the income of seniors, the two trumpeted most are the increase of \$2,000 in the pension tax credit and pension income splitting. But who benefits from that tax credit or income splitting? Not a single senior whose only income is CPP, OAS and GIS. The tax credit applies only to private pensions, so the seniors who need the money most receive no help from their government, none at all.

Currently about 130,000 eligible seniors receive GIS, the guaranteed income supplement. About 80% of those missing out are women, mostly women who are very elderly. In addition, there are also about 55,000 seniors who are missing out on CPP retirement benefits.

Interestingly, there are virtually no eligible seniors without QPP. That is because officials in Quebec identify those eligible seniors and ensure they apply for their benefits.

If a senior realizes that he or she qualifies, the current legislation for OAS, GIS and CPP provides only 11 months of retroactive payments unless governments provided erroneous advice or there was an administrative error. Years of income may be lost.

To add insult to injury, Ottawa does not pay interest on the retroactive CPP payments, even when those cheques are for lost benefits due to administrative error. Again, in Quebec, QPP pays retroactive benefits for up to five years, including interest.

There is also precedent in the rest of Canada, where long periods of retroactivity are allowed for other programs. Income tax returns can be re-filed for several years to make claims that have been missed. As well, GST credits are paid retroactively for more than 11 months.

Why are seniors penalized more than others?

About 38% of seniors receive GIS. The majority of seniors who retire without an employer pension plan receive GIS. RRSPs can be a terrible investment for many Canadians who do not have a pension plan, but for those seniors on GIS, their income includes earnings, RRSP withdrawals and CPP benefits, which can result in an effective tax rate of 50% to 100%. I repeat: 50% to 100%. This occurs because GIS is reduced by 50¢ for every dollar in income, including RRSP withdrawals, and that income is still taxable.

The structure of the current clawbacks for GIS makes it virtually impossible for GIS recipients to enjoy the benefits of any RRSP savings they make. Most of the funds will be clawed back in the form of GIS reductions and income tax.

Similarly, if a senior is employed, this will also lead to a GIS clawback as the money will still be subject to income tax and payroll taxes. Thus, under the current regulations, employment is unlikely to improve the standard of living of the poorest seniors.

Those dependent on OAS and GIS are condemned to live below the poverty line. In 2004 about one-third of seniors, mostly single women, were dependent on OAS and GIS for an average income of about \$12,400. The Statistics Canada low income cut-off is approximately \$17,000.

• (1345)

The particular impact on women was outlined in the *Ottawa Citizen* just last month. The paper stated:

Many elderly Canadians, especially women, are losing thousands of dollars in income because the federal government bars them from collecting all the Canada Pension Plan benefits they have earned....[T]he government should be doing more to reach out to seniors who are eligible for benefits, but who, for reasons ranging from ill health to illiteracy, might not realize it or have the wherewithal to apply. Women are hardest hit because officials often assume that elderly women were stay-at-home wives and mothers, and therefore do not check to see whether they are eligible for Canada Pension Plan benefits when they are applying for old age pension or the guaranteed income supplement.

I would like to note that in particular, unattached senior women remain very vulnerable. They make up 60% of seniors living below the poverty line. In 2003, according to a Government of Canada report, 154,000 unattached senior women lived in poverty. Let me repeat that, 154,000 senior women lived in poverty.

The GIS, which is supposed to help, forces many seniors, especially those who are unattached, into poverty. I want to emphasize again that a single senior receiving OAS and GIS is forced to live on about \$1,000 per month. That is just not acceptable. One thousand dollars a month simply does not do it.

There are many reasons why senior women end up living in poverty or near poverty. Women's unpaid work makes their risk of poverty higher and results in less access to private pensions. Senior women receive smaller pension incomes because of the wage difference between men and women. Most divorced women do not claim a portion of their former spouse's pension, even though they are entitled to it.

Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable. Many over the age of 65 who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years are without any income at all. Approximately 65% of GIS beneficiaries are women. Women are concentrated in low wage and part time jobs where there is rarely a pension available. Because many retirement plans do not compensate for absences to raise children or look after sick relatives, women are left out once again. It is usually women who do the caregiving.

The ratio of male to female earnings tells a story of persistent systemic inequality between male and female incomes whether from employment or pensions. The first step to ending the poverty cycle for senior women and men is ensuring access to safe, affordable and accessible housing. If a person spends the majority of his or her income on his or her place of residence, this leaves little money for food, medication and other necessities, thus forcing many into the poverty cycle.

In 2001 more than half of seniors living on their own in rental accommodations were paying more than 30% of their income on housing. In particular, single women were more likely to be living in substandard conditions because of those low incomes. If housing costs are tied to one's income level and not to market value, then and only then does one have a chance to break out of poverty and live in dignity.

The cost of housing across Canada is on the rise. Last year housing costs were up 13%. With no new affordable housing money in the foreseeable future, many Canadians, especially senior Canadians, run the risk of becoming house poor. I hear from my constituents in London—Fanshawe about this very dilemma all the time. Many of them are energy poor because of the increase in the cost of utilities. When housing costs are higher than 30% of a person's income, the person is indeed condemned to live a life below the poverty level.

Over four million seniors rely on the OAS, GIS and CPP for their income. While past changes and increases in payment amounts have helped to alleviate some of the poverty faced by these seniors, there are still too many falling between the cracks.

Bill C-36 was an excellent opportunity for the government to fix many of the mistakes left over by the Liberals, but it fails to do so. If we want to do more than just pay lip service to the rights of seniors, we need to enshrine the seniors' charter. We need to explore all possible means of creating better income security for those who built our country.

There is great potential in Bill C-36. I hope all parties will come together and amend this bill so that seniors have the opportunity to live in dignity.

• (1350)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's very clear explanation about the need for the federal government to get serious about dealing with the issue of senior citizens who are falling into poverty.

I have noticed that the issue of seniors' poverty has not been discussed here. For the last month or so we have watched the stringed marionette to the Liberal Party stand up and deliver the lines that have come down from head office about fighting for what they say is the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. I wonder what is so vulnerable that the Liberals would stand up en masse. For anyone who was caught in the income trust bubble, clearly what is most vulnerable is the credibility of the member for Wascana who created that outrageous bubble in the first place.

There are other members in the House who are not standing up for senior citizens, who are not talking about the families who are falling into poverty, who have no interest in speaking about fairness, but

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they seem to be more interested in the bruised ego of the member for Wascana and the fact that people got caught up in an income trust bubble created by the Liberal Party. In light of that fact, what steps do we have to take to restore some credibility as politicians to our senior citizens, to the people who are slipping into poverty to say that we really do hear them, that we are serious about it and we are not just playing political games?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the seniors' charter is the answer. Once again I want to congratulate my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for bringing that to the House. Clearly the Parliament of Canada supported it because it saw the value in it. We need to move forward on that. We need a government that is willing to look at that charter and say that seniors matter, their dignity matters and the fact that they built this nation matters to Parliament, to the nation.

Income security is first and foremost. We must make sure that seniors have the kind of income security to enable them to meet the rent, to pay the utility bills and to have the medication they need. We should extend that. We need pharmacare so that seniors do not have to choose between buying groceries and filling their prescriptions. We need home care so that seniors who want to remain in their homes can have access to the kind of care that prolongs their independent living. We need long term care. The government has an opportunity today to bring in the kind of measures so that seniors will not have to worry about what happens when their health will no longer allow them to live in their own homes.

My own family has experienced this. My father suffered a second stroke and he needs long term care. Could he find it close to home at an affordable price? No. He had to travel far out of town and my mother is faced with the reality of making a trip of more than one hour every day just to visit him. There will be nothing available to accommodate him in their community for at least the next two and one-half years. That is wrong. It is unethical. This is a nation that is great because of its seniors and we have abandoned them.

Yes, there is much we could do. We have not seen much of it from Parliament. We have not seen much of it in terms of previous governments. It is time. We have an opportunity and we need to do it now.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Western Arctic is a riding that has mostly rural and remote communities. There are many elders who have not had regular job experience that would allow them to build a comfortable pension. They live in communities where the cost of living is 200% higher than that of most of our cities.

The problem that seniors have identified to me over and over again is that when they do a little extra work, maybe go out trapping for a few furs or something else in the community that allows them to make a few extra dollars, it all gets taxed away from them. It gets taken out of their guaranteed income supplement. This is a huge problem throughout northern Canada. How can we address this problem? How can we give these people some relief? Seniors just want to work to make a little bit extra to pay the bills. It is very expensive for them to live.

Statements by Members

●(1355)

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, we end the clawbacks. There are so many seniors in rural and remote communities who, because of low incomes over their lifetimes, have to supplement their incomes in their retirement years.

The government once again has the opportunity to do the right thing. I hope that today's budget will show that the Conservatives have been paying attention to the fact that our seniors are in desperate need. This is the time to come forward with aid so that seniors in all parts of the country have access to the kind of income security that would allow them to live with dignity in their retirement years.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-36.

Although this has been termed a housekeeping bill, it is unfortunate that we did not take this opportunity to examine some of the other issues that are facing seniors in this country. It is unfortunate that we did not take the steps the NDP proposed in the seniors' charter to address some of the very real issues that confront seniors in our country today.

Canadians are worried about a number of different issues. Canadians are worried, for example, about the solvency of their pension plans. In the previous Parliament a substantial amount of work had been done to look at protecting those pension plans for seniors. One proposal was that if a company should be so unfortunate as to go bankrupt, the protection of workers' pensions needed to be front and centre.

The NDP had argued very strongly for much stronger measures than actually came forward in former C-55. One step which parliamentarians and I am sure all Canadians would support would be to make sure that workers' pensions are protected, and that when a company went bankrupt, the workers' pensions would be the first to be paid and would not be somewhere far down the line.

In addition, we have discovered that since the mid-1990s, seniors' incomes have reached a ceiling. The gap between seniors' revenue and that of other Canadians is increasing. We have talked about fairness and affordability. We have talked about a prosperity gap. Seniors are truly facing that prosperity gap.

According to the government's own National Advisory Council on Aging, between 1997 and 2003, the mean income of senior households increased by \$4,100 while the average income of other Canadian households increased by \$9,000. The situation is even worse for seniors who are living on their own. Sometimes people only pay attention to numbers. In total, over a quarter of a million seniors live under the low income cut-off, or as we also say, below the poverty line.

There are many groups of people who are adversely affected as they age. One such group of people who are adversely affected is women. There is a recent *Ottawa Citizen* article entitled, "Late CPP applicants lose thousands in benefits: Women hit hardest by 11-month limit on retroactive payments". I am going to quote from that article because it is helpful when there are other words out there besides those of parliamentarians.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but the time has arrived for statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NAVY LEAGUE OF CANADA

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in January, I was proud to announce that the Navy League of Canada in Sarnia—Lambton had resolved its tax problems, thanks to the help of my federal colleagues, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of National Defence and our Prime Minister. They all took action when I asked them to save the organization that runs the Sarnia Sea Cadets.

For nearly 20 years, young people aged 12 to 18 have learned all about seamanship and water safety, while being taught the importance of discipline, teamwork, self-reliance and leadership in Sarnia—Lambton.

It took a Conservative government to finally resolve a problem that had plagued the Navy League for years.

I would like to give further thanks to Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley, as well as the local Navy League, including Dave Anderson who always kept faith that our government would ensure such an important youth program survived.

Now we look to a bright future for the Navy League and the Sea Cadets. I urge parents in Sarnia—Lambton to sign up their kids in the cadet programs.

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●(1400)

CABINET MINISTERS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are starting to learn what Ontario already knows which is that they just cannot trust the three Harris triplets sitting on the front benches of the Harper government.

The Minister of the Environment has a particularly disturbing record from his Ontario government days. He was part of the Harris government that increased Ontario's energy dependence on coal-fired plants by 127%. The minister was also a member of the Harris cabinet whose decisions on municipal downloading led to the Walkerton tainted water tragedy. He had the honour of serving as energy minister during the blackout of 2003. Ontarians were treated to the joke that he was doing a rain dance to keep the province cool and power usage low during that summer before the blackout.

Ontario already knows the damage that has been done by those former Harris ministers. Canada should not have to pay the same price.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

DANIEL TESSIER

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, the Laval Police Brotherhood lost a member for the second time in less than 15 months. The first was the tragic death of Valérie Gignac, a police officer in Laval. This time, it was my personal friend, Daniel Tessier.

As the brotherhood's former chaplain, I met with Daniel the night before the tragedy. He gave me a hug and told me I was his favourite member of Parliament. Who could have known that a few hours later, during a risky and dangerous operation, he would be killed so tragically and cruelly?

I would like to salute these courageous police officers, the men and women who risk their lives to serve their communities. I would also like to pay tribute to Daniel and tell him that he will always be in my thoughts and in my heart. I would also like to salute his wife, Dominique, and his daughters, Marie-Andrée and Véronique, and tell them that I care for them and I share their sorrow.

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[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, communities across northern Ontario are scrambling to deal with the growing municipal infrastructure deficit. The federal government, along with the provincial Liberals, have simply walked away on the north. Sure we will hear them talk about the COMRIF program but COMRIF has been a complete failure to deal with the years of underfunding.

Meanwhile, the municipal infrastructure gap continues to grow. Homeowners are facing massive increases in municipal tax rates to pay for water, sewage and road improvements. Many of these communities do not have the tax base to cover it.

I want to speak today to the issue facing the people in Larder Lake and Virginiatown, Ontario. These are proud communities. They are not asking for handouts. They want to know why the federal government has shifted the burden of infrastructure costs onto the family economy. This is a fundamental issue of fairness. The gold resources from these communities helped build the Canadian economy and yet it feels like these communities, along with communities right across the rural north, are being cut adrift from the rest of this country.

How are we going to build viable communities as long as we continue to shift the infrastructure debt down to the municipalities? It is time we dealt with the growing gap between the rural and the urban south.

* * *

CURLING

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just over a week ago, Glenn Howard's Coldwater Ontario curling rink won the 78th Brier Curling Championship in Hamilton, Ontario. This was Glenn's first Brier win as skip and his third in a winning Brier rink.

This is a proud moment for the citizens of Glenn's hometown of Penetanguishene in my riding. It is a proud moment for the members of the Coldwater District Curling Club, also in Simcoe North.

Glenn's Ontario rink included Richard Hart, Brent Laing and Craig Savill. Now they will be representing Canada at the World Men's Curling Championship starting March 31 in Edmonton. They will be seeking the 30th world title for Canada since 1959, an honour that no other country can claim.

I would ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Glenn and his rink for their Brier win and wish them all the best in bringing home another world championship for Canada.

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[Translation]

CABINET MINISTERS

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the three musketeers of the Harris government are back on the political scene, but now they are operating at the federal level.

We have seen how they governed in Ontario and left the province with a \$6 billion deficit.

Now we get to see them in action in the federal government: from flip-flopping on the income trust issue to breaking wait times promises, not to mention big contracts for their friend, Gordon Haugh, and, to top it off, an environment minister who does not believe in climate change.

The return of these three musketeers is a real nightmare.

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●(1405)

FEMALE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last May I introduced a private member's bill to support women who must take extreme measures to get out of threatening situations with their violent ex-spouses. After exhausting all available resources, these women must go as far as changing their identities.

After years of waiting, our new government took concrete action last Friday.

The Minister of Human Resources and Social Development and the Minister of Public Safety announced the beginning of consultations for a new service for these victims of abuse.

Today, I would like to thank my fellow ministers for finally taking action after so many years when nothing was done.

I would also like to thank the sponsor of my private member's bill, the member for Prince George—Peace River, who was moved by the experience of one of his constituents caught up in a process that has been going on for eight years, with no help from the former government.

The years of waiting are over. To victims of abuse: our new government is ready to step up to the plate.

*Statements by Members***LES BRASSEURS DU NORD**

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Blainville's microbrewery Les Brasseurs du Nord, which is one of the most important in Quebec, is once again standing out by investing \$5 million to double its space. What is special about the expansion of these facilities is that they incorporated environmental measures that promote sustainable development.

By changing her architectural plans, transplanting mature trees and plants elsewhere, improving energy efficiency by building a solar panel and recovering the heat generated by the fermentation tanks, Ms. Urtnowski demonstrated, in an innovative and socially responsible way, that sustainable development is also a matter of business.

Well done, Ms. Urtnowski.

* * *

[English]

RALPH LUNG KEE LEE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, I received an invitation to celebrate the 107th birthday of Mr. Ralph Lung Kee Lee, the oldest remaining member of the Chinese Canadian community to have paid the infamous \$500 Chinese head tax.

Mr. Lee came to Canada at the age of 12. After paying off the head tax fee, Mr. Lee joined thousands of Chinese labourers who were working to construct the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Last Saturday, I had the honour, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to personally apologize to Mr. Lee and his family and deliver to him a redress cheque, a redress that Mr. Lee had waited 95 years to receive.

I feel it is my responsibility to inform the House that this past Thursday Mr. Lee died in his Pickering home. Canada has lost a living link to its past dreams, a man who chose our nation and, despite adversity, lived his life with dignity, love and honour for his family and his country.

Canada thanks Mr. Lee.

[Member spoke in Chinese as follows:]

Xie Xie Ni, Lee Xian sheng.

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HEALTH CARE

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health, another of the Harris triplets, is the honorary president of the wait times guarantee broken promise club.

The minister was ousted from power in Ontario after his stint firing nurses and closing hospitals. Ontario taxpayers especially did not like the huge \$25,000 per month contracts handed to personal friends like Gordon Haugh.

Today the minister is up to his old tricks in Ottawa, handing yet another \$25,000 contract to Gordon Haugh.

Maybe the health minister does not realize that he has an obvious priority that has yet to be fulfilled.

Perhaps we will see in today's budget if he has actually been able to get something, anything, done on the Conservative promise to take action on wait times and do something positive for the health care system in Canada. Or, is that triplet going to remain as ineffective in Ottawa as he was in Ontario?

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Liberal leader emerged from one of his party's regular, "What can we say to get elected" meetings, and announced that his party would get tough on crime, honestly, for real this time.

The Liberal leader says that the only way to protect our homes and our rights is to "catch and convict" more criminals. This is from the same party that completely gutted Bill C-9 which would have ensured that people who commit serious crime would not go back into the community but would actually serve their time behind bars.

While the Liberal leader used the phrase "catch and convict", I would suggest that, based on the Liberal record, what he meant was catch and release.

Time and time again during this Parliament we have seen Liberals obstruct justice legislation which they said they supported during the last election campaign.

Given their current leadership void, I have some advice for Liberal organizers if they are planning to force an early election. Perhaps they might consider printing a "dry erase" version of the red book, complete with a marker and eraser so Canadians can keep their Liberal platform up to date with each new Liberal flip-flop.

* * *

● (1410)

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I spent the last two weeks talking to hard-working families in Hamilton Mountain. They are increasingly recognizing the existence of a prosperity gap in Canada. They do not feel that they are benefiting from the economic growth they keep hearing about.

They are right. The numbers back them up. Not only is there a growing gap between the rich and the poor, there is also an alarming erosion of economic security for middle class Canadians.

Statements by Members

Here is what my constituents want to see in the budget: property tax relief through federal investments in urban infrastructure; a manufacturing sector strategy and help for building trades to secure decent paying jobs; fairness at the gas pumps instead of billion dollar subsidies to the oil and gas industries; a \$10 minimum wage so that no Hamiltonian working full time is still living below the poverty line; investments in green technology and post-secondary education to help climate change and our kids; assistance for cleaning up Randle Reef; timely access to public health care; pension protection and income security in retirement.

In short, Hamiltonians can do without flashy pre-election announcements. All that working families want is fairness from their government. Surely that is not too much to ask.

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF FINANCE

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks, we have witnessed a flood of prebudget spending on the part of the government: money handed out right and left with no financial framework and no long term vision, in other words, spending to buy votes.

When he was the Ontario Minister of Finance, the current federal minister said that everything was fine in the province. Soon after that, Ontario found itself with a \$6 billion deficit. Therefore, it is worrying to now hear him say that everything is fine in Ottawa. It brings back bad memories. It also reminds me that, shortly before his last budget, the minister tried to be reassuring, just before making deep cuts to social programs. He took advantage of that budget to target the poor, women, aboriginals, the illiterate and minorities. He cut recklessly and blindly in the environment, and let us not forget also that he had said he would reduce our taxes, when he in fact increased them.

* * *

ROBERT LALONDE

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, as part of the Francofête 2007 celebrations, Robert Lalonde received the award for Mérite du français dans la culture during the Gala de la Francoville. The recipient of this award is chosen by the Union des artistes, the Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois, the Société des auteurs de Radio, Télévision et Cinéma, and the Office québécois de la langue française.

Robert Lalonde joins a prestigious list of recipients, including Gilles Vigneault, Clémence DesRochers, Richard Desjardins, and Fred Pellerin. Robert Lalonde is known for his contribution to theatre, his roles on the big screen and the small screen, and his critically acclaimed writing. The Bloc Québécois and I would like to acknowledge Robert Lalonde's remarkable dedication to the promotion of the French language throughout his career.

[English]

CABINET MINISTERS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not impressed by the three Conservative amigos left over from their days as provincial Ontario ministers.

Like a bad dream, the Harris triplets are trying to take Canada “back to the future”, undermining the social and economic progress of hard-working Canadians.

The anti-Kyoto environment minister, so puffed up like a blowfish on his own hot air, greenhouse gas at its worst.

The hospital hunting health minister handing contracts to long term friend Gordon Haugh. No accountability there.

The blarney fuelled finance minister still searching for his pot of gold at Canadians' expense.

Just like in Ontario, Canadians are gathering strength against the three Harper triplets. Canadians will not allow the three amigos to do damage to Canada like they did to Ontario.

This party, the official opposition, the Liberal Party of Canada, will prevent it from happening.

The Speaker: I am not sure what reference the hon. member had but it sounded as though he was referring to the Prime Minister by name and if that were the case, I know he knows that is contrary to the rules and he will not want to repeat that mistake.

The hon. member for Fundy Royal.

* * *

CRIME LEGISLATION

Mr. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one day last week, the Leader of the Opposition woke up and decided to become tough on crime.

Canadians can see through this blatant Liberal hypocrisy since this is coming from the same member who voted against funding for 1,000 new RCMP personnel, the same member who blatantly ignored the Liberals' own election platform in which they promised to double mandatory minimums for gun crimes and whose party is now blocking our Bill C-10 and the same member whose party gutted this government's bill to crack down on house arrest.

The Leader of the Opposition is clearly only pretending to be tough on crime because Canadians are fed up with a Liberal justice system that, according to the Liberal Ontario Attorney General, is stuck in the summer of love.

I know the Liberal leader finds it difficult to set priorities but will he for once make the safety of Canadians a priority and tell his MPs to stop blocking this government's justice agenda?

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

•(1415)

*[English]***AFGHANISTAN**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have great confidence in the work of the men and women serving our country in Afghanistan, but they no longer have confidence in the minister overseeing the mission.

The Minister of National Defence has apologized for providing inaccurate information to the House about the situation of prisoners of war, but the questions remain.

How can the Prime Minister and Canadians continue to have confidence in a minister who has been so careless about the safety of human beings and Canada's responsibility to uphold human rights and international law?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we have made human rights a cornerstone of our foreign policy.

It is our policy in Afghanistan to ensure that all detainees are treated in accordance with the Geneva conventions. We have an agreement with the Afghan government that it shall do that. We expect it, as a sovereign government, to honour that agreement.

We have recently entered into an agreement with the Afghan independent commissioner of human rights. This will also ensure that we have another check to ensure the human rights of detainees are respected.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence spoke with absolute certainty each time he made one of his many erroneous statements about the role of the Red Cross with respect to Afghan detainees. Why is that?

The minister has 30 years' experience as a commander. He is supposed to know the Geneva Convention inside out.

I am once again asking the Prime Minister how could the minister have made such a mistake?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that the International Committee of the Red Cross has a very real role to play with respect to the question of overseeing the rights of detainees. That is part of our agreement with the Afghan government. The Minister of National Defence has made the nature of that arrangement clear.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is given full access to those detainees under that agreement. We expect the government of Afghanistan to respect that. We now have an arrangement with the Afghan human rights commissioner to ensure that is in fact the case and that human rights are respected.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was no answer to my question on how the minister could have been mistaken for so long.

Let us talk about the new agreement. How can the Prime Minister have any confidence in the ability of the Minister of National Defence to uphold basic human rights when his alternative to the Red Cross, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, admits that it is unable to do the job?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, part of the reason we went to Afghanistan was at the request of the Afghan government as part of the United Nations' mission, together with 36 other allies, in order to ensure a democratic government could result.

Part of our program there is to help build the strength and capacity of that government, including the question of human rights. We have supported, and will continue to support, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission so it can develop that capacity in Afghanistan, something we believe in strongly.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the role of the Red Cross is not the only issue on which the minister is misleading Canadians.

Last week we learned that the Minister of National Defence was challenging the jurisdiction of the Military Police Complaints Commission to investigate alleged abuse of detainees in Afghanistan. The minister's action contradicts the commitment made in the House, "there are three investigations going on. We are not going to interfere with those investigations".

Why did the minister mislead the House saying he would not interfere when he is interfering?

•(1420)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not interfering in any of the ongoing investigations. There are four ongoing investigations and they will continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the minister was questioned in this House about the investigation by the Military Police Complaints Commission, he stated, "—I do not interfere with, nor will ever interfere with, any investigative process".

Now his department is contesting the commission's jurisdiction.

Why did the minister mislead this House by stating that he would support this investigation when he knew very well that his department was plotting to derail it?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, currently four investigations are ongoing and four investigations will carry on to their conclusion, at which point we will learn whether there has been any wrongdoing or improper following of procedures. We will wait for the outcome of the four investigations.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for almost a year now we have been alerting the government about the way the Canadian Forces transfer prisoners to the Afghan authorities. Every time, the Minister of National Defence said there was no problem because Canada was relying on the Red Cross, which ensures that these prisoners are well treated and informs the government when they are not. The Red Cross recently contradicted the minister: it does not have a policy of making such reports to Canada.

Will the Prime Minister call for the resignation of his Minister of National Defence, who misled the House of Commons for months?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister made clear to the House at the earliest opportunity the clarification of the situation with the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is in fact very involved in the process with detainees. Part of our arrangement with the Afghan government is that it has access to them.

However, to ensure that the Canadian government is informed about the human rights situation of those detainees as well, we have entered into the recent arrangement with the human rights commissioner in Afghanistan and we believe this will ensure that we now have two levels of protection. This will be something that will be in the fine tradition of Canada's defence of human rights.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister apologized for one reason only: because it was proven that he did not tell the truth in this House. That is the only reason he apologized, otherwise he would have continued to say things that were not true in this House. That is what he did for months.

I have the following question for him. Did he inform the Prime Minister of the situation or did he leave him in the dark? Was he at least able, for once, not to lobby the Prime Minister and tell him the truth instead of spreading falsehoods?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister's statement this morning speaks for itself and clarified the situation very well for the House. We now know exactly how detainees will be treated. We know the International Committee of the Red Cross has access to those detainees pursuant to our agreement with the government of Afghanistan and we know the Afghan human rights commissioner will be able to provide us information if there is any suspicion of maltreatment of detainees.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence not only misled the House regarding the issue with the Red Cross, but he also said that he was capable of locating all the prisoners turned over to Afghan authorities. However, we now know that four have disappeared and one has died.

How could the Minister of National Defence appear so sure of himself, even though he definitely knew at the time that he could not locate all the prisoners turned over to Afghan authorities?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to an ongoing investigation. When the investigation is completed, we will know the facts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. Now, the Minister of National Defence is even considering preventing the military police from investigating the disappearance of these prisoners.

How can the minister explain that his department wants to stop the military police from investigating these disappearances, despite his claims that he wants to get to the bottom of this? There is definitely a contradiction there. How does he explain this new contradiction between what he says and what he does? If he had any honour left, the minister would resign immediately.

● (1425)

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, four investigations are ongoing. All the investigations will proceed and we will wait for the outcome of every investigation.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative defence minister finally admitted he misled the House regarding the role of the Red Cross and the handling of prisoners taken by Canadians. We thank him for his apology. We are still waiting, however, for an apology from the Liberal defence minister who actually was the one who got us into this mess in the first place.

The Military Police Complaints Commission has started an investigation of all detainee transfers at the request of Amnesty International and the B.C. Civil Liberties Association. Will the minister assure the House, without qualification, that his department will not interfere in this independent investigation?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, four investigations are ongoing and all four will proceed.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are getting the same mantra over and over again, which is what he did in the past about the Red Cross.

The minister seems to be saying that his department will not interfere. Why then did the office of the JAG send a letter to the MPCC and to Amnesty telling them that DND would "have no alternative but to proceed" against the investigation?

In an attempt to stop the independent investigation, the JAG may serve legal papers as early as today. Is the minister aware of what is going on in his department this time?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said that all the investigations, the National Investigation Service, the Board of Inquiry and the MPCC investigations, will proceed.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence tried to play innocent today, with his lame excuses, but it is not working.

It is interesting because, through access to information, we were able to obtain a document that confirms that he had a telephone conversation with the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross on September 26, 2006. Even though they were not speaking face to face, I assume they talked about the situation in Afghanistan.

Can he confirm to this House that he spoke to the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross? At the same time, can he tell us if they talked about the situation of the detainees in Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met earlier with the president of the International Red Cross. We talked about a number of issues. We did not talk about that specific issue.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the House that this telephone conversation took place on September 26, 2006.

[English]

The Minister of National Defence does not want to come clean about the situation with the Afghan detainees. We know for a fact, thanks to a tip, that four detainees disappeared after we transferred them to the Afghan National Army. We arrested them because of the threat they posed to our troops and the Afghan people. Now they are back in the field against us because there is no or not enough monitoring.

I look the former arms' dealer straight in the eyes. Why will he not tell us what is really going on in Afghanistan?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this particular incident is being investigated by the NIS at this time.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in January the Military Police Complaints Commission received a complaint about allegations of abuses suffered by Afghan detainees captured in April 2006 by members of the Canadian Forces. As part of a regular National Defence policy, the minister was informed about the fate of these detainees in a confidential report. Why did the minister wait for months before investigating these reports?

• (1430)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all these various issues are under investigation. When the results come out, we will all learn the truth.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not ask how many investigations there were; I asked why it took him so long to start the investigations.

The Chief of the Defence Staff submitted reports directly to the minister about the transfer of Afghan detainees and the health of those detainees. It took a complaint from an Ottawa professor to force the investigation.

Is the minister incompetent, or is he deliberately misleading the House, as he has done before?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the member's earlier statement where she talks about abuse. There is no proof of abuse at this time. We must wait for the outcome of the investigations.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the arrangement for the transfer of Afghan detainees several times. Each time, the Minister of National Defence responded with falsehoods that the Conservatives whole-heartedly supported.

How could the Minister of National Defence, who was speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, tell so many falsehoods about these detainees?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning in my statement I apologized to the House fully and completely for providing inaccurate information. This inaccurate information was provided in good faith. I have recently learned that the information concerning the monitoring of the Red Cross was not as I understood it. We have taken corrective action in the House to correct the records.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how could the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is responsible for international treaties signed by Canada, be guilty of such negligence and go as far as giving his full support to his National Defence colleague, who has misled this House so many times in the past few months?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Minister of National Defence answered the question and gave parliamentarians enough information to understand the situation.

[English]

Like the Minister of National Defence, we responded at the time with the information that was given to us. This has since been clarified. A more fulsome answer has been provided. There are ongoing investigations which will shed further light on this issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the opposition has been worried ever since we had the debate on Afghanistan. The opposition parties expressed their concerns regarding the treatment of Afghan prisoners.

How can the Minister of National Defence rise in the House today and not resign when, in fact, he misled us at least ten times, and not just once, with regard to our concerns?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently we made an agreement with the Afghan human rights commission. It has undertaken to inform us of any abuse of prisoners within the Afghan system, as well as any abuse on our side.

I have talked to the representative of Kandahar province. I have also talked to the national representative of this organization. I have spoken to the defence minister and the president. They have all agreed that they will meet the requirements of our agreements.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence told us in this House that everything was going very well and that was not true. He told us that there was an agreement with the Red Cross, and that is not the case. He told us that he knew the location of the prisoners, and that is false.

Does the minister realize that, if he were still in the army, he could be court-martialled for such behaviour?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government set is a very important requirement that we ensure that detainees are treated properly in accordance with international law. Our troops, the men and women over there in Afghanistan whom I visited last week, are of the same mind. We treat prisoners properly. We have now engaged the Afghan human rights commission to ensure that they can be monitored through the entire system.

• (1435)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has misinformed the House and has had to apologize on the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Why is he yet again misinforming this House by saying that supporting the Afghan commission's human rights role through necessary financial support will somehow undermine the Afghan commission's objectivity? Is the work of the Afghan human rights commission to go unsupported, and is the work of other countries, like the U.K., the U.S., Denmark and The Netherlands, somehow not to be supported? Is that what the minister is trying to tell us?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada supports initiatives in Afghanistan that strive to respect the rights of individuals, particularly the rights of women. The Government of Canada will continue to support such initiatives.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us whether or not he supports the mandate of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission?

Is he prepared to provide financial support in order for the commission to continue its important work?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, what I was going to say before was that the Canadian government has financially supported the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. A million dollars has been contributed to support that work. It is inappropriate obviously for the Department of National Defence to be the source of those funds. It is elsewhere in the government from which the funds have been produced.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister has been entrusted with the duty to protect the sterling record of our military and its reputation for humane treatment of detainees. Last year the minister was not living up to that duty when he relied on the Red Cross to investigate abuse when it had no access to transferred detainees.

Will the minister assure the House that detainees will not be transferred to Afghan authorities unless the necessary resources are in place to monitor their treatment and protect Canada's international reputation?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with the representatives of the human rights commission and they assured me that they are capable of following up on prisoners and reporting any possible abuse. At that time from the military I offered logistic support.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, detainees have disappeared, yet the minister still offers no guarantee. Today he called the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission another layer of comfort, but yesterday he said he was not going to give it a dime to do its job.

When will the minister sign up to his responsibilities and sign over the necessary resources to safeguard human rights?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the member missed my earlier response. The Department of National Defence does not feel it is appropriate for it to be funding an organization for reasons of perception of conflict. However, the Government of Canada has funded the Independent Human Rights Commission to the amount of \$1 million which will provide, along with support from a number of other countries, a lot of support to ensure that they can do their job as part of our effort to rebuild Afghanistan's government, to rebuild their human rights capacity so that they can live in a brighter future than they had under the Taliban.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend the Minister of the Environment met with his G-8 environment colleagues in Potsdam, Germany.

Could the minister please tell the House how Canada is taking charge in the international community on the global fight against climate change with our international partners?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is once again taking leadership on the world stage after 13 long years of inaction. People from across the world are actually very cynical of Canada because they talked a good game on reducing greenhouse gas emissions but in fact delivered nothing.

There is a consensus among G8+5 members on the science. There is a consensus on the technology. There is a consensus that we must move forward to ensure that all global economies remain prosperous.

There is also a growing consensus in Canada that the Leader of the Opposition did not get the job done.

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●(1440)

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's sell and leaseback scheme for federal buildings across the country is illogical. The scheme is going to hurt hard-working Canadians who pay taxes and who will now be on the hook for these arrangements for years and years to come.

I wonder if the minister thinks that it makes good economic sense to sell his house and lease it back from the new owner for 25 years.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the approach we are using is one that makes fiscal sense. It is used in the private sector all the time. Provincial governments have used this in the past. It is going to give value for taxpayers' dollars.

This approach has been vetted. It has been put forward and examined for years. The Liberals, in fact, put this process forward. It was approved. It made common sense, but of course they bungled it when the time came to implement it.

I can assure the NDP that when it comes to making fiscal sense and putting in place a plan that makes sense financially, the NDP will be the first party that we ignore.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when will the unelected minister make his plans clear to this elected chamber?

One group that understands that party very well and that stands to do very well from its sell and leaseback scheme is the big banks. It was reported today in the *Globe and Mail* that this sale could net between \$1 million and \$5 million for the Bank of Montreal and the Royal Bank.

The government is showing no leadership whatsoever. This scheme makes no sense. It is illogical. Will the minister reverse course and refuse to sell these buildings?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going ahead with this process because it makes sense. It will be good value for taxpayers' dollars. It will benefit all Canadians. It will reduce the \$4 billion liability in fix-ups on

buildings that we currently hold. It makes perfect sense for taxpayers.

We will get value in everything we do. From the Department of Public Works on down, we will get it done. We will go ahead and ignore the NDP which has a record of fiscal mismanagement in every province of this country. As I said in my first answer, we will go ahead and ignore the NDP's advice on fiscal management because we know that every time it has tried, it has failed.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Britain and The Netherlands have agreements in place that allow them to verify that transferred prisoners receive proper treatment, but Canada does not. When will the defence minister take steps to give Canada the same authority as Britain and The Netherlands?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Great Britain and The Netherlands use the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission to monitor the activities of detainees in the Afghan system and we will also.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, four prisoners are missing and Canada has no guaranteed system in place to ensure that prisoners are receiving proper treatment.

The government and the defence minister owe Canadians and the House of Commons an explanation about what steps the government has taken to ensure that prisoners are not being mistreated. More particularly, what is the government's plan if there is evidence that prisoners are being tortured?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has assured us that it will report any abuse of prisoners. It is able to monitor all the prisoners. If it finds abuse, we have asked that it report that abuse to us and we will deal with the Afghan government.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that the International Committee of the Red Cross has forced the Minister of National Defence to correct the record and confirm that it has no role in the monitoring of the Canada-Afghanistan detainee transfer agreement, can the minister tell Canadians what immediate steps he is taking to verify that detainees captured by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan and transferred to Afghan authorities are being properly treated?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have engaged the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It will monitor detainees within the Afghan system and it will report to us any abuses.

●(1445)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is a former brigadier general with 30 years' experience and knowledge of both the Geneva Conventions—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Beauséjour has the floor.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, they were not applauding this morning when the minister had to admit he misled the House.

It is not credible that the minister did not know what he was talking about when he made those statements.

[*Translation*]

No one believes the Minister when he says that he did not know what he was talking about.

[*English*]

Why did the minister think he would get away with misleading Canadians about the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier today, my understanding of the activities of the Red Cross with the handling of detainees was incorrect. When I made those statements it was in good faith.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since July 2006, the young Maxim Charbonneau, a Canadian citizen, has been imprisoned in Haiti without any credible charges against him. Despite pressure by his family and Ambassador Claude Boucher, there has been no progress. Maxim is being held in atrocious conditions, is currently rotting in a Haitian prison and has to rely on his parents' help in order to be fed.

After eight months of inaction, what is the Minister of Foreign Affairs waiting for to personally intervene with the Haitian government to get Maxim Charbonneau out of prison?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me acknowledge that there are clearly still many challenges within the Haitian justice system. We have taken this matter directly to the highest levels of the Haitian government, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice.

We continue to provide consular assistance and access through our officials in Haiti on the ground. We will continue of course to do all we can to move this case forward and to provide assistance to Mr. Charbonneau and his family. This is clearly a matter of great concern to many and I appreciate the hon. member raising this issue here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite what the Minister of Foreign Affairs is saying, the fact remains that Maxim is still in prison after eight months.

I would like to remind the Minister of Foreign Affairs that no charges have been laid against Maxim Charbonneau and that last Friday, the judge was to present an indictment, but once again, this indictment was postponed.

What is the Minister of Foreign Affairs waiting for to shoulder his responsibilities and defend a Canadian citizen being held for no reason?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member that these are issues certainly within the Haitian justice system. There is no question that that is not the standard that we would expect of many countries. It is certainly not a standard here in our own country.

This particular individual, as I mentioned, has received consular visits. The Canadian government has made interventions on his behalf, and on behalf of the family, with the highest levels. We will continue to pressure and work with the Haitian government to see that this case results in a fair trial.

I can assure the hon. member that we will continue to work on behalf of Mr. Charbonneau to see that he is treated fairly.

* * *

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week a Conservative government staff member was caught spying on the leader of the official opposition. This employee, who is paid by the Canadian taxpayer, was gathering film and photos of the opposition leader for election use by the Conservative Party.

This is a blatant and unauthorized use of public funds, and contrary to Treasury Board guidelines.

Will the government immediately demonstrate accountability, apologize to Canadians, and repay the money on this most inappropriate activity?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is a well known fact that all political parties engage in an exercise called opposition research. They even have staffers that are captioned as that in their staff lists.

This is a totally normal practice done by everybody. Two things are amazing: first, that the Liberal Party is not delighted that somebody is actually interested in what its leader has to say; and second, that it is pleased to have company there at the events.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our farmers have been facing increasing pressures from rising input costs. This has really put a lot of people in a cost price squeeze. It is a major concern for them and their families.

During the last election we campaigned on a commitment to address cost of production issues, in addition to replacing CAIS, with programming that actually works for farmers.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Agriculture update this House with what the government is doing to help farmers who are facing increasing production costs and what the government is doing to make farm income support programming better for them?

• (1450)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 9 the Prime Minister announced two programs totalling a billion dollars in new money that will be going to Canadian farmers.

To address the cost of production we are delivering an investment of \$400 million. We said we also wanted to make progress more predictable and bankable. The farmers' savings account provides the flexibility they have been looking for and we are going to put another \$600 million into that program.

Combine that with a new disaster relief framework, improved production insurance, better cash advances, and improved business risk management programming, we are now well on our way to replacing the old Liberal CAIS program. Every time, any day, we can replace a Liberal is a good day for Canadian farmers.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week Imperial Oil announced that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline project will be further delayed and that the costs of the project have more than doubled.

I am sure the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has heard from his friends in the Petroleum Club that the government needs to hand over more taxpayer dollars to get this project moving. This same oil company also announced that it has posted the largest profit in its history.

I ask the minister, instead of just handing over billions of dollars from ordinary Canadians to these rich oil companies, will he use these dollars to build roads, schools and community infrastructure to support sustainable development in the north?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly the Mackenzie gas project is an important economic benefit to the north. Our government is going to support the private sector in seeing that come through to fruition.

This is something that I think the private sector is going to be heavily involved with. The Government of Canada is going to let the private sector deliver it.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not much of an answer for the people of the north.

The economic development of Canada's north is more than just helping rich oil companies reap larger profits. It is about a planned approach which protects the northern environment, provides a decent standard of living for ordinary northerners, and ensures an orderly development of the north's resources.

Will the minister use this delay to create an industrial strategy for the Mackenzie Valley that really helps the north?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very active throughout the north. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development have been throughout the north assisting northern communities not only with economic development but the housing sector as well. We are going to continue to keep the north in our focus.

* * *

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, James Murray is indeed a senior researcher for the Conservatives fully funded by the taxpayers.

Mr. Murray was sent on the road last week with his little digital camera getting footage of the Liberal leader to be used for election purposes. It seems these people cannot tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and repay the money to compensate the Inspector Gadget that was used in this particular exercise, and repay that money because it was used and will be used for election purposes?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it used to be just the New Democratic Party that participated in the conspiracy business, but now they have developed a clairvoyancy over on the Liberal benches. They know what is going to be done with this stuff.

I simply put it to the House that it is a difficult and challenging thing to keep up with the changing positions of the Liberal leader. This is now his fifth position on the environment. We need to have somebody there to watch what those positions are so we can answer the questions properly from him.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years victims advocates have been calling for victims to have a more effective voice in the criminal justice system.

In our platform we promised the establishment of a federal ombudsman for victims of crime to help ease the burden for victims of crime and to give them greater access to enhanced programs and services.

Can the Minister of Justice update the House on how our government intends to keep this promise?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to giving victims a larger role and a more important role within the criminal justice system.

Oral Questions

That is why I was very pleased to announce on Friday that \$52 million over the next four years will be spent on victims and victims' services. In addition, for the first time, we will establish the office of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime, an individual whose sole responsibility will be to take the concerns of victims seriously.

This was a commitment in the last federal election and I am very proud to be part of a government that has delivered on that commitment.

* * *

• (1455)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past week the people of Kashechewan learned that a promise from the Conservative government is meaningless.

On numerous occasions the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, committed to the people of Kashechewan that they would determine their own fate.

Given the minister's negative reaction to the community's decision, how can he claim to have done anything other than mislead the House when he said on November 9, 2006 that it will be their choice?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister met with the chief and the community just recently and we are going to continue to discuss the options that they would like to see happen in Kashechewan. Of course though, we cannot forget that it was in fact the Liberal Party that left this community without a dime or a plan.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that the government dismantled Environment Canada's climate change policy directorate, a section responsible for coordinating efforts in implementing new policies and analyzing their potential impact.

How does the Prime Minister expect us to take his recent climate change initiatives seriously when he is abolishing the unit responsible for monitoring and tracking such initiatives?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we did no such things. There were no people moving from climate change capacity. They did do some internal reorganizations. They were done at the level of the public service.

We have an exceptionally strong group of men and women in the public service helping the government and helping Canadians to combat climate change.

The one thing those respected public servants now have is, after 13 long years, a government that is finally taking the issue of climate change, pollution and smog seriously.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families across the country are suffering because of the government's lack of action to protect manufacturing jobs.

In the last two years alone 125,000 jobs were lost in this province. In my community the latest victim is Hamilton Specialty Bar where we are going to lose 300 jobs and 600 pensioners are going to lose 20% of their pensions plus their benefits.

If it is not in today's budget, when will the government bring forward a plan to protect the manufacturing jobs in this country?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the industry committee has prepared a report on manufacturing. We are looking forward to reviewing the recommendations that came out of the committee's important study on the challenges facing the Canadian manufacturing sector.

Already the government has acted. We have laid out an economic plan in "Advantage Canada" that will create a better business environment for all industries. We continue to maintain a close dialogue with the manufacturing sector to discuss further measures and address them as they come forward.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in an earlier answer, the minister failed to net out the \$600 million he will take from farmers annually by his attack on the Canadian Wheat Board. A friend of the Minister of Agriculture, the Market Choice Alliance has, by letter attached to a Conservative member's parliamentary mail-out, called upon farmers to inform other neighbours on who is and who is not a Wheat Board supporter.

The establishment of an enemies list in Canada is wrong. Will the Minister of Agriculture condemn the establishment of this enemies list by neighbour informing on neighbour today?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of that old Chilliwack song, *She talks crazy talk*. I am not actually sure what he is talking about, but I know this, we want to listen to western Canadian farmers and we want to hear what they say about marketing choice. We think they want to move to more marketing choice.

Apparently, the Leader of the Opposition says he does not care what farmers say, he will not listen to them, and will not move to marketing choice. The member for Malpeque says he does not care what they say. It is business as usual, people have to do what the Liberals say and they will not listen to farmers.

We are listening. We look forward to the results of the plebiscite and we are listening to western Canadian farmers.

Routine Proceedings

● (1500)

[Translation]

INDUSTRY

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec government has committed to giving \$50 million to the National Optics Institute, while the federal government has promised just \$18 million. It is only \$32 million short of matching the Quebec government's commitment.

Will the Minister of Industry promise to increase funding to the National Optics Institute, as four major economic organizations in the Quebec region are calling for, in order to help advanced technology businesses be more competitive on the global market?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in this House about two weeks ago, our government indeed paid \$18 million to the National Optics Institute for the next three years. Of course, that institute has additional demands, but the file is now being analyzed.

I would also ask the hon. members to wait for the budget presentation later this afternoon.

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[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Chaudry Amir Hussain, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of four other individuals: the Hon. Denis Fentie, Premier of Yukon; the Hon. Paul Okalik, Premier of Nunavut; the Hon. Joseph Handley, Premier of the Northwest Territories; and the Hon. Floyd Roland, Minister of Finance for the Northwest Territories.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the administration of the London North Centre and Repentigny by-elections held on November 27, 2006.

This report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on Bill C-269, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system).

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the standing committee on Bill C-278, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (benefits for illness, injury or quarantine).

* * *

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS ACT

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-412, An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (recreational snow sport helmets).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce this bill which would amend the Hazardous Products Act, part I of schedule I, to add recreational snowboard helmets. It would ban the advertising, sale and import into Canada of unsafe ski and snowboarding helmets that do not meet the requirements of the applicable Canadian Standards Association.

This is a medical, safety and economic issue. It is good public policy because recreational head injuries cost Canadian taxpayers over \$100 million a year in health care costs, not to mention the human tragedy. My bill would ensure that Canadians would have the appropriate head gear protection they need when skiing or snowboarding.

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

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● (1505)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Health, presented on Monday, September 18, 2006, be concurred in.

Today I have moved a concurrence motion in the second report of the Standing Committee on Health as it relates to a matter which has seized my career as a parliamentarian since 1993.

Routine Proceedings

When I was first elected, the issue of the day was health care. Canadians continue to support our health care system, but they want assurances that the Government of Canada will continue to support our health care system, particularly for those in most need in our society.

At the time, there was a proposal to have a national forum on health. One of the things that I wanted to do, having spent nine years on the board of my hospital in Mississauga, was to be on the health committee so I could participate in the important area of debate in the House of Commons and of its committee work.

The first thing I did was to look at the work that the Standing Committee on Health had done in the prior Parliament. To my amazement, I found a report of a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and Status of Women called "Foetal Alcohol Syndrome: A Preventable Tragedy", which was dated June 1992. I read the report with interest.

I consider myself to be an educated person. I have three children. I spent nine years on the board of my hospital. I believe I was attuned to what was going on in my community. After reading that report, it was clear to me that if I had never heard of fetal alcohol syndrome, chances were many Canadians were in the same situation.

I have had private members' bills and motions before the House. I have received 80% to 95% support of the House for private members' initiatives on the issue relating to fetal alcohol syndrome. It has been frustrating, unfortunately, in each and every opportunity and in each and every Parliament.

We are faced with the same situation again. This is a fragile government. I have a bill on the order paper and I expect it to be dealt with by the House within the next month or two. We are faced with the uncertainty of our electoral future. I do not know why because there are so many priorities that Canadians need to have addressed, yet all I hear is a government that is just itching to go to the electorate because those members want it their way.

I cannot afford to let down the people, the families, the children, the NGOs and all those who care about children who suffer from alcohol related birth defects. They want to hear that Parliament is engaged on this issue. They want to hear that we really want to do something.

The Standing Committee on Health, after receiving deputations from Health Canada on the status of affairs dealing with fetal alcohol syndrome, found that there was an uncertainty about whether Health Canada was really committed and convinced that this was a priority. I wonder how many Canadians really understand what is going on with fetal alcohol syndrome. I wonder how many people really understand what it is.

Alcohol related birth defects occur in one out of every thousand births. It costs millions of dollars every year for these children. In fact, the leading known cause of mental retardation in Canada is maternal consumption of alcohol. About half of the people in the jails of Canada suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome or alcohol related birth defects now under the umbrella called fetal alcohol spectrum and disorders.

It is a travesty that Parliament would be jeopardized to suspend itself yet again without dealing with issues of importance to the health of Canadians, especially children.

● (1510)

The facial features of a human being are established between days 15 and 22 of pregnancy. Fetal alcohol syndrome has associated with it characteristic facial features. That is the evidence, that is the proof that the damage is done to the unborn child before a woman even knows she is pregnant. It indicates that there is only one way to reduce and to prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, and that is to have an educated public.

We need to not shy away from the facts that one in a thousand births result in a mentally challenged human being.

I have given many speeches in the House. One of them was about my disappointment in Health Canada's response to this. We have had many opportunities to hear from Health Canada. On the second to last occasion, its representatives appeared before the Standing Committee on Health to report on what had been done and what the plans were to address fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It was a litany of all the things that had happened in history, but there was not one iota of a plan on how to address this tragic situation, the preventable tragedy of fetal alcohol syndrome.

I spent some time developing a program called "Drink Smart". One of the flyers I have produced has in it a very short but very important message for Canadians, both men and women. Half of the pregnancies in Canada are unplanned and therefore we cannot wait. As Health Canada has said time and time again, if a woman is pregnant, she should cut back or abstain from alcohol. If it is between days 15 to 22 and women do not know they are pregnant, the damage can be done. The message has to get out to women not to wait until they know they are pregnant. If they are sexually active, if they are not using protection and if they are in their birthing years, the only way to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome, or FASD, is to abstain from the consumption of alcohol.

That is what it is all about, but it will take work and support by Health Canada, and that is not forthcoming. This is the problem. This is why I have moved the concurrence motion. We have much work to do, but the most important work is to take care of the most vulnerable in our society, the unborn children.

We know what medical science can do today. We can operate on unborn children. We can detect birth defects. We can correct them in the womb. We are dealing with the virtual certainty that there is going to be a life. We are dealing with a situation where prenatal consumption of alcohol is the leading known cause of mental retardation in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

If we care about the criminal justice system, we have to care about how these people came to commit crimes. Everybody in this place who knows about fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder knows that there is a high incidence of criminal activity among those who suffer from this illness, this mental disability.

Half of the people in our jails suffer from alcohol related birth defects. People want to talk about getting tough on crime, but we cannot be tough on crime when people have no idea what they are doing because they have mental problems. We have to deal with it. There have to be preventative measures. There have to be remediation measures.

• (1515)

Our penal system is based on a rehabilitation model. I hate to tell members this but rehabilitation from mental illness is not there. It is not applicable. What we need to do is deal with issues of coping, helping the families and educating the public. We need to reduce the incidents. We need to make it an issue and a priority, and it takes all parliamentarians in this place to be speaking about it.

I raised this issue and asked for concurrence in the second report of the Standing Committee on Health called "Even One is Too Many: A Call for a Comprehensive Action Plan On Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder", which was a good report.

The report basically said that Health Canada needs to develop a comprehensive plan to address alcohol related birth defects. The committee asked for that. I heard committee members question the witnesses from Health Canada on this. We need to share the data. We need to get everybody together on this issue. It is important that all the NGOs have the same facts, the same supports and the same language. We do not want them mixing up the information and perhaps trying to exaggerate a bit in certain areas. We do not have to exaggerate. This is a serious problem.

The government came back in January with its response. I must say that I was very disappointed because I have seen this report before. I have seen the list of all the things we have done. I have heard the arguments about not being sure about the administrative structure, about whether a certain person should be in charge or whether we should have that, this or the other thing. I have never seen such a combination of bureaucratic mumbo jumbo.

Back in June 1992, the subcommittee on health called for the exact same thing. We need a comprehensive plan to deal with this because we know it is a preventable tragedy. Parliament has not responded to that need.

Parliament can only respond to that need if the departments, which advise parliamentarians and governments, are onside. I am sorry but Health Canada is not onside on this issue. This is a bureaucratic nightmare and an administrative boondoggle. Health Canada is only interested in continuing to have some sort of a toy to play with. Alcohol related birth defects are not to be played with. The evidence is clear.

Even medical professionals have been reluctant to mention that prenatal consumption of alcohol is the leading cause of mental retardation. They do not want to risk being put in the position where they might be sued for not telling people. Health Canada, the

medical profession, the nursing profession, families, churches, doctors, everybody needs to be involved.

In 1989 the United States put a label on every alcohol beverage container produced for consumption in the United States which basically cautions expectant mothers and others about the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

We have been fighting to have that in Canada ever since I came here. It was one of the first bills that I had, Bill C-222. I remember the member from up north, from the Sudbury area, was the minister of health at the time. She is here and is supporting us today because she does not care what Health Canada said, she wants to do it. I see her parliamentary secretary is here as well. She spoke to that bill and said that she would support the initiative because alcohol related birth defects was a big item and an expensive item that not only hurts the child but hurts that family that has the lifelong responsibility for caring for the child.

If members were to see some of the statistics they would be absolutely amazed. Do members know that beverage alcohol is directly and indirectly responsible for 19,000 or more deaths a year, 45% of all motor vehicle collisions, 30% of fires, 30% of suicides, 60% of homicides, 50% of family violence, 65% of snowmobile collisions, one in six family breakdowns, 30% of drownings, 65% of child abuse, 40% of falls causing injury, 50% of hospital emergencies and over \$15 billion of costs to our health care system?

• (1520)

When we see a list like that, it touches pretty well everything we ever talk about in this place. It is about people. The strength and success of a country is not an economic measure. It is a measure of the health and well-being of its people.

Our children are some of the most vulnerable in our society. These unborn children who happen to be victims of prenatal consumption of alcohol never had a chance. When we look at the numbers we see how this problem has permeated society for such a long period of time. What is Parliament doing? It looks like the government wants to throw us back into an other election. I would rather stay here and pass legislation dealing with a comprehensive strategy to deal with FASD, alcohol related birth defects.

We can do this. This is the Parliament of Canada. NGOs all across the country are looking for a glimmer of hope but they are not seeing it from Health Canada nor from the agenda today. However, nothing is more important to me today than to share with the House my passion and my interest and to ask that we move this agenda forward.

We have had enough of the administrative and the bureaucratic playing around with an issue that is so important to Canadians. We have an opportunity here and I do not want to lose it. It appears that this is the only way I can ever get this matter on the table. Private member's items have such little opportunity in this place that we need to rely on concurrence motions in order to get certain items on the floor to be discussed.

I want to quote from a June 1992 report called "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: The Preventable Tragedy". It states:

—there is no question that maternal alcohol consumption can have devastating impacts on the foetus. The basic fact is that when the pregnant woman drinks, her unborn child “drinks” also; that is, the alcohol in the mother’s bloodstream circulates through the placenta into the bloodstream of the foetus. It is possible that the blood-alcohol level in the foetus will remain at an elevated level for a longer period than that of the mother because the immature foetal liver metabolizes the alcohol more slowly.

We knew what was going on back in June 1992 from our health committee. Our health committee has this history of knowledge but it also has a history of having the back turned on it, its ideas and its thinking, by Health Canada.

I do not think we should ever be squeamish about saying something when a department does not do the job that it should for us or when it looks for excuses to tell us why we cannot rather than how we can. I want to find out how we can. I want to see a comprehensive strategy. The report and the response by Health Canada was a disaster. It is almost unreadable with its bureaucratic jumbo jumbo.

A strategy is clear, concise and it is correct. We know the data. We know the incidence rates. We know how to detect it. Since I brought in my first bill, doctors have been able to analyze samples of the first stool of a newborn child to determine whether its mother has been drinking during pregnancy. Another way to detect fetal alcohol syndrome is through a detailed examination of the newborn’s eye movement. There are many ways to detect this but we have not responded.

I rose today to move the concurrence motion and to ask all hon. members to help in any way they can to help us prevent fetal alcohol syndrome, the preventable tragedy.

• (1525)

Mr. Brian Pallister: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I beg the indulgence of my colleagues to briefly revert to reports from committees.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

FINANCE

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th and 17th reports of the Standing Committee on Finance. The 16th report concerns Bill C-40. The 17th report is rather exciting and I urge the members to read it. It is the supplementary estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue of fetal alcohol syndrome is very important. I was intrigued to hear the pseudo outrage of the member opposite. The reason I put it in that way is that he talked about a health committee of 1992. Since then we had 13 years of Liberal government and nothing, using the member’s own logic, was done.

The member’s criticism of the health report does not mention the fact that his solution of merely putting labels on alcohol was rejected

Routine Proceedings

by members of his own party in the last Parliament at the health committee because it was not effective and because a more thorough comprehensive program was needed. That is what the report reflects. Unfortunately, the member, in the 13 years of his government, had all that time to bring forth solutions, recommendations and legislation and yet nothing was done.

When the member talks about this issue he should acknowledge his own government’s inaction and have some humility when he raises this important issue because the trail goes back to his government. It is a shameful record. I would encourage the member to apologize and then bring forward some constructive suggestions rather than just complain.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the member would take me, a backbencher, and make me the Government of Canada and make me unilaterally responsible for all kinds of things that can happen in the world.

I am a backbencher. I bring forward my thoughts, views and my work for the last 10 years. I will never apologize for my work on fetal alcohol syndrome over the last 10 years.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that pathetic input from the government shows why it is not doing anything about it.

This is a particularly important issue in my riding and I commend the member for Mississauga South for the work he has done over the years. We have a high incidence of FAS problems and we have a great organization called FASSY which does tremendous work on this with little resources. It works with the families to find assisted living and it provides programs with very little funding.

It would certainly be a great benefit shown by Parliament for some of the most needy in the country if we provided assistance for these people. As the member mentioned, it would also be a great economic boon because of the incredible cost to the country of perhaps a million dollars a victim. It is also a human tragedy. No reasonable thinking parliamentarian would not support initiatives to deal with this tragic problem.

Could the member outline some of the things that we as a Parliament could do to deal with the situation that is particularly tragic in the north but also in other parts of the country?

• (1530)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has always been very supportive and is very knowledgeable about this issue.

I would refer him to the January 2004 report, which I believe was done by Ipsos-Reid for Health Canada, that laid out in some very substantive detail an action plan to address fetal alcohol syndrome and alcohol related birth defects.

One of the most interesting and obvious ways in which it recommended we take action was to have literature with facts about this problem in every doctor’s office right across the country and to ensure every woman entering the offices for check-ups, et cetera, particularly those who are in their birthing years, be given the information directly by their doctors.

Government Orders

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a couple of questions and make a comment. He talks about going back to 1992. I must admit I am quite proud to represent a riding where, in 1988, the member from Surrey North was I think one of the first to raise this in the legislature when he spoke of labelling bottles of alcohol for that very reason. I am very proud to carry on that tradition from the NDP in Surrey North.

I have held in my arms newborn babies going through withdrawal. Anybody who has ever seen that will take any action they can to make sure that never happens again to any infant.

There are three things that I would ask the member to comment on.

First, is the federal government providing through its health transfer enough programs for people who have alcohol addictions to get into treatment? In my province, I know there are women who have young children and are anxious to go into addiction treatment programs. They may become pregnant, but there is no place they can go, except for one place that has not opened yet; it is at risk of not opening as a result of the Conservatives' movement on child care. These women will not leave their young children behind and they cannot take them with them. I am interested in the member's comment on whether he thinks there are adequate health transfer payments for programs for potential moms or moms with their children to get treatment.

Second, I would ask if he thinks there should be mandatory reporting of FAS-FAE, not by name but so that we have a sense of trend across the country, because one of my concerns is that we do not have accurate information across the country. I was one of the members on the health committee who raised the issue. It was clear to me, anyway, that Health Canada had not been very interested in taking action since the former report.

Third, I would like to ask the member if he has any sense of the amount of dollars spent by the provinces on children. Many of these children are not raised by their birth parents. They are raised in foster care or adopted. I would ask the member whether he thinks there should be funding resources allocated to adoptive parents to support them in raising children.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Mississauga South has a minute and a half to answer all those questions.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to speak with the member about some of the more detailed ones. However, let me strike down a myth. The myth is that this somehow has to do only with heavy drinkers and people who are addicted. That is not the case.

I wrote a book called *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: The Real Brain Drain* in March of 2000. It is on my website. Let me quote a mother, who said:

My son has fetal alcohol syndrome. He was diagnosed at age 8. I got pregnant between high school and college. I was a social drinker and have never had a problem with alcohol. I did not know I was pregnant until three-and-a-half months along. I stopped drinking then, but it was too late. The damage was done. Though I did not set out to harm my child, I did, and now I need to do whatever I can to make things easier for him.

The reality is that even during casual drinking at a critical period during the early stages of pregnancy, the damage can be done. If a woman is sexually active in her birthing years and is not using protection, the best prevention for fetal alcohol syndrome is to abstain from consuming alcohol.

• (1535)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to the government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Health on the issue of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

I would like to take a moment to again reflect on some of the comments made by the previous speaker and say that when this issue came up in 1992, the previous government was obviously aware of the terrible nature of FASD. That member continues—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. chief opposition whip on a point of order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to my colleague. I understand that this is a debate that engages the entire House and I too would like to commend my colleague, who has done this work for 13 years, but I believe, Mr. Speaker, that if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the motion for third reading of Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act, be deemed carried on division.

I recognize that there are many people in the House who would like to speak to the concurrence motion before us. I am very cognizant of the fact that there will be a budget tabled today. It is not our intention at all to in any way delay Bill C-36, but we obviously recognize how important this concurrence motion and the whole issue of fetal alcohol syndrome are, not only to the House but to all Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was just about to reflect on the fact that the previous member and his party have been aware of this issue since 1992. In their 13 years of government, the issue was not dealt with in any substantive way. In fact, it could be argued quite easily that the issue has become worse under those 13 years of Liberal government. For the member to say that there was any concrete action under the previous government I think is very misleading. That is why this issue is very important and why we need to address it today.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about the report and its content. Members will see that what I am about to say goes a lot further. It is a broad approach with specific action items and it is far more extensive than that member's suggestion of simply putting labels on alcohol containers. The previous speaker's solution to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder was labels on alcohol. Even his own party members rejected that at health committee time and time again. I note that he was not able to get that bill passed through the previous government at all.

Thank goodness we have this government, because we are going to take real action to deal with this completely preventable and terrible disease. The term "fetal alcohol spectrum disorder", or FASD, refers to a range of lifelong disabilities caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. It is a leading contributing factor to childhood development delays in North America and a major cause of preventable birth defects.

Before discussing the government's response, I feel it is important that we acknowledge the committee's hard work on this report. This is a committee made up of all members of Parliament. The committee's report represents an important contribution to the national discussion on how best to prevent and mitigate the impact of FASD and how best to improve the overall health, social and economic outcomes of those individuals' families, caregivers and communities affected by this issue.

The hard work of members from all parties in preparation of this committee's thorough analysis of the issues around FASD underlines the commitment we all share in preventing new cases of FASD and mitigating the impacts of existing cases. As a member of the Standing Committee on Health, I am proud of the accomplishments represented by this report and of the committee's ongoing efforts to improve the health of Canadians through endeavours such as this. The government has considered the committee's analysis and recommendations and will continue to consider them as we move forward.

I would like to underline that the government's response to the committee's report presents a holistic and integrated approach to this issue. FASD is not simply a health issue. It has implications for individuals' quality of life, for families, for caregivers and for communities, implications that make it a much larger issue, both socially and from an economic perspective.

As such, the government approaches FASD in a manner that is holistic and emphasizes collaboration and cooperation between all players. Led by the health portfolio, efforts to address FASD will engage departments across the federal government as well as provinces and territories, aboriginal communities, organizations and all of society. Provinces and territories have called on the federal government to assume leadership on FASD.

● (1540)

In 2003 the Government of Canada led some consultation, but obviously it was not nearly enough.

We have looked at an interjurisdictional collaborative approach by all governments and stakeholders to prevent the occurrence of new cases of FASD and to improve the outcomes for those who are already affected.

For example, budget 2006 provided \$3 million for the fiscal year to mount a healthy pregnancy public awareness campaign. Three million dollars is a lot more than the previous government provided, I have to say. This includes moneys for first nations and new and specific programs.

Another example is the development and dissemination of diagnostic guidelines for FASD published as a supplement to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* in 2005. This ambitious undertaking involves consultations with practitioners and extensive expert peer reviews. It is an important tool for health professionals to—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My apologies to my esteemed colleague. I assure him that this will not take too long.

Mr. Speaker, I think if you sought it you would find unanimous consent from all parties present to proceed to Questions on the Order Paper briefly so we could get that done before 4 p.m.

An hon. member: No.

● (1545)

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, we would be more than happy to allow all questions to stand. If that is in essence what my hon. colleague is requesting, I would ask that he rephrase his request and we would be happy to concur with that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I believe this has been walked around. There are a number of questions which are required by the Standing Orders to be answered today. We planned to answer them and that is why the request has been made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There is no unanimous consent.

The hon. the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, it is important to ensure that health professionals have the ability to diagnose FASD in a timely manner to maximize the treatment.

Beyond the framework that was introduced, the health portfolio and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission have been meeting on the development of a multi-sectional national alcohol strategy to reduce alcohol related harm in Canada. This will include increasing awareness of the harms caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The strategy has been developed in consultation with relevant federal departments, provinces and territories, non-governmental organizations, researchers, addiction agencies, the alcohol beverage industry and the hospitality industry. I am pleased to report there is a high level support to move forward with the strategy's recommendations and I look forward to its release.

These are just a few examples of the ongoing work in this area which is being led by this government. This government remains committed to collaborative action along the lines of five overarching goals of the fetal alcohol syndrome framework. These include: increasing public and professional awareness and understanding of FASD; increasing the capacity to address FASD; creating an effective screening diagnostic data collection and reporting tools and processes; expanding the knowledge of facilitating information exchange; and supporting action on FASD.

I have already mentioned that FASD is a significant and complex public health issue. Estimates of its commonality vary but the committee's report estimates that nine out of every thousand babies born in Canada will suffer from FASD, leading to an approximate cost of about \$1.5 million for care and social services over the course of an affected individual's life, not to mention the terrible human cost.

The implications of FASD go far beyond issues of treatment. They include considerable implications for Canadian society in terms of lost potential, impact on families and caregivers of those affected and the cost to the health care system, social services and the criminal justice system.

Addressing such complex issues requires a coordinated action on a number of fronts. As such, the government's approach to addressing the issue is one of collaborative leadership via the health portfolio in partnership with other federal government departments, provinces and territories, aboriginal communities and stakeholders.

For example, right now within the health portfolio, work is taking place to address FASD through several initiatives. These include efforts under Canada's drug strategy, the work now taking place to develop a national alcohol strategy, and ongoing work under the national framework for action to reduce the harms associated with alcohol and other drugs and substances. As such, the committee's report itself notes that the health portfolio's ongoing work on this issue provides a diverse range and support for FASD activity.

As the committee report also notes, other government departments, such as Justice Canada, National Defence, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Correctional Service Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Indian and Northern Affairs

Canada provide services and support for client groups directly under federal jurisdiction.

The federal government also supports and coordinates work being done by the provinces and territories on FASD while many provinces and territories are leaders in this field. Significant disparities exist—

• (1550)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to get this on the record. I am asking for consent from all parties to allow us to proceed to another item under routine proceedings for a brief period of time so that we can submit answers to questions which have been asked by members of the opposition. Today is the deadline for the majority of these questions and if the opposition members truly want answers to the very questions that they raised in this place, I am asking for their concurrence to allow us to give those answers today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, it seems that not only do opposition members not want answers to the questions they have asked, but they also do not want to deal with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is disappointing that the opposition is playing games on issues that are so important. Having said that, I will continue with my speech.

The federal government also supports and coordinates work being done by the provinces and territories. For example, the health portfolio regularly provides support for meetings of the Canada Northwest Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Partnership, which includes membership from Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Saskatchewan and my home province of Manitoba. As well, the health portfolio works with the FASD Intergovernmental Action Network for Ontario and the Atlantic Inter-governmental FASD Partnership with membership from all four Atlantic provinces and the province of Quebec.

Federal support for and collaboration with these intergovernmental networks allows experts and policy makers from all jurisdictions to work together to establish plans of action to share best practices. The government views this ongoing collaborative approach as critical to ensuring progress in addressing the complex and multifaceted public health issue of FASD.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the government shares the standing committee's concerns for preventing new cases of FASD and for mitigating its effects on individuals, families and communities dealing with it. Again, I would like to express thanks to my fellow members of the committee, as well as the witnesses who appeared during the study for their contributions to the ongoing national discussion on how to best address FASD.

The government is committed to continue to act on FASD within the existing framework which was developed through national consultations, whose goals are in keeping with the committee's recommendations and which has already yielded results. I look forward to continuing to work together collaboratively with everyone to fulfill the federal role in the pan-Canadian effort to prevent future alcohol affected births and to improve outcomes for those already affected by FASD.

Again, I would like to reflect on the fact that the member who raised this issue and other members of his party had 13 years to deal with FASD and they clearly did nothing. They would rather complain, obstruct House proceedings and provide only criticism where constructive comments are warranted. It is ironic that the criticism they are providing is directed at their own previous record.

I look forward to taking real action to deal with FASD and to ensuring that all Canadians have the opportunity to live the Canadian dream.

• (1555)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, let us see if we can get rid of the confusion.

I am not asking to revert to routine proceedings. I am asking for the unanimous consent of the House to answer a number of questions: Questions Nos. 134, 135, 142, 147, 153, 159 and 163. Also, if Questions Nos. 136, 137, 139, 140, 148, 152, 160, 172 and starred Question No. 154 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately and I would ask that all further questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House for the series of propositions he is putting forward?

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Because we now have clarification and we have not been asked to revert to orders of the day or to a previous section, but only to have those questions read into the record and to stand, I believe you would find unanimous consent.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 134, 135, 142, 147, 153, 159 and 163.

[Text]

Question No. 134—**Ms. Olivia Chow:**

With respect to the government's plans to establish a national agency for the recognition of foreign credentials: (a) what are the timelines associated with the creation of said agency; (b) where will the agency be located; (c) will the agency establish a database of organizations and institutions from where Canadian schools, professional organizations, licensing bodies, and credential assessment agencies can verify information; (d) will the agency create a clear and accessible Internet portal and a toll free line, which would act as a one-stop shop where immigrants and potential immigrants to Canada could access information about (i) assessment criteria and processes, (ii) educational institutions which serve immigrants who need to

Routine Proceedings

upgrade their skills, (iii) how to get proper accreditation in different fields of work, (iv) information on licensing bodies, (v) how to get a license to practice in a regulated profession, (vi) how to get Canadian experience through mentorship or bridging programs; (e) will the agency create a uniform assessment process so that a set standard for credential recognition is in place throughout the country; and (f) will the agency be integrated with Service Canada offices throughout the country?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to establishing a foreign credential entity that will support the faster integration and increased participation of qualified internationally-trained workers into the Canadian labour market.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development are working together to deliver on this commitment.

Provincial/territorial governments have jurisdiction over the regulation of skilled trades and most professions and have delegated the authority to regulate most professions and determine licensing and certification requirements to provincial regulatory bodies. However, through the foreign credential recognition program, the Government of Canada is working with provinces and territories and Canadian institutions to strengthen FCR processes across the country.

There are many partners involved in foreign credential recognition in Canada, including all levels of government, over 400 regulatory bodies, over 200 post secondary education institutions, and five provincial assessment agencies. The Government of Canada will continue to work with its partners who are responsible for verifying whether the education and job experience obtained in another country are equal to the standards established for Canadian professionals.

Service Canada brings Government of Canada services and benefits together in a single service delivery network. Service Canada's goal is to provide one-stop, easy-to-access, personalized service. Improved service delivery to client communities, including newcomers, is being examined and opportunities to use the extensive Service Canada network will be fully explored.

Question No. 135—**Ms. Olivia Chow:**

With respect to the Tripartite agreement of 1983 and amended in 1985 between the government, the City of Toronto and the Toronto Port Authority: (a) has a certificate been issued indicating that the Bombardier Q400 meets the definition of Short Take-off and Landing; (b) has the Bombardier Q400 undergone test flights using the Toronto City Centre Airport to determine if it meets the six degree glidepath requirements and, if so, when were those test flights conducted and what were the results of those test flights; and (c) how does a commercial airline using ten aircraft and operating 14 round trips each day fit into the definition of general aviation under the tripartite agreement?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tripartite agreement references to a six degree flight requirement only apply to short take-off and landing operations. The Bombardier Q400 is not a short take-off and landing aircraft.

Routine Proceedings

On July 19, 1985, an amendment to the tripartite agreement clause 1(d) added the Dash-8 to the definition of general aviation permitted to operate at Toronto City Centre Airport. General aviation, as it is defined in the tripartite agreement, includes all civil aviation activities undertaken by individuals, organizations or corporate entities engaged in the operation of commercially registered aircraft. The aircraft known under the trade name of Bombardier Q400 is aeronautically classified as a DHC-8 400 Dash aircraft, which is included in the tripartite agreement definition of general aviation, and is therefore compliant with the terms and conditions of the agreement.

Copies of Bombardier DHC-8 400 aircraft tests may be requested from Bombardier Inc.

On September 25, 2006, Transport Canada issued Porter Airlines Inc. an air operating certificate. The DHC-8 400 aircraft is a certified aircraft allowed to operate in Canada.

The Q400 aircraft can maneuver and land safely at Toronto City Centre Airport. The Q400 aircraft must operate in accordance with the tripartite agreement restrictions regarding aircraft noise and must abide by the noise abatement procedures published in Canada Air Pilot.

Question No. 142—**Mr. Peter Stoffer:**

As of January 1, 2007, how much money have Canadian organizations, individuals, or officials received under the Northern Boundary and Transboundary Rivers Restoration and Enhancement Fund (Northern Fund) and the Southern Boundary Restoration and Enhancement Fund (Southern Fund)?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these funds are administered by the Pacific Salmon Commission, PSC. The PSC indicates that the total amount paid to Canadian organizations, individuals and officials is \$11,030,409 USD for the period of January 1, 2004 up to January 1, 2007. Expenditures for the Northern Boundary and Transboundary Rivers Restoration and Enhancement Fund, Northern Fund, were \$4,785,044 USD and for the Southern Boundary Restoration and Enhancement Fund, Southern Fund, expenditures were \$6,245,365 USD.

Question No. 147—**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:**

With respect to the devastation in the Philippines due to four typhoons in late 2006: will the government provide further aid to the government of the Philippines to help its citizens rebuild homes, businesses and infrastructure?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada responded swiftly and effectively to the typhoons that impacted the Philippines in 2006 and is continuing to provide assistance to the government and people of the Philippines. The allocation of Canadian assistance directly related to the typhoons to date totals \$2.55 million. In addition, Canada is an important part of the international humanitarian system and our financial contributions to the core activities of the UN humanitarian agencies and the Red Cross/Crescent Movement has helped these organizations to rapidly respond to these events as well.

Immediately following the two most damaging typhoons, typhoon Milyeno (Xangsane) and typhoon Reming (Durian), Canada committed substantial resources to specifically address emergency needs, facilitate the recovery of affected communities and enhance

preparedness for future similar events. For typhoon Milyeno (Xangsane), Canada immediately allocated \$400,000 to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and \$150,000 to the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives in the Philippines. For typhoon Reming (Durian), Canada immediately allocated \$500,000 to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and \$500,000 to the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives in the Philippines. In addition, in response to a consolidated appeals process for the 2006 typhoons following typhoon Durian, Canada contributed a further \$1 million for emergency food aid through the World Food Program to assist up to 100,000 families, 500,000 people, with the provision of supplementary food rations. This constitutes the largest contribution to the appeal from a bilateral donor to date.

Projects funded by the increased allocations to the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives are now being implemented by local organizations focusing on facilitating economic recovery of affected households and assisting in small scale rehabilitation of vital public utilities such as schools and day care centres. In addition, projects are also addressing the longer-term need for mitigating and preventive measures for similar future events. Canada is therefore doing its share to help the people of the Philippines deal with the devastation from the typhoons and to be better prepared in the future.

Question No. 153—**Ms. Libby Davies:**

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Vancouver East: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for 2007?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Vancouver East:

Social Housing: In 2006, CMHC provided funding to 4,658 units in the riding of Vancouver East, committed under various programs administered by CMHC, which provides housing for singles and families. Of this total, there are 1,505 units benefiting from a preferential interest rate and some of these units are also benefiting from a forgivable capital contribution grant equivalent to 10% of the original project cost. The remaining 3,153 units are receiving annual funding of \$9,009,241.

On June 19, 2006, CMHC signed a social housing agreement, SHA, with the Province of British Columbia. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-B.C. SHA is currently some \$140 million. British Columbia also received in 2006 a one-time lump sum amount of \$24 million for risks associated with future inflation, changes in interest rates and loan losses. The administration of these 4,658 units was transferred to the province on January 15, 2007. The amount of subsidy available in 2007 is dictated by the agreements between CMHC and the various sponsor groups and assumed by the British Columbia Housing Management Corporation pursuant to the SHA.

There may be additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under various federal-provincial programs already administered by the Province of British Columbia which are not included in the above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC. For the first nine months of the year the province had claimed federal funding of some \$75 million on these programs, covering some 27,000 units across the province. Effective October 1, 2006, CMHC started to advance SHA funding for these units.

Renovation Programs: For 2006/2007, British Columbia's allocation for CMHC's suite of renovation programs is approximately \$16.2 million. On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of these renovation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Vancouver East, some \$4,296,986 has been committed for 263 units in 2006. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Affordable Housing Initiative/Canada-BC Affordable Housing Program Agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$130 million has been allocated to British Columbia. As of December 31, 2006, 4,432 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$126.4 million. The Province of British Columbia and others are matching federal AHI investments.

British Columbia Housing administers the Canada-British-Columbia Affordable Housing Program Agreement. According to information provided by B.C. Housing, in 2006 there has been one commitment for 92 units and representing \$4,700,000 in CMHC funding under this program in the riding of Vancouver East. B.C. Housing is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing Trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. B.C.'s share of this funding is \$156.9 million.

Question No. 159—Ms. Olivia Chow:

With regard to the Canada Student Loans Program, in the last five years: (a) how many students living in the constituency of Trinity—Spadina have declared bankruptcy due to defaulted student loans; (b) how many loans have been sent to collection agencies within the constituency; and (c) how much has the government spent on collection agencies mandated to collect defaulted student loan money from students residing within the constituency?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, please note the responses

Routine Proceedings

below are based on postal codes located within the Trinity—Spadina constituency. Some of these postal codes may overlap a different constituency since our information is limited in terms of constituency boundaries.

a) It is not possible to provide an answer to this question, as bankrupts may have several debts that lead them to declare bankruptcy. However, in the last five years, the number of students with Canada student loans residing in the constituency of Trinity—Spadina and who have declared bankruptcy is 5.

b) In the last five years, 70 borrowers residing within the Trinity—Spadina constituency had their student loans sent to collection agencies.

c) In the last five years, the government has paid \$1,104.96 to the collection agencies to collect defaulted student loans from students residing in Trinity—Spadina.

Question No. 163—Hon. Keith Martin:

With respect to the recent wind storms in British Columbia and the need for disaster relief funding other than for Stanley Park, how much has the government committed to the Province of British Columbia for disaster relief?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada has not committed any money to date under the disaster financial assistance arrangements, DFAA, to British Columbia for the recent wind storms because, as of yet, the province has not requested federal financial assistance for these events. Under the terms and conditions of the DFAA, the affected province or territory must request federal assistance and, based on the request, an order in council must be approved declaring the event to be of concern to the federal government and authorizing federal financial assistance under the DFAA, before any DFAA payments can be made.

If federal financial assistance under the DFAA is approved for the wind storms that have affected British Columbia, the cost sharing of eligible provincial expenditures will be made according to the established DFAA formula.

Routine Proceedings

[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 Questions Nos. 136, 137, 139, 140, 148, 152, 160 and 172 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately?

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 136—Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:

With respect to its Policy on Responsible Investing adopted in October 2005, has the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board engaged in industry dialogue, proxy voting, shareholder motions, or direct engagement with (i) British American Tobacco, (ii) Altria, (iii) Rothmans, (iv) Japan Tobacco, (v) Ivanhoe Mines, (iv) Walmart, (v) Lockheed Martin, (vi) Exxon, (vii) Molson Coors, (viii) Nestle; and, if so, what were the results in each case?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 137—Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:

With respect to the sale in Canada of tobacco products on which excise and sales taxes have not been fully paid since February 6, 2006, has the government: (a) developed estimates of the quantities of untaxed tobacco products sold in each province and in each month and, if so, what were those estimates by provinces for each month; (b) considered implementing policies and measures to (i) revoke the federal tobacco manufacturer licence if the manufacturer is operating illegally, including if the manufacturer does not comply with provincial legislation, (ii) prohibit the supply of raw materials such as raw leaf tobacco, cigarette filters and paper and electricity to unlicensed tobacco manufacturers, (iii) increase the minimum bond for all tobacco manufacturers to at least \$2 million and make such bonds forfeitable if a manufacturer is non-compliant with the law, (iv) improve tobacco package tax marking systems, including a full tracking and tracing system, (v) ensure that provincial tobacco tax is collected on native produced product on which federal tax is collected, (vi) combine the current federal GST and excise tax charged on tobacco products with a single higher excise tax rate, (vii) persuade the American government to shut down the illegal tobacco manufacturing facilities on the New York State side of Akwesasne reserve, (viii) initiate government-to-government negotiations with First Nations governments to control smuggling and invite First Nations governments to implement the effective tobacco control measures included in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; and, if so, what were the results or actions taken in each case and, if not, what was the rationale for not doing so?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 139—Mr. Peter Julian:

Pertaining to the National Marine and Industrial Council: (a) what is its structure, mandate and stated objectives; (b) what are the total annual appropriations from the government since its founding; (c) what are the total annual contributions received from the private sector since its founding; (d) what are the expenses and the nature of the expenses associated with the operation of the Council and the operation of each working group within the Council, including actual and projected salaries, per diems, costs of travel, meals and accommodation and requisitions; (e) who has the Council identified as the representatives of labour, and industry stakeholders; (f) how often has it reported to the government and what reports has it prepared for the government; and (g) when will the minutes pertaining to the May 11, 2006, meeting be publicly available?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 140—Ms. Denise Savoie:

With respect to Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA) and the Labour Market Partnership Agreements (LMPA) signed by the federal and provincial governments: (a) with which provinces has the federal government entered into a LMDA or a LMPA; (b) what is the current status of each of those agreements for

each province; (c) what amount of federal funding, for which years, has flowed through for each agreement with each province; and (d) what is the government's position with respect to the remaining federal funding committed to in each agreement for each province?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 148—Ms. Denise Savoie:

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Victoria: (a) what were the projected and actual spending amounts of CMHC in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; (d) how many new CMHC-funded housing units were added in 2006; (e) how many CMHC-funded housing units ceased to be available in 2006; and (f) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for 2007?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 152—Mr. Paul Dewar:

With respect to the procurement of temporary personnel services by the government over the last five years: (a) what were the total government expenditures for such services, on an annual basis as well as over the five year period and, on an annual basis, what amount was spent by department; (b) with respect to the above figures, how much was spent annually, on a departmental or agency basis, in the National Capital Region alone and what was the breakdown by province for such services; (c) which companies received contracts to provide temporary personnel services over the last five years and what was the annual combined total of all contracts awarded to each company over the last five years; and (d) on an annual basis as well as over the five year period, how many people were hired by temporary employment agencies to work for the government, nationally as well as in the National Capital Region and, on an annual basis and by department or agency, how many employees were hired on a temporary basis, nationally as well as in the National Capital Region?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 160—Mr. Charlie Angus:

With respect to programs that are funded through the Department of Canadian Heritage for the 2006-2007 fiscal year: (a) what funds are the Department scheduled to distribute by the end of the fiscal year, on a program by program basis; (b) what is the status of the distribution of these funds, as of January 31, 2007; (c) what new practices are the Department undertaking in this fiscal year that are different from the previous fiscal year; (d) what role is the Minister of Canadian Heritage playing in the review of these applications; (e) what specific criteria is the Minister using to determine if she personally reviews an application in its entirety, or if she relies on briefings and recommendations from departmental officials; (f) which applications were sent to the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO) for consideration; (g) which of those applications considered by the PMO were fast-tracked to approval; (h) how many funding application deadlines were extended beyond their original date and, in each case, why was the deadline extended; (i) which funding applications originally made to the Department were fast-tracked to approval?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 172—Hon. Roy Cullen:

With regard to the User Fees Act, S.C. 2004, c. 6: (a) what actions has the government taken since the passage of this Act to introduce the policies and guidelines needed to fully implement it; (b) which departments or agencies under the authority of this legislation have introduced or amended a user fee since this legislation came into force; (c) of these departments or agencies that have introduced or amended a user fee, what measures and processes have they adopted to ensure that new or amended fees are in full compliance with the User Fees Act; and (d) what is the government doing to ensure that the spirit and direction of the User Fees Act is being applied to existing user fees, especially with regard to performance standards, and the reporting to Parliament and Canadians on user fees and service standards?

(Return tabled)

The Budget

[English]

STARRED QUESTIONS

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 Starred Question No. 154 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. 154—**Ms. Tina Keeper:**

Which First Nations did the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs identify as having used Zonolite Attic Insulation and for each of these First Nations, how many houses were insulated with Zonolite Attic Insulation?

(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.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue and I know the hon. member has said so himself. However, to play politics and to be partisan with it is not worthy of the hon. member or the government.

This is an issue on which the Department of Health tabled a report in 2003. Work had been going on. There was money in CIHR to do research. There was work being done through Indian and Northern Affairs to deal with at risk societies, especially aboriginal people. There were already programs in place. There were in fact lots of programs that were implemented with regard to public awareness.

To suggest that nothing was done and that suddenly within the space of 11 or 12 months the government pulled a rabbit out of a hat is playing politics and playing semantics. The work had started. The Canadian Medical Association had been spending its time developing the kinds of protocols and diagnostic tools about which we were talking, and that took time.

However, what I would like to speak to is the issue of labelling, and this is a very significant issue. I do not know if everyone in the House realizes that distillers, when they send their bottles of alcohol from Canada to California, they put labels on them, but those labels are not there for Canadians.

The hon. member from Mississauga makes a very strong point that this is an issue that we should move toward. We should be labelling because there is no better way of getting the message out

than when somebody picks up a bottle to pour a drink and reads that this is going to harm her child.

Most people do not read the posters and brochures. Therefore, I suggest this is a worthwhile cause and he should support it.

• (1600)

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I encourage the hon. member to speak to her own colleagues, who have already rejected the labelling of alcohol bottles, that it is not in itself effective. What we need is a comprehensive strategy.

I also find it ironic that the member talks about partisanship. It is the member previous who brought this into the partisan realm and refused to reflect on 13 years of Liberal mismanagement. Even by the own member's math, something was brought forward in 2003, but they had already been in government for 10 years. Even using the member's own logic, nothing was done for 10 years.

This government is working very hard to fix the terrible legacy of the previous government when it comes to issues of fetal alcohol syndrome disorder and so on. In budget 2006 this government dedicated \$3 million to help deal with this issue, and that was in our first few months. We did more in our first few months in office than the previous government did in a decade in office, and that is a fact.

As we move forward, I look forward and I hope that all parties will rally around the government to deal with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, as it is truly a terrible disease and 100% preventable.

[Translation]

The Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion at this time. Consequently, the debate on the motion is deferred to a future sitting.

[English]

It being 4 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Motion No. 14 concerning the budget presentation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved:

That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the budget document for 2007, including notices of ways and means motions. The details of the measures are contained in these documents. I am asking that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions. I also wish to announce that at the earliest opportunity the government will introduce bills to implement the measures in this budget.

Canada is strong today and we have a plan for an even better tomorrow. This budget is about helping families. It is also about achieving our country's full potential and showing a modern, ambitious and energetic Canada to the world.

The Budget

Today, we reduce the tax burden on working families, again. Today, we act to preserve our environment. Today, we move to improve our health care system. Today, we crack down on corporations that have avoided paying their fair share. Today, we take historic action to restore fiscal balance in our country.

We build from a foundation of strength. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in 30 years. Our fiscal fundamentals are the strongest in the G-7. We are paying down over \$22 billion against the national debt. That is \$700 for every man, woman and child in Canada. Our taxes are lower. Our budget is balanced.

In looking to the future, we take inspiration from our country's magnificent past. Canada is great because Canadians made it great. The people who built this country worked hard to realize their vision. They set us on a bold course to greater hope and opportunity. They had a passion for the free, prosperous and welcoming country they called Canada. We stand on their shoulders. We live in the Canada they forged.

●(1605)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty: We feel a debt of gratitude to our ancestors who fought for our freedom. Who built this country with their hands and their hearts.

Canada is a powerful idea. We are a modern nation that stands up for Canadian values in this world.

[*English*]

We are prosperous and compassionate, aspirational and welcoming, independent and strong.

Today we take the next steps in building a Canada that we will be proud to pass on to our children and grandchildren, a modern Canada ready to take its rightful place in the world, a Canada where people can realize their dreams and live in prosperity and peace. To that end, I am honoured to be tabling our government's second budget today.

Let me share just some of the proposed budget initiatives with the House which will result in a stronger, safer, better Canada. Let me speak first about a better Canada.

The first step to making Canada even better tomorrow is to restore the fiscal balance in this country today. Our Prime Minister has shown great leadership on this issue, not defending turf, not engaging in parochial politics, but acting in the best interests of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

There has been a lot of talk about fiscal balance. But what is it really about?

It is about better roads and renewed public transit. Better health care. Better-equipped universities. Cleaner oceans, rivers, lakes and air. Training, to help Canadians get the skills they need. It is about building a better future for our country.

And that means getting adequate funding to provincial and territorial governments. We get that. The provinces get that. Canadians get that. Almost everybody gets it.

So we are taking action. Through this budget, we are delivering an historic plan worth over \$39 billion over seven years to restore fiscal balance in Canada.

Our plan is based on principles: accountability through clarity of roles and responsibilities; fiscal responsibility and budget transparency; predictable, long-term fiscal arrangements; a competitive and efficient economic union; and effective, collaborative management of the federation.

●(1610)

[*English*]

Here is what the plan includes.

We are keeping our commitments on equalization. We are returning equalization to a principled formula based program. We are maintaining the benefits of the offshore accords as requested by the governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

As we promised, every province will be better off under the new plan. Under the new plan, provinces will get the greater of the amount they would receive by fully excluding natural resource revenues or by including 50% of natural resource revenue.

A fiscal capacity cap will provide fairness by ensuring that equalization payments do not result in a receiving province ending up with a fiscal capacity higher than a non-receiving province. Equalization receiving provinces will receive an additional \$1.5 billion this year, an increase of \$1.9 billion since we took office, to ensure all provinces can continue to invest in roads and infrastructure, post-secondary education and health care.

We have also agreed to renew and strengthen the territorial formula financing program by \$115 million this year to ensure the territories can take advantage of the extraordinary opportunities in their futures.

[*Translation*]

There is more to restoring fiscal balance than restoring equalization.

That is why we are also keeping our commitment to restoring equal, per capita cash allocations in other transfer programs for the provinces.

Starting in 2007–08, we will put the Canada social transfer payments on an equal per capita cash basis to support post-secondary education, social assistance and social services equally in all provinces. We will increase the CST by \$800 million for post-secondary education in 2008–09, and by 3% per year afterwards. Funding for post-secondary education will rise to \$3.2 billion in 2008–09, a 40% increase—an additional \$16 billion investment in our future over seven years.

We are also committing to move the Canada health transfer to an equal per capita cash basis when the current arrangement expires in 2014.

*The Budget**[English]*

We will also invest \$250 million more per year to create child care spaces with the provinces beginning in 2007-08. This is on top of the \$850 million invested annually in early childhood development and child care.

We are providing \$500 million a year for labour market training in 2008-09, that is \$3 billion over the next six years, to ensure Canadians get the skills training they need for the future.

And we are keeping our commitment to Canada's future by improving Canada's infrastructure.

● (1615)

[Translation]

Starting this year, each province and territory will get base infrastructure funding of \$25 million per year, and additional cash on a per capita basis. We are making an unprecedented investment in Canada—\$16 billion in new funding, for a total of \$33 billion over the next seven years. We will also make additional investments in national, growth-oriented projects like the Asia-Pacific Gateway, to which we are now committing \$1 billion in federal funding.

To help municipalities with their infrastructure needs, we are also extending our gas tax funding to 2013-14.

To support important environmental initiatives with the provinces, we have created a new, \$1.5-billion Canada ecotrust for clean air and climate change.

[English]

The actions taken in this budget will restore fiscal balance through long term, fair and predictable transfers.

The long, tiring, unproductive era of bickering between the provincial and federal governments is over.

[Translation]

The long, tiring, unproductive era of bickering between the provincial and federal governments is over.

[English]

There are values and beliefs that unite us, that make us proud, and that embody what it means to be Canadian.

To achieve a better Canada, we must invest based on those values and beliefs.

First, we help the vulnerable and we aspire to help one another.

Second, we take pride in the spectacular beauty of our country and aspire to preserve it.

Third, we cherish the universality of our health care system and aspire to strengthen it.

Fourth, we are a caring people and aspire to support people who need our help.

This budget makes our values and beliefs stronger. Canadians are a caring people. We offer a helping hand to people who find themselves out of work. Yet, social assistance programs can produce unintended consequences.

In Canada, too many people feel trapped on welfare.

A single mother with one child who takes a low income job can lose almost 80¢ of each dollar she earns. That is because of higher taxes and reduced benefits for things like drug and dental coverage. Some people call this the welfare wall.

It is time to help people over the welfare wall and on to a better, more prosperous life for themselves and their families.

The budget will invest more than \$550 million a year to establish the working income tax benefit known by the helpful acronym as WITB. I hope members will appreciate that in my role as the member for Whitby—Oshawa. It is easily remembered.

Helping people achieve a better life for themselves and their families, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

For many years, I and others, who are members of the House, have worked with parents of severely disabled children. Parents of children with severe disabilities face emotional strains and financial hardships that can, at times, be overwhelming. They worry about how they will take care of their children in the future.

They need our help. Based on our expert panel's recommendations, we will invest \$140 million over the next two years to establish a registered disabilities savings plan, similar to an RESP.

Compassion and understanding for persons with disabilities and their families, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

The second point is that we take pride in the spectacular beauty of our country and aspire to preserve it. From the majestic peaks of the Rocky Mountains to the rugged shores of Newfoundland and Labrador, many of the most beautiful places on earth are in Canada.

How fortunate we are to call this vast, beautiful country our home. We must preserve and protect it.

In total, budget 2007 invests \$4.5 billion for environmental initiatives.

We are investing \$225 million with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to protect up to 2,000 square kilometres of ecologically sensitive land.

We are dedicating \$30 million to safeguard the Great Bear Rainforest on the central coast of British Columbia.

We are dedicating \$10 million over two years to conserve ecologically important lands in the Northwest Territories, which will protect an important part of our boreal forest.

We are strengthening enforcement of environmental protection laws by increasing the number of enforcement officers by 50%.

● (1620)

Protecting the natural beauty of our majestic land, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

Canada has one of the largest supplies of fresh water on the planet and beautiful oceans on three sides of our vast country. We cannot take these resources for granted.

The Budget

We must protect our precious lakes, rivers and oceans. That is why we are announcing our new national water strategy.

This comprehensive initiative will improve water quality in places such as the Lake Winnipeg basin, the Great Lakes basin and Lake Simcoe.

All Canadians deserve safe, clean drinking water.

We will provide a tough regulatory framework and standards for drinking water on first nations reserves.

We will also work with provinces and municipalities to improve municipal sewer and water facilities.

Our national water strategy will also help support the sustainable development and protection of our oceans. It creates nine marine protected areas, including Sable Island on the east coast, the Scott Islands on the Pacific coast and Lancaster Sound in the eastern Arctic.

Our national water strategy will provide funding for our Coast Guard to buy and maintain six new vessels.

Fresh, clean water, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

We want clean water. We also want clean air.

We are taking action. We are introducing a program that provides rebates to people who buy fuel efficient or alternative fuel vehicles. We will also sponsor initiatives that take old, polluting cars off the road and introduce a green levy on gas guzzlers.

Environmental measures in this budget will improve the air we all breathe. They do not involve any accounting sleight of hand or complicated purchases of energy credits from distant countries like Russia.

Clean air, right here, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

Third, we cherish the universality of our health care system and aspire to strengthen it.

The people of Saskatchewan have contributed much to Canada, but perhaps nothing as fundamental to our Canadian fabric as the concept of universally accessible health care.

Our government is providing a total of \$2.6 billion in new health care investments as well as an increase in health transfers. This means our government will transfer \$44 billion in health care funding to the provinces and territories in the next two years.

The time has come to modernize our health care system.

Canada needs electronic health records. They will help our health providers to be more efficient, improve the quality of care provided, and reduce the chance of medication error. This all adds up to reduced wait times.

We are investing \$400 million to help fund ehealth initiatives and up to an additional \$600 million to reduce wait times.

A modern, cutting edge health care system, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

A vaccine exists today that helps prevent cancer of the cervix. This budget provides \$300 million to provincial and territorial governments to enable them to introduce cervical cancer immunization programs.

Let the day come when people look back on this cancer as a disease we have conquered—in the same way we do polio today. Promoting women's health. That is our Canada, voilà notre Canada!

[*English*]

Health care, of course, goes beyond physical well-being. We must reach out in practical and compassionate ways to those struggling with mental illness. The funding provided in this budget will establish and support a Canadian mental health commission to lead the development of a national mental health strategy.

I am very pleased to announce that the hon. Michael Kirby has agreed to serve as chair of this important commission. Respect and dignity for people with mental illness, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

The fourth point is we are a caring people and aspire to support people who need our help. Canadians are generous. When it comes to determining what good causes to support, we believe individual Canadians can make that decision far better than government.

Last year's budget improved incentives to make donations of securities to public charities like hospitals and universities. The response from Canadians has been overwhelming: at least \$150 million in donations of securities for hospitals and health care, more than \$50 million for education and more than \$20 million for the arts. In budget 2006 we promised to explore developing a similar incentive for donations of securities to private foundations. We did. Now we are expanding this program to encourage donations to private foundations as well.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

There are stockpiles of pharmaceuticals for fighting diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis that are going unused. There are also people in Africa and developing countries around the world who need these medicines.

That just does not make sense.

That is why this budget includes a tax incentive for donations of pharmaceuticals to developing countries.

Giving generously to others. That is our Canada, voilà notre Canada!

[*English*]

Budget 2007 is creating a better Canada by helping the vulnerable, preserving our environment, strengthening our health care system and helping Canadians contribute to those in need.

The Budget

Last fall we launched a long term economic plan for Canada called Advantage Canada. It was designed to improve our quality of life and to make Canada a world leader for today and future generations.

Advantage Canada promotes five competitive economic advantages we need to succeed in today's global economy: a fiscal advantage, a tax advantage, a knowledge advantage, an entrepreneurial advantage and an infrastructure advantage.

It all starts with a fiscal advantage. We are lowering our national mortgage by \$9.2 billion, on top of the \$13.2 billion we have put against the debt since we were elected.

In last November's update, I promised Canadians would benefit directly from debt reduction. They will. Through our tax back guarantee, lower debt will mean lower interest payments which will mean lower taxes.

Let me be clear. Every dollar saved from lower interest payments will be returned to Canadians through personal income tax reductions. More money staying in Canadians' pockets and less money lost to interest payments, that is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

I hear it in the hockey arena, in the coffee shops and from people on the street that taxes in Canada are way too high. It is true. I know that as finance minister and as the father of three teenage boys.

Parents across Canada struggle daily with the challenge and the expenses of raising a family. They work hard, they play by the rules and they try to teach their children right from wrong. They hope for a tomorrow that is a bit better than today. With higher costs of living, housing and energy, it is not easy. We need to make it more affordable for people to have children and to raise them.

There were many personal tax relief options we could have pursued in this budget. We made a choice. We chose to support hard-working families.

In budget 2007 we are creating a working families' tax plan. This plan has four components. First, for families with children it creates a brand new \$2,000 per child tax credit for children under 18 that will help families to get ahead.

Here is an example of what it will mean. A single earner family with two children with an income of \$37,000 per year will save \$620. That is a 23% reduction in their federal taxes.

That is money families can use to buy new shoes or clothes for their children, or save for a new computer, or even to buy a new pair of hockey skates, just like I did yesterday with my wife, Christine, for our son John.

•(1635)

Second, we are ending the marriage penalty for single earner families through an increase of the spousal and dependant amounts to the same level as the basic personal amount. It is good public policy to encourage commitment and marriage, not penalize it. That is what we are doing.

[*Translation*]

Third, parents across this country are struggling with the costs of post-secondary education. We are helping parents save for their children's education by strengthening the RESP program.

[*English*]

Fourth, seniors on a fixed income are often forced to make choices to get by. We are helping seniors by raising the age limit for RPPs and RRSPs from age 69 to age 71. These measures build upon the tax relief provided under our tax fairness plan. It increased the age credit amount to benefit low and middle income seniors. It also allowed pension income splitting for pensioners beginning this year. Together, these actions put \$1 billion a year back into the pockets of Canadian seniors who earned and deserve every penny.

This government has introduced a total of nearly \$38 billion of tax relief, benefiting hard-working Canadians for this and the next two fiscal years.

Our tax advantage is about more than personal income tax relief. It is also about providing an advantage to our businesses as well. Our House finance and industry committees heard about how valiantly Canadian manufacturers have weathered the perfect storm of a high dollar, low costs, international competition and an economic slowdown in the United States.

For personal income tax relief, we chose to focus on helping families. For corporate tax relief, we chose to help Canadian manufacturers succeed by focusing on our capital cost allowance system.

Generally, Canada's capital cost allowance system allows businesses to write off their investments in manufacturing and equipment over roughly seven years. Accelerated capital cost allowances permit a faster write-off to encourage economic investment and to create jobs. It is time to support our manufacturers through a dramatic new capital cost allowance incentive.

From now until the end of 2008, we will allow manufacturers to completely write off their new investments in equipment over a two year period, resulting in \$1.3 billion in tax savings for our job creators over the next three fiscal years. This is like a shot of adrenalin for our manufacturers. It will help Canadian businesses invest in new technology and better compete on the world stage.

Canada's job creators also need modern technology to be more efficient and they need buildings that allow them to grow. Changes we are also making to the capital cost allowance system will shorten the write-off period for computers and non-residential buildings.

The Budget

Our world is changing. Improving our capital cost allowance system also means striking the right balance. For oil sands and other industries, we will be phasing in accelerated capital cost allowances to promote promising new technologies, green technologies like carbon capture and storage. It follows that we are balancing this by phasing out the accelerated capital cost allowance for general investment in the oil sands by 2015.

The watchword for Canada's new government when it comes to taxes is fairness. Tax fairness means paying one's fair share, regardless of where a company is registered or where a head office is located.

We improved the fairness of our tax system in our last budget and in our tax fairness plan. We are taking new steps today.

● (1640)

Step one: we are putting an end to the use of tax havens, where corporations borrow in Canada to fund business operations abroad, then use the interest deductions to offset Canadian income.

This is a practice that has resulted in Canadian taxpayers indirectly subsidizing the foreign operations of multinational corporations and paying the price in reduced business activity and job losses here in Canada.

No more. The interest expense on debt incurred to acquire shares of a foreign affiliate will no longer be deductible.

Step two: we are providing the Canada Revenue Agency the funding it needs to detect tax avoidance through offshore tax havens to ensure that every company pays its fair share of tax.

Let me add that if creative tax planners find other loopholes, we will close those loopholes as well.

The free ride is over. Everyone is going to pay their fair share.

Tax fairness for everyone. That is our Canada, voilà notre Canada.

Add it all together and, in a little over a year, we have announced tax relief worth \$3.6 billion for Canadian businesses for this and the next two fiscal years.

We recognized in Advantage Canada the need for a knowledge advantage so that Canadians can compete more successfully in our modern global economy. We set a bold goal but an achievable one: to have the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

Actions we are taking today will help build that workforce tomorrow.

First of all, we are investing over \$1.3 billion in new money for science and technology research.

Secondly, we are dramatically increasing financial support for post-secondary education.

Third, we are providing new funding for skills training. The result will be that any Canadian who needs training should be able to get training.

[*English*]

Fourth, we are providing the greatest number of scholarships ever granted to our graduate students through the Canada graduate scholarships program. These prestigious awards are worth \$17,500 per year for master's students and \$35,000 annually for doctoral students for up to three years.

To recognize the outstanding contributions of Canadians who have made a real and lasting impact on our lives, we plan to dedicate these prestigious scholarships to the memory of Sir Frederick Banting and Dr. Charles Best, Alexander Graham Bell, and Joseph-André Bombardier.

We are not just funding scholarships. We are helping to create the next generation of leaders, young Canadians who will make us proud, make Canada strong, and make the world a better place through their achievements.

Finally, in addition to creating a future generation of leaders, we are also investing in leading research institutions.

Budget 2007 sets aside the funding necessary to make that happen and will help fund leading edge institutions like the Life Sciences Research Institute in Nova Scotia, l'Institut national d'optique au Québec, the Perimeter Institute in Ontario, the Canada School of Sustainable Energy in Alberta, and B.C.'s Brain Research Centre, among others.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs are the motors of our modern economy. That is why we are looking to achieve an entrepreneurial advantage. That includes a plan to strengthen our capital markets, helping Canadian entrepreneurs access the money they need to grow.

Creating an entrepreneurial advantage also means supporting our two million small businesses. They work hard. They create jobs. They make our country work.

The last thing they need is excessive government red tape and needless regulation to slow them down.

This budget contains a package of initiatives to help Canada's small businesses.

For example, we are reducing the number of annual tax filings and remittances for more than 350,000 small businesses. For some smaller businesses, the number of tax filings and remittances could drop from 34 to as few as 10, a 70% decrease.

We will reduce the business paper burden by 20% by November 2008, following the excellent example of the Government of British Columbia. The hon. Secretary of State for Small Business and Tourism will lead this effort.

In addition, farmers, fishermen and -women and small business owners all stand to benefit from the first increase in the lifetime capital gains exemption in nearly 20 years. We are increasing this capital gains exemption to \$750,000 from \$500,000, effective today.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in championing this reform and the effort to reduce the business paper burden by 20%.

The Budget

In today's knowledge economy, a strong economy and clean energy are not mutually exclusive. One of the goals set out in Advantage Canada is for this country to become a green technology leader.

Budget 2007 includes \$2 billion in incentives for renewable fuel production over the next seven years. The results will be a fresh energy supply, new jobs in our growing Canadian renewable fuels sector, including biofuels, and cleaner air.

This initiative will mean new opportunities for our agricultural products and support for our agriculture industry in the process.

Canada's farmers feed not just our country, they feed the world. It is time we provided the kind of support that these decent, hard-working people of integrity deserve, so we are providing \$1 billion in new direct assistance to farmers through this budget and we are replacing the top tier of the CAIS program with a new savings account plan.

Over the last two budgets, we have delivered \$4.5 billion in new assistance to Canada's farmers.

We have heard from farmers. We have listened to them. We have acted.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

In planning for the future, this budget looked to the history of this country to help us to achieve an infrastructure advantage.

From Sir John A. Macdonald's national railroad, to Louis St. Laurent's St. Lawrence Seaway, to John Diefenbaker's vision of the north, transportation and infrastructure have connected our great country. It united us and shaped who we are.

[*English*]

Today there are new opportunities to connect our nation, including those made possible through the new \$1.5 billion Canada ecotrust for clean air and climate change.

For example, the construction of an east-west hydroelectricity grid will deliver cleaner energy, strengthen our economy and build on our position as the world leader in the production of the cleanest form of energy in the world: hydroelectric power.

This budget also builds Canada with more than \$16 billion in infrastructure funding. Federal funding for infrastructure over seven years will be \$33 billion, the largest such investment in Canadian history.

Budget 2007 takes concrete action to lower taxes and position Canada for global success as we take initial steps to implement Advantage Canada, our long term economic plan.

I have spoken about building a better Canada and a stronger Canada. These alone are insufficient. We must also make Canada safer.

Canada is admired the world over as a safe, law-abiding society. We must keep it that way.

We cherish our safety and security. Reading stories of carjackings, home invasions or reckless and random murders in our cities upsets all of us, because that is not our Canada.

Many serious crimes link back to the drug trade. Grow ops or meth labs are being found in residential neighbourhoods. Gangs distribute these drugs. Then innocent people get hurt as a result of gang warfare.

That is unacceptable. Today we are launching a new national anti-drug strategy to combat the use of illegal drugs.

We are also providing funding to protect our most precious asset, our children, from online sexual exploitation and to assist investigators in suspected cases of human trafficking.

In addition, the government will put in place a plan to combat white-collar crime that includes attracting and retaining the best qualified police and other expert resources to the RCMP's integrated market enforcement teams.

● (1655)

[*Translation*]

We have a long tradition of reaching outside our borders to those who are less fortunate.

We will increase our foreign aid by nearly \$900 million over the next two years, consistent with our commitment to double international assistance by 2010-11.

[*English*]

Canadians are a peace-loving people. We are all proud of the role Canada plays across the globe restoring and protecting the peace. Yet those who would harm us and harm those we protect do not share our values. They do not want the peace we protect. They disregard human rights. They shatter people's lives forever.

Our history has shown that we are at our best protecting others when our forces are strong and our soldiers are supported, when our soldiers can count on their government as much as their government counts on them.

It was 1917. Entire villages had been destroyed in northern France and Belgium. Our enemy was entrenched, ready and confident. On that cold spring morning, tens of thousands of Canadian soldiers, men from places like Amherst, Nova Scotia; Calgary, Alberta; Lachute, Quebec; and Wallacetown, Ontario came to win back freedom. In one of the most dramatic battles of the first world war, those brave Canadians succeeded where other nations had tried and failed. Canadians had taken Vimy Ridge by afternoon. More than 3,500 of them made the ultimate sacrifice. The respect Canada earned on April 9, 1917 endures 90 years later.

The Budget

This brings me to our brave veterans and soldiers serving Canada today and what this budget will mean for them. It includes \$60 million to increase the field operations allowance for soldiers and five new centres for veterans to help Canadian Forces members and their families deal with stress injuries related to their military service.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

We will create the position of veterans' ombudsman to ensure that the services delivered by the Department of Veterans Affairs meet the service standards set out in our new Veterans' Bill of Rights.

We will fund improvements to services for veterans.

[*English*]

In proposing these measures, we are ever mindful of the torch being passed from yesterday's veterans to today's heroes. Many Canadians who have been to the Netherlands know the warm greeting of an elderly person whose eyes say "thank you" to this day.

Canadians helped liberate the people of the Netherlands in World War II, bringing a new beginning to that country. Let our generation do the same for the people of Afghanistan.

The need is most urgent for Afghan women. Years of Taliban oppression left women hurt and their spirits broken. We must help them. We are helping them.

[*Translation*]

Our Prime Minister recently committed \$200 million to the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Mr. Speaker, this budget confirms that funding.

Our work is already paying off. Close to 5 million children, one third of them girls, have been enrolled in schools.

[*English*]

By creating a civil society, by opening schools and medical clinics and helping enforce the law, we are not only fighting terrorism, we are bringing new hope to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I have gone on almost as long as it seems.

We in this House are the stewards of the greatest country in the world. As I stand in this historic chamber I cannot help but think of the generations to come. Our actions today will create the Canada they will enjoy tomorrow: a Canada with a standard of living and quality of life that are second to none; a beautiful country with clean water and fresh air, free of debt with a flexible, well-educated, modern workforce; a welcoming, prosperous land that attracts aspiring people who seek opportunity and peace for themselves and their families; a model society, a shining beacon in what can be a dark world.

What will future generations say of us and of our actions? Let them say that we had the courage, the commitment and the confidence to bring Canada to its rightful place on the world stage. Let them say that we strengthened Canadian values and beliefs. Let them say that we opened the doors to new opportunities and a better life. Let them say that we never settled for second best, that we had the conviction to make the right choices. Let them say that we helped families pay down their debts, helped their children through school,

helped them purchase their own homes and realize their dreams. Let them say that we built a great economy that is the envy of the world.

It is time to unleash Canada's full potential. Let us be bold. Let our Canada be an example to the rest of the world of what a truly great, prosperous and compassionate nation can be. Let us aspire to a stronger, safer, better Canada.

• (1705)

The Speaker: There is now a 10 minute period for questions and comments on the hon. minister's speech. I therefore call for questions and comments. There will be a time limit on the questions and comments of about a minute and a half. I call upon the hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the minister for some of his fine words.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to be gracious so I hope the applause has not interrupted my time.

I would also say that never has a finance minister had so much and done so little. There is very little in this budget for middle income Canadians and there is nothing at all to position Canada for the 21st century.

In particular, last year the minister raised the income tax rate on the lowest income Canadians and today he has shamefully refused to reduce that tax rate or indeed any other tax rate.

There is precious little tax relief. There is not a penny in the pockets of undergraduate students. There is a watered down version of the working income tax credit. There is only a pittance for Canada's aboriginal people. There is nothing for social housing or legal aid. I could go on, but I will not. I will end with one question.

In the middle of all this social inaction which we expect of that government, why could he not have at least done one thing, which is to reduce the income tax rate on the lowest income level from 15.5% to 15%? That is not too much to ask.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the member opposite for his acknowledgement of this historic budget and his recognition of the importance of restoring fiscal balance in Canada, but he did not say that, did he? No, he did not say that because his party says that there was no fiscal imbalance. My party and the Prime Minister, virtually every government in Canada, everybody in Canada, except the leader of the Liberal Party and I guess the Liberal Party's finance critic, says that there is a fiscal imbalance in Canada that needs to be remedied, that needs to be fixed. Today we fixed it.

The Budget

Yes, it is expensive to fix a historic wrong. In fact, two-thirds of the new spending in this budget goes toward moving from fiscal imbalance to fiscal balance in Canada. It is a goal well worth pursuing and one which we have accomplished today. The remaining one-third deals with tax reductions and new spending in other areas that are priorities for Canadians. I am sure the member for Markham—Unionville knows something about the infrastructure needs in the greater Toronto area and elsewhere.

• (1710)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the budget the finance minister has just delivered fails to close the prosperity gap in this country. With the \$9 billion in corporate tax cuts and the failure to take away the tax advantages for the oil sands, it seems the budget was written more for those around the board room table, not around the kitchen table. How can the Conservatives claim that this is a budget for working families and ordinary Canadians? When we look at this budget, we can see that it fails on many measures.

Despite new funding for post-secondary education, working and middle class families will face higher tuition fees and student debt will continue to rise. Despite funding for health care, families will continue to pay for prescription drugs and home care. There is nothing in this budget for veterans and there is nothing in this budget for seniors despite motions that have been passed in the House. There is no new money in this budget for housing, of which there is a critical shortage in this country.

I would like to ask the finance minister, why is it that this budget does nothing to close the prosperity gap in this country?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong about veterans. The budget contains some substantial benefits for veterans which I actually announced about 10 minutes ago.

The member raised the point about how we can help lower income Canadians and struggling Canadians to do better. We need to help them over the welfare wall. When the Liberal Party opposite was government it talked about this but, as usual, it did not get the job done. Today we did it. We accomplished it today with the workers' income tax benefit.

I am sure my NDP colleague recognizes the importance of encouraging struggling people to move from social assistance into jobs. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. We are actually helping to make it worthwhile for people to support their families and to move into the labour force. This is an important social reform. I hope the NDP will support it. I have no idea what the Liberals might or might not do because they just talked about it and never did it.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the finance minister for another excellent budget, a budget that delivers for hard-working Canadian families, a budget that delivers on our commitment to the environment and a budget that delivers on our commitment to restore fiscal balance to the federation.

Could the minister please share with the House how this budget delivers on our commitments to the good, hard-working, overtaxed people of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, in budget 2007 our government is delivering for the hard-working families of Saskatchewan like never before.

Under the new fiscal balance package, Saskatchewan will have the largest per capita gains of any province in 2007-08. We are providing \$1.4 billion to improve the lives of the people of Saskatchewan, including \$226 million under the new equalization formula, \$756 million under the Canada health transfer, \$342 million for the Canada social transfer and \$75 million for infrastructure.

Additionally, we are providing Saskatchewan farmers with \$250 million. We are providing \$500 million to support private sector production of renewable fuels in Saskatchewan and throughout Canada.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this budget is a huge disappointment for farmers.

Last year the Prime Minister promised that he would move to cost of production. All we see in this budget is the \$1 billion that was announced several times. There are no details and no negotiations established with the provinces. It could have been done in a way under the Farm Income Protection Act that it could have been rolled out immediately but he locked it into the budget. It really is just a promise. There is no real money there. The only real money in this announcement is under the capital cost allowance, capital gains tax exemption, in order for farmers to get out of the business.

Why did the minister not live up to the Prime Minister's commitment of a year ago of achieving cost of production?

• (1715)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, as I said a few moments ago, over the last two budgets we have delivered \$4.5 billion in new assistance to Canada's farmers. The member opposite said that was not real money. I would suggest to the member opposite that he stay out of the banking business.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I would briefly point out that instead of answering my question, the minister talked about fiscal transfers.

I would point out that it was his government that cut \$10 billion of transfers to the provinces over five years by slashing child care programs, by scrapping the labour market partnership agreement and by reneging on the Canada-Ontario agreement.

Far from doing very much, instead of transferring \$11.1 billion over five years, he actually transferred \$1.1 billion, which is a difference of \$10 billion.

[*Translation*]

I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

The Budget

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed to have been adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

(Motion agreed to)

(The House adjourned at 5:18 p.m.)

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