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Monday, April 23, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 23, 2007

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

STATUTES REPEAL ACT

The House resumed from December 5 consideration of the motion that Bill S-202, An Act to repeal legislation that has not come into force within ten years of receiving royal assent, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before we begin looking at Bill S-202, I want to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, for placing his trust in me by naming me House Leader of the Bloc Québécois. I also thank the voters in Joliette because, without their support, I could not have been entrusted with this responsibility by the leader. I can assure my colleagues in this House that I will take part in parliamentary debates as constructively as possible, as I have always tried to do since I began sitting in Parliament seven years ago.

I would also like to thank the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean for all the work he has done, and particularly for everything he will be doing in the coming weeks, because obviously I am counting on his support, which I know I can rely on. As well, he has knowledge and expertise to pass on to me in order to make as smooth a transition as possible. The member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean will be with us until the end of this session.

In my opinion, Bill S-202, an act to repeal legislation that has not come into force within ten years of receiving royal assent, makes a great deal of sense. Some legislation has not come into force 10 years after it was adopted by the House and received royal assent. Something therefore needs to be corrected in the way legislation is made, and Bill S-202 suggests how this can be done.

The Bloc Québécois will support this bill, which is designed essentially to clean up legislation that has been adopted but has not come into force. Using a mechanism that I will come back to, this bill would force the government to make the House aware of such legislation.

This bill is also a way of clearly establishing that the legislative branch is responsible for the entire legislative process and that the executive branch has to carry out decisions made by Canada's Parliament, such as the decision to adopt bills in this House or the Senate. In a way, this bill strengthens legislative power and ensures that the executive serves the legislative and not the reverse.

We would, however, like to add some qualifications to the bill before us. We think that three amendments would be desirable. First, Bill S-202 allows legislation not to come into force within ten years. We feel that this is much too long. The House should question the relevance of any legislation that has not come into force after five years, as well as the rationale for the government's decision not to put it into force. We will therefore ask that the bill to be amended so as to reduce from ten years to five years the government's discretionary period for putting into force legislation passed by Parliament, that is the House of Commons and the Senate.

Second, we would want the government to be required to set out before Parliament its reasons for not having put the legislation into force, or not planning to do so, despite the fact that it has received royal assent. As I indicated, the goal is to enable the House to exercise its legislative responsibility in ensuring that the government does not do as it pleases with legislation passed by the House or by Parliament as a whole. In this respect, we feel that the type of explanation to be provided to Parliament by the government to justify not having put the legislation into force needs to be clarified.

Third, clause 3 should be amended to reflect the fact that the members of the Senate are not elected, but appointed by the Prime Minister, as everyone knows.

• (1110)

We propose amending clause 3, which currently reads as follows:

Every Act or provision listed in the annual report is repealed on December 31 of the year in which the report is laid unless it comes into force on or before that December 31 or during that year either House of Parliament adopts a resolution that the Act or provision not be repealed.

We propose amending it to:

Every Act or provision listed in the annual report is repealed on December 31 of the year in which the report is laid unless it comes into force on or before that December 31 or during that year the House of Commons adopts a resolution that the Act or provision not be repealed.

We find it is the responsibility of the House of Commons, of those who sit here, who were elected by the public—the electors—in their respective ridings. We think this should be a privilege of the House of Commons and not the Senate.

Private Members' Business

As I mentioned earlier, some bills and legislation have been passed by both Houses of Parliament. Although they received royal assent, they were never brought into force by the government.

This occurs when a bill is passed and Parliament gives the government the latitude to decide when the bill will come into force in order to give the government time to negotiate the bill's implementation with the provinces or, for regulations, the time to give the public service the latitude to consider all the implications. Nonetheless, for bills, the government is certainly not given this latitude in order to have the discretionary power to implement legislation or not, or to postpone its implementation indefinitely.

In our opinion, it is important to have a mechanism that ensures that the government is required to bring back to the House all the bills that have not been implemented. As I was saying earlier, we propose that this be done over a period of five years rather than ten. It is also important to receive the necessary explanations from the government on why the legislation has not been implemented, or why the government does not intend to implement it.

It may very well be that changing political, economic, social, environmental and cultural circumstances make it appropriate not to implement certain legislation.

The Library of Parliament has compiled information. There are acts dating back to before 1985. These deal with such matters as motor vehicle fuel consumption standards. It seems to me that we could do away with that particular piece of legislation, since consumption standards have obviously changed considerably over the past 20 years. I have not read it, but I am convinced that it is completely obsolete by now. This explains the purpose of the bill.

The mechanism in the bill provides that, on December 31 of the ninth year that an act has not been put into force, Parliament may be notified through an annual report laid before each House of Parliament, namely the House of Commons and the Senate. The government then has one year, from December 31 of the ninth year, to indicate whether it intends to put the act into force, or to explain why not, in the *Canada Gazette*.

In that case, if the government decides to explain why it will not implement an act, the act must be repealed if it is not brought into force by the following December 31, unless the House of Commons—if it considers the government's explanation to be unsatisfactory—that year resolves that it not be repealed. As I said earlier, the original bill also gives the Senate that power, but we believe that this ought to be within the purview of elected representatives.

The bill before us does not apply to acts or provisions of acts that are to come into force on assent or on a fixed date. Furthermore, the bill includes a transitional provision for provisions amended during the nine-year period before the enactment comes into force.

As I said earlier, this is simply about enabling the House of Commons, Parliament, the parliamentary process to ensure that we do not have to keep dealing with a series of acts that have not been implemented, or that, in some cases, cannot be implemented, or may not have been implemented for the wrong reasons by successive governments. The Senate committee was told that the bureaucrats do not even know how many such acts are gathering dust in various departments.

●(1115)

Parliamentarians, including government members, should be concerned about this. As I said, the Library of Parliament provided the senators who introduced this bill with a list of 56 bills that were never brought into force. Consider, for example, the Motor Vehicle Fuel Consumption Standards Act, which I mentioned earlier, and the Canadian Heritage Languages Institute Act from 1991, to name but two.

The Bloc Québécois supports the principle underlying the bill and hopes that the committee will be able to improve it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning I am honoured to address Bill S-202, the statutes repeal act.

Let me begin by congratulating the member for Joliette on his appointment as House leader for the Bloc Québécois. I know that he will bring his not only his experience but his commitment to this place to that job. I also want to thank the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean for his work in that position up to this point. They are different MPs, I know, and they bring different perspectives to that important task in this place.

I also want to thank the member for Mississauga South for presenting this Senate bill, the statutes repeal act, here in the House for our consideration. I know that it comes out of his commitment to the functioning of this place. He takes a great interest in how the chamber works and I appreciate his initiative around this important legislation.

As we have heard, this legislation seeks to address the fact that a number of pieces of legislation have never come into effect. They have never been enacted even though they have passed through the legislative process here in the House and also in the other place. For some reason, the government has chosen not to enact them.

That came as somewhat of a surprise to me even though I have worked in this place for many years. The fact that the government could choose not to implement legislation that had been passed by the House of Commons and the Senate, that it had that prerogative, is something that I still find passing strange. I find it strange that governments would sponsor legislation, take it through the process in both chambers, with members giving it their due and careful consideration, and see it go through all the stages of the various readings in the House and Senate and ultimately be passed, yet for some reason choose not to implement that legislation, and it would also not seek to repeal that legislation. It would just let it sit there on the books without effect for many years.

Private Members' Business

Indeed, I understand how that is a problem and I understand the need for some kind of housekeeping measures, both to bring accountability for the legislative process and to ensure that governments are doing their duty and following the will of the legislative branch of our government. I think this bill is a very important piece of legislation. It is important to consider what we do with legislation that has been on the books for many years and has not been enacted.

Generally there are several ways in which this is dealt with in legislation. All legislation has a coming into effect clause, which is usually the last clause of the legislation and which talks about when the legislation will come into effect. In some legislation that is very clearly stated: that it comes into effect at the point of royal assent or sometimes on a specific timetable with specific dates. In those cases, there is not a problem in terms of that legislation not becoming effective, not being enacted and not actually being carried out.

The problem is in the situation where the coming into effect legislation talks about the date to be determined by the governor in council, when the government is given the opportunity to determine the timeline for the coming into effect of legislation. Often there is a good reason for that. It may be that there are further negotiations with other levels of government that have to happen. It may be that regulations have to be developed to allow for the implementation of that legislation.

However, it is in those situations that the prerogative begins for the government to delay or even not implement legislation. That is where I think we need to be more diligent, perhaps, as members of Parliament. I certainly will be careful to look at that clause in any legislation that I am directly involved with in this place in the future, because I think that is where we as legislators can exercise our abilities to ensure that the legislation we work on and support comes into effect in a reasonable length of time and actually does happen. I think that is a place where we need to be more careful.

I would also hope that governments might take more direct responsibility in a situation where problems do crop up with legislation that has been passed but which governments feel they cannot go forward with. They should take responsibility to bring back legislation to repeal something that has already been passed, to convince the people in this place, who have responsibility for the people of Canada to work on that legislation and to make judgments about that legislation. A government must give representatives the opportunity to understand the problems with the legislation as the government sees it and to make a decision about whether it should go forward or not.

● (1120)

We have heard that there are two complete bills, the Motor Vehicle Fuel Consumption Standards Act from the early 1980s and the Canadian Heritage Languages Institute Act from the early 1990s that have not been implemented. I do not know what was in those pieces of legislation that caused them to not be implemented by the government. When I see the title of the first one, the Motor Vehicle Fuel Consumption Standards Act, I wonder if it had come into effect we might have solved some of the problems that we are facing today since it seemed to be an early attempt to deal with that important issue back in the 1980s.

I also understand that there are 57 other pieces of legislation that would be affected by this bill and it seems reasonable that there should be a review of that legislation. However, I want to make sure that we do not lose the opportunity to hold governments accountable for important legislation that was passed, and that we do indulge and we are careful about the politics between the legislative branch and the executive branch of government. We sometimes have to as legislators push the governor in council, the government, to act on legislation and for very good reasons.

I will use as an example my experience since I arrived in this place with a piece of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act which was passed in 2001 dealing with the refugee appeal division. I know this is not exactly applicable to the Statutes Repeal Act, but it gives an example of the kind of situation we are talking about.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, IRPA, was passed in 2001 and one feature of that act was the establishment of the refugee appeal division which was a paper screening process that gave refugee claimants an appeal of a decision made by the Immigration and Refugee Board. That refugee appeal division was established in law as a compromise in the debate on the immigration and refugee appeal division.

The government of the day wanted to reduce the panels which heard refugee claims from two members to one member, but concerns of other members of Parliament were that a two member panel gave an opportunity for corrections of errors that might be made in the process, whereas a one member panel did not afford that opportunity for fairness and justice, hence the RAD was introduced as a compromise to ensure fairness in the system.

Since then, the governments of the day have refused to implement the refugee appeal division, and every refugee and immigrant serving organization in the country and many internationally have called on the government to implement that. The previous Liberal government and the current Conservative government have faced those strong calls from NGOs which work with refugees to implement that division to bring a modicum of fairness to the process.

The governments of the day have refused to do that. It is part of the law. It was passed as part of the law, but the fact that the law also gave the governor in council the ability to determine the timetable for the implementation of that law, these particular sections have never been implemented.

This brings us to the strange situation where the member for Laval, with the support of her colleague, the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, have drafted a private member's bill, Bill C-280, An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (coming into force of sections 110, 111 and 171). However, this is a private member's bill to implement legislation that has already been passed by Parliament. It seems a strange step to have to take, but many members of Parliament in all parties have called for the government to take this action.

Private Members' Business

That is one example of the kind of situation we get into, where this chamber made a decision and the Senate also made a decision on this legislation. The legislation was passed. An important piece was added as part of the debate on that and yet the government has chosen never to implement it. Many of us feel that it is a very serious problem with our immigration law.

There are other examples. There is the wage earners protection bill, Bill C-55 which dealt with corporate bankruptcies and putting workers first in the lineup to receive compensation. Parts of that have not been acted on even though it was passed in this place. There are sections of the Labour Code which face the same situation. We do need an effective mechanism to review those pieces of legislation and I am glad that Bill S-202 gives us that opportunity.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the House in support of this bill from the Senate. It will be very useful for all of Parliament.

[*English*]

It is not often that we get a chance to discuss a bill that we can agree on. This private member's bill seems to have the agreement of all parties. It has very good support in the Senate. It is not a bill that attracts a lot of attention. I have not received a lot of calls in my riding on this bill. It does not get a lot of media attention. The bill shows, for one thing, that Parliament can work and that there can be some good cooperation among parties.

The bill seeks to make Parliament work better in the future, to solve problems before they arise. There may not have been a thousand cases of where not having this type of bill has hurt Canadians, but I think we can see that the potential is there and in other instances where Canadians are not getting the benefit that Parliament intended. Previous speakers spoke about the bankruptcy protection act for workers which is an excellent example. It was passed by both Houses and it received royal assent but has not been brought into force.

I would like to begin by thanking the other place for its excellent work, and particularly Senator Banks, who has taken this on and has made great arguments. He has done a lot of good research on this matter. I think it advances the mark. I am not sure that it accomplishes the full task of what we should be doing. We should be asking very fundamental questions about why a bill can go through the House, be enacted, go through the Senate, committees, hear witnesses, be approved by both Houses of Parliament, receive royal assent, and then the government chooses not to put it into force.

Perhaps it is important for Canadians to understand that there is an operative clause in many of these bills, usually the last clause, that says the bill would come into force with the approval of the governor in council. That essentially means that cabinet would decide, and cabinet is government. There can be good reasons for that.

For example, the bill could be dealing with agreements that have to take place or be negotiated. It could have interprovincial ramifications, meaning that changes might have to be made to laws in other provinces. We have had that in certain instances with the

Criminal Code where changes needed to be made in the provinces that have not happened. In those cases, we would see the reason behind it. We cannot have provincial acts and federal acts saying opposite things.

There could be other acts of Parliament that go through or are initiated with some discussion that gives reason for the original act to be not valid, sometimes counterproductive, or having a different intent.

Another example are international treaties or Canadian treaties with first nations that have to be taken into consideration. Sometimes they need negotiations and the act cannot be brought into force until those negotiations happen.

I believe there are 56 such acts of Parliament that have received royal assent but have not been proclaimed because they are waiting for governor in council proclamation. This raises the question of certainty. If I am going to be favourably affected by such an act, then I would want the certainty that the act would be implemented. If I am going to be negatively affected, or if it can change the outcome of my day-to-day decision-making processes, then I should have the right to know that also. I should have the right to know that the bill or the act will be proclaimed or withdrawn. I believe it is very good in that sense.

I find a 10 year time period a bit long. Some senators have suggested that perhaps it should have been a five year period. I would suggest that perhaps there could be other elements added to the bill, and the committee will certainly be reviewing this. Maybe there should be an annual listing of all the acts, not just at the 10 year period but at the one year, two year, or three year period. Parliament could be told where the legislation is in the process, why it has not been proclaimed, or what the holdup is. Parliament could be appraised of the situation. Again, I reference the bankruptcy provisions to protect workers.

• (1130)

The purpose of a bill passed by Parliament is to advise government, government being cabinet, to enact and put in place that piece of legislation so that the bureaucracy, civil servants, can make the decisions and take the actions that are deemed necessary by Parliament.

If we look at a bunch of acts that are not proclaimed or put into force, we could suggest that cabinet or government is looking at the effect of a private member's bill and sometimes even a government bill saying, "That is what the House thinks but we know better". I do not think that is the intention and that is not how Parliament should work. Parliament is supreme and the governor in council should enact the will of Parliament as soon as possible. The only way we can know whether that is being done or whether there is justification for what government decides is that there be an annual review to look at each of the bills to see why they have not been put into force.

We live every day with ministerial discretion that gives a lot of power to a minister, not necessarily just the governor in council but as a minister independently. We have a bill before the House now on the modernization of the Fisheries Act. It is a very old act that needs modernization. I am looking forward to having a serious debate on it.

Private Members' Business

I wish we could have good consultations with the fisheries industry and the communities affected so that modifications could be brought to the proposed act. I am quite comfortable that 99% of it is good, but there needs to be some changes and clarifications and there has been a refusal to do so.

My point is that when we look at the old act, there is so much ministerial power and discretion, and the new act possibly gives more to a minister. In this case the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans could make a decision in which all would agree with the principle, as was announced a couple of weeks ago on licensing provisions and regulations in the lobster fishery in western Nova Scotia. That can have some negative effects and not give the opportunity for proper discussions and consultations on how to negate and minimize the negative effects and encourage the positive.

Protection of the independence of the inshore fleet is very positive, people want that, but they do not need an artificial effect of decreasing the value of their licences which is, in the case of family businesses, the pension plan of fishermen and their families. A quick decision by a minister without consultation and proper regard can have a negative impact. We must ensure we have those types of discussions.

In the case of bills that are brought before the House, usually we have a lot of discussions in various ways. We can have them go to committee at first reading, have public input at that time, have consultation prior to the bill being drafted, consultation after the bill is drafted, and consultation at second reading both in the House and the Senate. One would think that once that process has been followed, the will of the House should be supreme. It is in law but in practice sometimes it is not because the government will decide when it will bring a bill into force.

I was pleased to see that in this bill itself the drafter had the wisdom to put in the sixth article that this act comes into force two years after the day it receives royal assent. Ironically, had the drafter not done that and inserted the typical operative clause saying it would come into force at the proclamation of the governor in council, the bill might not be able to do at all what it seeks to do, which is to make sure these acts of Parliament are put into force unless there are valuable reasons not to, and there can be. I suggest that probably in most cases there are.

What is suggested now is a review in the ninth year. I would invite the committee to consider an annual review of all bills that are in limbo, all of them. I am sure only two or three would have to be debated. With that, I am pleased to add my support along with other members of the House to this important bill.

• (1135)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on many occasions in the House we have differences on all sides of the House, sometimes minor and sometimes sharp, but today it is a pleasure to see a fair degree of unanimity in dealing with the occasionally mundane, but most necessary, mechanics of the efficient operation of the House.

It is for that reason that I am glad to have the opportunity to comment in a positive manner on Bill S-202. It is an important initiative and one that I know most, if not all, members of our party fully support.

Today I will focus my comments on the question of how much oversight would be appropriate in respect of the coming into force of legislation considering all the other responsibilities that Parliament has to discharge. To be more to the point, I would like to address the question of how soon Parliament's attention should be drawn to the fact that particular acts or provisions have not been brought into force.

As we know, Bill S-202 would require the Minister of Justice to report at the beginning of each calendar year on all acts and provisions that have not been brought into force in the past nine years. These acts and provisions would be repealed at the end of the year unless during the year they were brought into force or exempted from repeal by a resolution of either Houses of Parliament.

The only basis on which legislation would be reported would be how much time has passed since it was adopted by Parliament. No partisan or political motives could influence the content of this report, and to me that is very important. This single criterion ensures that at one point in time every provision that has not been brought into force will be brought to the attention of Parliament and the government will need to account for it.

The downside, if I may use that expression, of having this single criterion is that it treats all acts and provisions in the same way, regardless of their significance, which may range from granting important rights to making relatively minor technical amendments.

During the December debate, the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord suggested that a 10 year period following the adoption of legislation was far too long and that any legislation that has not been brought into force within 5 years should be repealed. I would like to express some concerns about reducing the timeframe from 10 years to 5 years as she suggested.

Under the current 10 year period, the first report to be tabled by the Minister of Justice would include four complete acts and provisions in about 60 statutes. We need to keep in mind that the first report should be the longest because it will cover old legislation. That kind of systematic repeal of obsolete provisions was last done by the statute revision of 1985. We would expect the following reports to be shorter after the first set of repeals have been made under Bill S-202.

I have had the benefit of looking at a list of all acts and provisions that would be added to the list of legislation to be repealed if the bill were amended, as suggested by the hon. member, to refer to a five year period of repeal instead of a ten year period. This simple change would add one complete statute, the Specific Claims Resolution Act, and over 150 provisions in 18 statutes. That is a lot of legislation to be reviewed by Parliament.

When I compared the results created by reducing the repeal period from 10 years to 5 years, it left me with the impression that a number of these additional provisions would probably have been brought into force between 5 years and 10 years. I am concerned about spending too much time too soon on provisions that would probably not appear on the same list five years later because they would already have been dealt with in the meantime.

Private Members' Business

Multiple consequential amendments are sometimes dependent on a single action to be completed. For example, the Cape Breton Development Corporation Divestiture Authorization and Dissolution Act provides for the dissolution of the corporation and some things can only be done once the corporation is dissolved. For the same reasons, some provisions, for example deleting references to that corporation, can only be brought into force once the corporation ceases to exist.

• (1140)

We can find such provisions in the five year list but they would likely not appear on a ten year list. Is it the best use of Parliament's time then to simply review such provisions?

I understand the importance and am in favour of having proper parliamentary oversight but I am concerned that in most of these cases added by a five year rule it would simply exceed what is necessary to keep track of implementation of legislation by government. In other words, during the due course of time it will probably be dealt with.

I am not the sponsor of Bill S-202 but, from the previous debates at the other place, I understand that the aim of the bill is not to simply repeal everything as soon as possible.

As I mentioned last December, there are valid reasons why some legislation takes time to be implemented. I do not believe anyone in this House is in disagreement with this point. The effect of the bill would be to provide an opportunity to consider the validity of these reasons at some point in time.

What would be the point of asking Parliament to spend time on so many items that would eventually have been resolved anyway? Considering that it often takes years for particular statutes to be adopted by Parliament, is it necessary to systematically start reviewing their coming into force as quickly as four years after their adoption? In very particular cases, Parliament provides that a review of an act be undertaken after five or ten years. This is an exceptional measure to monitor the impact of significant legislation, like the Anti-terrorism Act which touches on fundamental rights and values.

The purpose of Bill S-202 is not to provide for such parliamentary review across the board. I am concerned that not all provisions that would fall under the five year timeframe would be of such an extraordinary importance as to require Parliament's attention after simply a few years of their enactment. If they are so important as to require Parliament's attention, nothing prevents parliamentarians from asking the responsible minister what is happening in that respect and questions can be raised much sooner than before the end of five years.

Although I concede there is no magic in the particular number of years, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, it seems to me that when legislation has not been brought into force within ten years there are reasons to be concerned that nothing has been done to bring it into force. However, relatively few acts and provisions should survive this timeframe.

I mentioned last December that there can be valid reasons why legislation might take a significant time to bring into force. These reasons often have to do with the need to make administrative

arrangements before implementing new programs or measures, or the time required to coordinate them with provincial, territorial or foreign governments. Parliament, though, should be entitled, as provided in Bill S-202, to receive answers.

The other point I would like to make in this respect is that once a piece of legislation appears on the list in a given year, a resolution of either Houses of Parliament will be required to save it from repeal at the end of the year and such resolution will be required every year until the legislation is finally implemented or repealed.

Do we really want to hear about an international treaty implementation act every year for five years? Quite frankly, no. This House has many pressing, urgent, necessary and demanding issues to be dealt with but it is quite common for legislation like that to take years to implement. Parliament's time is precious and it should not be spent on issues that would be resolved in due time.

I am all in favour of a process that would require the government to explain thoroughly why legislation adopted by Parliament has not been brought into force. However, I am concerned that if we put in place a threshold that is too low, like a review within five years, we would spend time on issues that would have been resolved if we had simply waited a few more years. By waiting until 10 years, chances are that only significant problems would reach Parliament. Is that not our duty? It seems to me to be a much better use of Parliament's resources.

• (1145)

Finally, I will repeat that if a situation requires Parliament's attention before 10 years because it is pressing, it is urgent or it is a matter that should be dealt with by Parliament, nothing really prevents any member of the House to ask for explanations from the responsible minister.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak briefly to the bill but I definitely will be supporting the bill brought forward by my colleague, the member for Mississauga South. He is a tremendous legislator who has a great understanding of the House, how it works and how it might be improved.

In such a complex system, items can sit around for years or fall between the cracks and people do not know they are there. They complicate an already complicated system. We do not need anything to make the system more complicated or to hold up the business of the country so anything we can do to streamline that and make it more effective I am sure all parliamentarians would agree.

The process for some bills is that after they receive royal assent from the Queen or the Governor General, they must then be proclaimed. Some of them come into effect on a particular date specified in the bill. Those are not the types of bills we are talking about today.

Other bills must be proclaimed by the government and, if that does not happen, then the bill does not come into effect. It could sit on the books forever which could cause a very confusing situation. In fact, years and decades later someone could proclaim a bill that was anachronistic, that had nothing to do with the times and it could be very dangerous, inefficient or not useful at all. This bill would simply clean up that situation.

Private Members' Business

A number of colleagues have already said that they wonder why that situation exists but the present system makes it possible to exist. My hon. colleague from Mississauga discovered that and came forward with this legislation to help fix that situation.

The legislation would provide that bills which have not been proclaimed after 10 years would no longer be in effect or be eligible to be in effect. The government could bring it back in the future but the legislation would allow a decision time of 10 years so that it would not be clutter and that it could not, perhaps by mistake or anachronistically, be brought into effect when it was not really meant to do so.

One thing we would want to be sure of in this process is that a bill would not be lost by accident. All of a sudden 10 years is up and the bills that might have been important, that might have been waiting for some important reasons that were mentioned by the members of the government and some other speaker to be proclaimed, they die because of the bill. However, the bill makes provisions for that. Bills will not just quietly die because a report would need to be made to the House after nine years. It also contains provisions to ensure that everyone is aware that this is about to take place and to give good consideration.

Once again, it would improve the system. When something is happening which people may not have been aware of or other exigencies or other important priorities have come forward and people have forgotten about it, the legislation would bring it back to the attention of the House that Parliament had decided to do something, that both Houses of Parliament had agreed and had passed all the procedures and for some reason it is still sitting there. The legislation would bring it to a decision point and a timely decision would be made so it does not just sit there.

At the moment about 57 bills have actually had royal assent but have not yet been proclaimed. Three of those are over 10 years old. We are not talking about a huge number of bills but there are enough that the bill is necessary as a housekeeping amendment to make Parliament and the legislative process more efficient.

I strongly support my colleague's bill and I hope the House will support it too.

● (1150)

I want to use the remaining time to float another concept that parliamentarians might think about in the future, which is that all legislation should sunset. There is legislation that is so old and anachronistic that it does not make any sense. Currently there are so many laws and the system is so big that the laws simply remain in force. There should be a provision that after a certain time, maybe 20 or 30 years, every bill would expire or would have to be renewed through a vote of Parliament to make sure it was still relevant.

Parliamentarians are very good at creating programs, legislation, expenditures and laws. However, they are not very good at getting rid of them when they are no longer useful.

This would affect virtually all departments and agencies of government. They would have to review what was in place and not let legislation just sit on the books. This could lead to all sorts of work, but on the other hand it would lead to a very timely review of

ancient, anachronistic and useless provisions that had been created in a different era.

In the acceleration of the knowledge based world changes happen very fast and laws become outdated fairly quickly. This idea would provide a check and an update on everything the government has put into place. At some timeframe in the future all laws and programs would be reviewed by the appropriate departments and ultimately by Parliament.

This is something for parliamentarians to think about when improving the parliamentary system in the future.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few remarks about Bill S-202, the statutes repeal act.

This bill as adopted in the other place is a valuable initiative. Like my hon. colleague, I am concerned about amending it to reduce from 10 to five years the period after which legislation could be repealed. I do not believe the purpose of the bill is to bring legislation into force as soon as possible. The appropriate time to do so is when the right conditions are in place, not as soon as possible. The real problem to be addressed is how to prevent the government from delaying indefinitely the coming into force of legislation.

Bill S-202 provides a good solution. By now we are all familiar with the process that Bill S-202 proposes to put in place. I do not intend to describe it in detail; I would prefer to focus on the problem it attempts to solve.

When Parliament is not in a position to bring an act or provision into force on royal assent, or identify a day for its coming into force, it has to rely on another mechanism to ensure that the legislation comes into force at the right time. The usual mechanism is to delegate to the government the power to select the day on which the act or provision would come into force. This is because the government should be in a better position after royal assent to assess when that time should be.

As we know, once Parliament has delegated to the governor in council the power to fix the coming into force date of legislation, it is a matter for the government to decide. As long as it considers from time to time the appropriateness of bringing the legislation into force, it has fulfilled its duties.

Until now, the only sanction the government could expect for failing to bring legislation into force was criticism in Parliament or elsewhere. Bill S-202 would ensure that the government could not consider indefinitely when legislation should come into force.

After 10 years the legislation would be repealed by operation of the law. By repealing the legislation after 10 years, Bill S-202 would ensure that the government seriously and regularly considered bringing legislation into force or it would lose the power to do so.

In addition, the reasons behind decisions not to bring legislation into force would have to be presented before Parliament in order for a resolution to be adopted deferring the repeal of the legislation. The bill would not, however, allow the government to easily dispense with legislation that it does not intend to implement at any time.

Private Members' Business

The report tabled annually by the minister of justice would put Parliament on notice that the acts and provisions it lists could be repealed at the end of the year. Any member of either house of Parliament could seek to prevent the repeal of legislation by proposing a resolution to that effect. In short, the government would have to publicly account to Parliament for the way it has exercised the power delegated by Parliament.

This new mechanism would improve our legislative process by implementing a mandatory parliamentary oversight nine years after powers have been delegated to the government to bring legislation into force. This would be an original process which has no equivalent, to my knowledge, in any of the Canadian legislatures.

Without any point of comparison, it is difficult to assess what would be the best parameter. Should legislation be repealed after 10 or five years? It is hard to assess, but considering how long it would take to re-enact legislation that would be repealed under this bill, should that be found necessary, I suggest that it might be better to keep a higher threshold. Therefore, in this regard, I disagree with the Bloc member who spoke earlier in favour of the five year threshold.

As my hon. colleague from Prince Edward—Hastings has mentioned before, there are many valid reasons why legislation might take time to be brought into force. I am concerned that if the repeal period were reduced from 10 to five years, the government might often be put in a situation where the conditions or circumstances necessary for bringing some legislation into force would not yet exist.

For example, not all the provinces or territories are ready to participate in a program or put in place a procedure needed to implement federal legislation. The procedures for enforcing federal offences under the Contraventions Act are a case in point. To keep such necessary legislation alive, the government would have to request either house of Parliament to adopt a resolution every year for a number of years.

● (1155)

A resolution is a good and transparent way to decide if an exemption from repeal should be allowed, but if after four years we have to seek resolutions to legislation that might take over 10 years to implement, it seems to me that Parliament would devote a lot of time to the same question that it cannot resolve because the coming into force depends on external factors. A good example of this is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Implementation Act which was enacted in 1998.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately for the hon. member, the time has expired for this hour of debate, but I will go to the hon. member for Mississauga South for his five minute right of reply.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-202 has been proposed a number of times since 2002.

If members had read the summary they would have gotten the idea that there were some solutions in it to some of the questions that were raised. The summary states that the enactment provides that any act or provision of an act, i.e. a part of an act, that is to come into force on a day to be fixed by proclamation or order of the governor in council must be included in an annual report laid before both

houses of Parliament if it does not come into force by the December 31 that is nine years after it receives royal assent. The act or provisions are repealed if they do not come into force by the following December 31, unless during that year either house, the Commons or the Senate, passes a resolution that it not be repealed.

There is that stop period in case matters come before either house that would make proper argument that repeal should not take place.

The enactment applies to all acts, whether introduced in either house. It applies to government bills, private members' bills, public bills and private bills that provide for a coming into force to be set by the governor in council.

This is simply a summary, but I would like to point out that the reaction of parliamentarians thus far has been somewhat of astonishment that there could be 57 bills that have received royal assent and have not come into force. What is happening? Never mind after nine years, why is there not an annual report of all the bills that have received royal assent and have not been proclaimed. The report could provide a basic statement for the reasons the acts have not been put into force.

I understand there are some bills that have some regulations that are very complex. For example, the reproductive technologies regulations took about two years to develop and they still have not been fully implemented. We can understand how some bills can take time and there is good reason, but in many of the bills it is clear from my review of them that there is no good reason for the failure to proclaim them.

We have had a very thoughtful debate at second reading. There have been some interesting propositions about how the bill may be further improved and considered by the standing committee which will call the necessary witnesses. Let us make absolutely sure that the legislation substantiates the wish we make each day as we say our prayer that we make good laws and wise decisions.

I thank all hon. members who participated in the debate. I believe there is broad support for at least approval in principle at second reading. Let us move the bill to committee so that we can consider further Bill S-202 on behalf of Senator Tommy Banks.

● (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 12:03 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Government Orders

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of the amendment made by the Senate to Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

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

That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours that this House disagrees with the amendment made by the Senate to Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. Speaker, it is with more than a little frustration that I rise today to debate an amendment to Bill C-16. Let me be clear from the outset, the government supports, in fact initiated Bill C-16 for fixed date elections, but the government opposes the amendment made by the Senate to Bill C-16. It is unnecessary and it weakens the original legislation.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

For more than a century, people from all over the world have looked to Canada as a model of freedom and responsible government. In fact, members of my own family took refuge here after fleeing repression.

[*English*]

They were seeking freedom, hope and opportunity. They were attracted by a country where they had a say, where political leaders were accountable to them and where government was responsive, effective and stable.

Just as John Diefenbaker said more than six decades ago, for those people, and for all Canadians, "Parliament is more than procedure; it is the custodian of the nation's freedom".

In Canada our government has its roots in the British parliamentary system. In our short history we have adapted those ancient traditions to make them more relevant to the Canadian experience. We have made reasonable incremental changes that make government better for Canadians.

As Nova Scotia prepares for 250th anniversary celebrations of Canada's first democracy next year, many of us reflect on the impact that responsible government has had on our country. It was a step forward in making government more accountable, fairer and more democratic.

[*Translation*]

Over the years, our system has been modified to ensure that the government is listening to the people it serves. Bill C-16 represents only the most recent changes. It aims to strengthen our democracy by improving responsibility, transparency and equity.

[*English*]

It establishes fixed dates for elections every four years on the third Monday in October. Fixed dates take the guesswork out of the electoral process and level the playing field for the Chief Electoral Officer, for political parties and, more important, for voters.

Our government does not believe that the governing party should be permitted to time an election to exploit conditions favourable to its re-election. Bill C-16 would put an end to governance according to poll results. It would prevent snap elections such as those called by Jean Chrétien in 1997 and 2000, which predictably resulted in record low turnouts. In both cases the vote was seen to have been called for the sole purpose of capitalizing on political circumstance on a calculation of partisan interest.

Bill C-16 would eliminate situations where decisions on election timing would be based on best interests of a political party rather than the best interests of Canadians. The bill would empower governments and parliamentary committees to set out their agenda well in advance with certainty.

[*Translation*]

All the parties agree that, above all, elections belong to the people. We believe that by getting more Canadians to participate in the election process, Bill C-16 will make it possible to strengthen our democracy.

[*English*]

Passage of this legislation will allow citizens to plan to participate in their nation's electoral process. That participation is the bedrock upon which our democracy is built.

Bill C-16 was passed in the House of Commons without amendments. It was debated very thoroughly in the House of Commons and also in the committee on procedure and house affairs. It was passed in the House of Commons and was sent to the Senate where it was examined in detail by the Senate's committee on legal and constitutional affairs. After a detailed period of scrutiny and a detailed process, that committee supported the passage of the bill without any amendments.

[*Translation*]

Various expert witnesses have appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. These two committees have extensively examined the bill.

[*English*]

No party in the House of Commons suggested an amendment to this legislation. Neither the House committee nor the Senate committee felt it was necessary to amend Bill C-16. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that at the very last minute an amendment was passed which has never been subject to any detailed scrutiny.

One has to wonder why the amendment was never presented for debate in committee. Perhaps there, reasoned examination would have pointed out the obvious flaws. The Leader of the Opposition supported Bill C-16 without amendment, yet he was not able to persuade Liberal senators to follow suit. He could not get that job done either.

Government Orders

I will turn my attention to the proposed amendment.

The proposed amendment to Bill C-16 would change the existing provision of the bill that would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to recommend a change to the polling day in the event of a conflict such as a provincial election or a day of cultural or religious significance.

[*Translation*]

This existing provision would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to recommend to the governor in council that the polling day be either the following day or a week later.

[*English*]

The proposed amendment would alter the bill so that it would explicitly allow the Chief Electoral Officer to recommend a change in the polling day in the event of a federal, provincial or municipal referendum. It is my contention that the proposed amendment weakens the original intent of the bill, the bill that was endorsed by all parties in the House of Commons.

Instead of safeguarding election dates for manipulation, the amendment would make it easier for governing parties to manipulate election dates. If the amendment were to be adopted, it would open the door to a prime minister putting off a scheduled election by calling a referendum on the same day. With the amendment, a national election would be cancelled because of a municipal referendum. I find it difficult to imagine any situation where a municipal referendum would be so important that it would result in a date of a federal election being cancelled, but the statute would provide for exactly that to happen.

We on this side of the House do not believe democracy or accountability in government is strengthened or enhanced in any way when a referendum to build a hockey arena in small town Ontario could cancel the date of a national election. The original legislation was drafted with enough flexibility to avoid conflicts in a limited variety of situations, but that should be as limited as possible. The amendment to which we object expands, not limits, the potential for fixed dates to be altered.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Under Bill C-16, neither the prime minister of the day nor the mayor of a small town could change the fixed election date.

[*English*]

In short, the amendment is unnecessary. The original bill has built in flexibility for the Chief Electoral Officer to adjust an election date in the event of a legitimate conflict.

Second, we believe the Liberal amendment weakens the original legislation by making the date of elections more vulnerable to manipulation, not surprising from a party that engaged in this kind of manipulation so regularly in the past.

Today I urge all members of the legislature to join with the government to oppose this unnecessary amendment and to oppose it in short order. Let us send the Senate a message. Let us tell senators that pointless amendments to important legislation are not acceptable to the House or to the Canadian people.

Had the amendment not been sloppily attached by the Senate at the very last possible moment, fixed dates for elections would be the law right now. Unfortunately, the unelected Liberal Senate and its continuing campaign against democratic reform blocked it. Consider the irony. The elected House of Commons passes a bill to fix dates for elections. Then an unelected Liberal dominated Senate passed an amendment to water down the law, without even committee consideration of that amendment, and, by doing so, prevented the democratic reform bill from becoming law.

The Senate telling members of the House of Commons how elections should work is an irony. Let us urge it to reconsider its amendment quickly so Bill C-16 could be in place in time for the next federal election.

[*Translation*]

As I said, Bill C-16 was passed in the House of Commons without amendments. The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs also supported passing this legislation without amendments.

[*English*]

It has undergone heavy scrutiny and has been found to be acceptable, but today we have been asked to consider an amendment that has not been examined in any detail. We are being asked to debate a frivolous amendment that is designed to frustrate the government's agenda of democratic reform. An amendment of this sort feeds public cynicism and erodes the accountability that Bill C-16 seeks to foster in government.

The kind of procedural manoeuvring being employed by the Senate to hold up the passage of Bill C-16 brings to mind the game playing that has left Bill S-4, the bill for Senate term limits, languishing in that place for an unbelievable 328 days so far.

Bill S-4 is legislation that proposes to limit Senate terms to eight years. It was sent to the Senate for consideration on May 30, 2006. That is when it was introduced there.

[*Translation*]

Last spring, the Special Senate Committee on Senate Reform examined Bill S-4. That committee held extensive hearings on the matter.

[*English*]

In October of last year it reported its findings, which supported the government's incremental approach to Senate reform. Despite that endorsement, Bill S-4 is now the subject of a second round of hearings by a Senate standing committee, a committee that is duplicating the efforts of the earlier special committee.

[*Translation*]

The Leader of the Opposition said he supports the proposal for Senate term limits. He said he hopes Bill S-4 will pass. Yet, he cannot convince Liberal senators to follow suit.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Once again, the Leader of the Opposition cannot get the job done.

Government Orders

Just as I did last week, I will use this opportunity to once again ask the members of the official opposition to urge their colleagues in the Senate to put an end to this game playing, stop thwarting constructive change and get on with the job Canadians want and expect them to do.

Bill C-16 represents an important step in the modernization of our political process. It is a reasonable step that would make government more accountable and more transparent. For these reasons, it should be passed without amendment.

The government opposes the Senate amendment and urges all members of the House to advise the Senate that Bill C-16 should be restored.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the government House leader's speech. One of the themes of his speech was delay. The irony of the opposition to this very minor amendment from the Senate is that the government House leader and his party are actually delaying the passage of the bill. Simply by accepting this minor procedural amendment, it could go to the Governor General this evening. It does not have to go back to the Senate.

By opposing the amendment, the government is deliberately delaying the passage of Bill C-16, its own legislation, which all parties accepted and supported, by sending it back to the Senate. It is inconceivable to me that this could be presented by the government House leader unless it is a deliberate stalling tactic. Those members do not want to see fixed election dates until they know whether they want to go to the Governor General and have a dissolution outside of a non-confidence vote. They could do that anyway under Bill C-16, but it would be inconceivable for the Governor General to accept, short of a national emergency, a request for dissolution within Bill C-16 if there were a no confidence vote. The government is trying to keep its options open.

Is the government House leader sincere in wanting to get Bill C-16 through, or is this really a stalling tactic to keep his options open?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why members of the Liberal Party are anxious to avoid an early election at any cost and why they fear there are conspiracy theories out there as reasons why this would be happening. I know the member for Vancouver Quadra is not looking to avoid an election in that way because he is planning on retiring from the House after many years of good service, but his colleagues fear meeting the voters one more time. Perhaps that is why they are anxious to see this happen quickly.

However, as I pointed out earlier, the bill could have been law right now had the Senate passed it without inserting this objectionable amendment. Members need to think about how this amendment was inserted. The bill was there for just about half a year and over that time the amendment was never discussed or put forward in committee. The Senate dealt with the bill at committee where it was approved as it existed coming from the House. It was only on the very last day, at the very last minute, that the amendment was proposed at third reading and was attached to the bill.

If the member wants to know who was playing games, it is pretty clear where the games were being played. They were being played in

the Senate where the amendment was attached at the very last minute.

That is not acceptable to us. We have made it clear why the change is unacceptable. Had the amendment been proposed at committee, there would have been an opportunity for it to be examined there, but the Senate did not do that. It was attached right at the end.

If the Liberals are concerned that it has not become law yet, they need only look at their friends in the Liberal dominated Senate, who chose to keep the bill from becoming law by attaching the amendment. They chose to water down the bill with the amendment, and that is the most significant part. It creates more opportunities for fixed date elections to be cancelled. It creates more opportunity for manipulation and uncertainty in our system. That is exactly what Bill C-16 was seeking to prevent.

By telling the Senate that we want it to restore the original intent of the bill, that fixed date elections will indeed be fixed date elections, we would be strengthening our democracy in a very positive way.

• (1220)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at our end of the House we are rather perplexed on two different levels.

First of all, there is the obvious irony of having the Senate interfere in and make comment about our election system in this country, with the unelected, undemocratic senators actually butting their noses in and interfering with the way the nation chooses to run its elections.

Having said that, we are also somewhat confused that the ruling party seems bound and determined today to sabotage and undermine its own initiative, its own bill, something it committed to Canadians.

I would remind my colleague, the government House leader, that one of the best features of a minority Parliament is that the ruling party of the day has to take into consideration input from other sources. It has to accommodate the reasonable concerns of the other parties. In this case, the Conservatives are outnumbered by I believe three to one.

The opposition parties all believe that this is a reasonable amendment from the Senate. Notwithstanding the irony of having the Senate butt its nose into the way we elect people, there is some merit to what it is putting forward today.

Rather than hurling stones at others for sabotaging and undermining this bill, the government is giving us the spectre of the government itself sabotaging its own initiative. To what end? Selfish political advantage. The Conservatives want the ability to be able to call an election without being exposed as frauds in terms of a commitment to fixed election dates.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing, of course, is seeking to restore, defend and strengthen the integrity of the bill. We seek to keep it in its original form and avoid its watering down. Quite clearly, the effort to undermine this has come from the Senate.

Government Orders

My friend from Winnipeg Centre has said that in a minority Parliament the government should accommodate the other parties. I remind him that in this House of Commons and in this chamber all parties supported this bill in its original form. The amendment did not come from anyone in this chamber. It did not come from anyone in the minority Parliament. As he observed, the amendment came from people in an unelected Senate.

Let us think of the irony. Everyone who was elected, every single member of this House of Commons, everyone who has to face the voters in an election, supported the bill in its original form. The Senate is the only place where people thought it should be changed. The only people who thought they had some opinions on how elections should be run, opinions that were different from those of everybody in this chamber, were the people who never face elections, the senators. Let us think of that. That is what is called chutzpah. That is some nerve.

If the senators were actually proposing that they should have fixed date elections, I could understand this amendment being introduced, but I did not see them proposing any amendments that there should be elections and that this bill should apply to the Senate. I did not see them proposing that there should even be fixed terms or fixed dates for senators. They seem to be resisting that in dragging it out so far. No, the only thing the senators are willing to do is tell people in the House how they should run elections.

To me, that is the height of irony. I think it tells us what one of the problems is in the Senate right now, and it tells us why we need to reform the Senate and why we need to continue this program of democratic reform and accountability to have fixed terms for senators. Also, we have Bill C-43, and if the other parties support the bill, then maybe we even will have an opportunity for some of this legislation to apply to senators one day and have them elected.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. government House leader and heard him say that he is not willing to accept a suggestion from the senators. When we look at it, he probably is more aware of this than I am because he has more experience in Parliament, but when bills are brought in and witnesses come before a committee, they are non-elected people and we take advice from those citizens.

I listened to the member for Winnipeg Centre. It makes total sense. If someone puts forward a good suggestion we parliamentarians should respect it. This is a very minor adjustment to the government's own bill. I think the government should accept it and should support the other parties and make this law today.

• (1225)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member for Newton—North Delta brought up the committee, the hearings at the committee, and the witnesses they heard from, because guess what? After committee members heard witnesses at the procedure and House Affairs committee of the House of Commons, they did not introduce that amendment. They kept the bill the way it was. As well, after the Senate committee members heard witnesses on how they thought the bill should work, they kept the bill the way it was.

It was not a suggestion from witnesses at one of the committees or a decision of one of the committees that led to this change. It was from one senator who thought he would raise it third reading, at the

eleventh hour, as another way to stall this bill and to stall any form of democratic reform. That is the real Liberal Party agenda.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that the official opposition in the House of Commons supports Bill C-16. When it was before this House earlier, we supported it wholeheartedly and spoke energetically in favour of it.

Repeatedly the House leader of the government speaks of irony. In fact, I think the walls of this extraordinary chamber are dripping with irony after his speech. However, he speaks of irony in the sense of delay, and of course the delay is on the part of the government on this unnecessary challenge of that minor amendment today.

Let me look at the other initiatives around delay. The House leader speaks of Bill C-43 and the delay there, but we started that last week. The government waited four months after tabling Bill C-43, the election through consultation of senators, to bring it forward. Why not four months ago?

He talked about Bill S-4, the bill on fixed terms for senators, and the fact that it has been held up in the Senate for over a year. This has not been held up in the Senate because of Bill S-4, because there is agreement on that. What there is not agreement on is that we should have the election of senators through consultation with the provinces, or whatever, before we redistribute the seats of the Senate fairly across this country.

How can any member of this House, and particularly of the government, support Bill S-4 without first supporting the other Senate motion to redistribute seats so there is less of the imbalance that so thoroughly disfavours Alberta and British Columbia at this time? I have colleagues in the government side from Alberta and British Columbia. It is inconceivable to me that they would think of altering in any way the status, the mandate, the credibility or the validation of the Senate without first sorting out that extremely unfair distribution for western Canada. This is where we are on that.

On Bill C-16, it is doublespeak, it is Orwellian, to hear the government House leader speak today about the Liberal side or Liberal senators delaying it. Good heavens, we could have had this passed before the Easter recess. We offered to rush it right through, get it to the Governor General and make it law before we left, but no, some bogus concept of this minor amendment as somehow frustrating the will of Parliament, the will of this House, was thrown up as a delaying tactic.

My goodness, the Conservatives refer to a referendum, as if a referendum called in some small municipality somewhere in this country would be allowed to dislodge the fixed election date. What we have to remember is that this would be with the discretion of the Chief Electoral Officer, an officer of Parliament, in one of the most respected senior offices in this country and one of the offices most critical to the fair operation of our democratic process. It is nonsense to expect that this person at his or her discretion would knock off a federal date that had been set for four years in advance because of some local referendum. It is just nonsense. It would not happen and it could not happen. Therefore, that is no reason to slow this down.

Government Orders

The government House leader speaks of disrespect or whatever in the other place where they would dare make a minor amendment to a House bill that has gone through this process and was supported by all parties. The Senate, whatever one thinks about elected or non-elected legislative chambers at this stage in our democracy, exists as part of our democratic machinery. We all have some firm minds about that, I think, including in the Senate, in terms of having some election process for senators. However, the Senate exists as part of our democratic machinery. It has a very specific purpose, which of course is to bring second sober thought to what is thoughtfully determined in this House. When it finds some area where it feels a bill can be made better, the Senate has the perfect right and the democratic responsibility to suggest an amendment, which is what has been done in this case.

I can recall the process last fall when Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act, passed through the House after several months of debate in committee and in the House. It then went to the Senate and we heard wailing and complaining from the government side that the Senate somehow was wasting everybody's time with this critical piece of legislation by not simply rubber-stamping it.

• (1230)

I think we all know now what happened in the Senate. There were over 100 amendments because it was a sloppy bill. There was no time as it was rushed through the process in the House. The Senate exercised its responsibilities properly by carefully looking at that massive, complex piece of legislation involving dozens of other statutes that needed to be amended as a consequence of it. The Senate came up with sensible, helpful arrangements and amendments that the House then of course accepted. That was not delay. That was the Senate doing its work in our democratic framework of institutions.

I will go back to this issue of electing, through consulting provincial bodies during provincial elections, for the appointment of senators into vacancies that happen in any one of those jurisdictions. I simply will say that this is a good piece. Let us get that moving. Why did we wait four months? Why have we waited a year without some serious consequence and a discussion of redistribution?

Let me just turn, then, to Bill C-16 itself, because this is a completely appropriate piece of legislation. It was supported in this House. Adding a final little fail-safe in case there could be a problem through a referendum process is just good sense. The Senate has suggested that, which is what we are debating here today. We are in favour of that and therefore are opposed to the government's motion.

In regard to Bill C-16 itself and fixed election dates, we know, and the House debates on Bill C-16 I think made it very clear through speeches on behalf of all parties, that this is a sensible further step in the democratic reform of Canada. It was made very clear that the overwhelming number of democracies in the world have fixed election dates and that there is a range of advantages to fixed election dates, including that it gives some predictability to government business.

Therefore, the government can put forward legislation and have the effective administration of legislation, with a timetable, knowing that it will not be dislodged short of a non-confidence vote or a national emergency. Therefore, the business of the government and

the people of Canada can be done more efficiently. It can also be done more efficiently in terms of cost. Having an electoral commission and electoral office idling full time to be ready for an election that could come at any day is not an efficient use of resources.

This is also effective in terms of voter turnout, which is perhaps one of the most critical issues of fixed election dates, something with which I think all members and all parties of this House have been in agreement. For people who are first time voters, be they students, new Canadians or seniors, we can have civics classes in schools, universities and communities to ensure that people are fully engaged in the electoral discussion of the various policies being put forward in the election by various parties. That could enhance interest and voter turnout, which of course leads to a healthier democracy.

Of course in a country such as Canada it is also immensely important to have a fixed date that avoids inclement weather. The last election in this country was held in winter. Sadly, we saw a continued reduction in voter turnout and of course, unless one has the very good fortune to live in Vancouver as I do, winter weather can be very disruptive to voter turnout. That is very important. We also want to avoid the summer holiday breaks, which we can by having a fixed election date in the early fall or late spring, in order to increase voter turnout.

For all of these reasons, it is good sound public policy and we all support it, so good heavens, let us get on with it. Let us not delay this any further. The concept of a referendum in a small community is so inconceivable as to be insignificant. It should not slow down the passage of this legislation. With the support of members of the House today, and with the vote tomorrow, I believe, or whenever we are going to vote on this, we could have this as the law of Canada and as real democratic reform and we could have it immediately.

• (1235)

I just suggest that it is a test to the sincerity of every member of the House in terms of the need for this reform, that we not be distracted by a small amendment. It is the result of the Senate doing its job of carefully looking to see if it could possibly be improved, which to the credit of the House, could only be improved by a tiny amendment of really no consequence at all.

I speak in opposition to rejecting this amendment and in full support of moving ahead quickly in the House right now, so that it can go on to the Governor General and become law as soon as possible.

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Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's comments and I must say, for the record and as I have said privately to the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, I wish him well in his future plans. I know he is not seeking re-election. I think that it is a shame, quite frankly. I think the member for Vancouver Quadra has brought much distinction to the House and he is the type of parliamentarian, regardless of partisanship, that all Canadians respect and deserve.

He has represented his riding well and I wish him much success in all his future endeavours. I wish frankly he was coming back to this institution. He brings with him great credit, and a lot of experience and expertise, but since that is not going to happen, congratulations for all of the work he has done on behalf of both his party and members of the committee on which he served so admirably. I had the distinction of sitting with him on one of those committee.

However, as much as I admire and respect the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, I must say that I fundamentally disagree with the premise that he is advancing, that this is a minor technical amendment because it is no such thing.

The amendment clearly states that if there is a referendum, either at the municipal, provincial or federal level, the date of the federal election could be changed, as the hon. government House leader indicated in his presentation. There could be a referendum in a small community in northern Saskatchewan or northern Ontario, say 450 people or 500 people holding a referendum on a hockey arena. A decision could be made because of this amendment that a federal election be cancelled, delayed or put off to a date not originally recommended.

I think that is not a minor technical change. I think that is a fundamental and significant change. If it is as minor a change as he suggests, what difficulty would he or any opposition member have in just removing the amendment and going back to the original bill which the member supported? If it is that minor in nature, what difficulty would that member have in removing it all together? Should he do that as the government House leader indicated, then it would become law and very quickly.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very kind remarks. In fact, I was on the verge of reconsidering my decision not to run again until he got to the word "however".

The hon. member raises good points. The key to this issue is getting the legislation passed at the earliest possible moment. It just seems to me that the reality of a referendum being called over a relatively minor issue in a municipality, provincially or federally, would not affect Canadians broadly. It is just inconceivable in that situation that the Chief Electoral Officer, one of the most important offices in our democratic set of institutions, would delay a federal election for a municipal referendum.

We ask, why have it there? There may be some, and this is what the senators are suggesting it determine, unforeseeable situation where it was important to adjust it. I think frankly that it is much more likely that if there was any conflict in dates because of a municipal or provincial referendum, or even a federal referendum, it would be done perhaps consciously in order to make the whole

process more efficient. In this manner people could come out and vote on two things at the same time, which may in fact save costs and enhance voter turnout. So, there may be something very valuable in this that suggests that it would not be used lightly nor would the discretion of the Chief Electoral Officer be exercised in anything but the most serious way in the public interest.

• (1240)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the member of the government in his upcoming retirement. I agree wholeheartedly with exactly what was said, that he is a tremendous asset to the House and brings all sorts of experience, decorum and benefit to the House. We will certainly sorely miss him and hopefully he will be a reference to us as needed.

I am disappointed with the government not in the substantive amendment but in three process issues and I would like to ask the member if he is also disappointed.

One is that it seems to believe in fixed election dates and now is stalling its own bill. I find that disappointing.

Second and more important is that the government House leader suggested that there were no problems with this bill when it came to the House. I commend to the House leader that if he is going to make such untrue statements, he should read *Hansard* to see what members have said. There was not a unanimous love-in about this bill.

As we know, there are people who have some problems with the entire concept. Those were outlined during the debate. I certainly had some problems with the concept and outlined them. The critic knows that I went to him a number of times with a very strong concern about this bill. The very first year this bill goes into effect it is going to cause an election about three days after the municipal election in Yukon. I have a number of concerns with it.

It is really not fair for the government House leader to get up and say that everyone approved it and there were no problems. He really should listen to the debate and treat those comments fairly.

Finally, we should not be dismissive of the Chief Electoral Officer. This suggestion came from the experts. I would think the government would want to listen to the experts, the people who are objectively tasked with implementing this process and have great respect for Canadians. They are non-partisan, objective and separate, and made a recommendation that we should take seriously and should not be so dismissive of it.

I would like to ask the critic if he agrees with me on those three points.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, to address the procedural issue and awareness of what happens in the process in the House when legislation is brought forward for debate, goes to committee and comes back, the member is absolutely right. There are very few issues where there is unanimity within a party, certainly not across the aisles here, but that is what is healthy about the debate.

That is why the Senate actually exists, this second sober thought. The way the convention of the role of this legislative body and the Senate has come to work out the fact that as our democracy progresses, it is not an elected legislative body, but does have a very special role to give extra thought.

Even before it gets there, of course, we have many differences of opinion within and among parties in the House and that is the richness of our democracy. We all learn as we go through that legislative process of debate. We have to be very slow to criticize new ideas or differences of opinion, even if they are only slight changes to the general flow of the intent of the House and then as it is considered in the other place.

• (1245)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, listening to the debate it is no surprise to me that the Liberal members opposite want to amend and change the bill because they do not want four year terms. That is the bottom line.

They look for any advantage they can find to allow government to control the election. They think that if they get back into power, it would be advantageous to them. That is the bottom line here.

The real issue is that as the bill is amended, the government can regulate when the election is held because it will simply have a referendum. Why not have a referendum on any number of issues? Then the election will be put off. That is unfair.

The point is that the bill has been sent to the Senate calling for four year terms. Canadians from coast to coast to coast would understand clearly that when an election day is held, four years hence there will be another one. What is complicated about that and why can the Liberals not agree to four year terms?

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, the concept that is presented by the hon. member of a federal government calling a national referendum to avoid a fixed date election is so beyond comprehension that I am not sure how to answer it seriously.

Alternatively, the concept of a Chief Electoral Officer accepting that the existence of a municipal referendum on a local issue would cause the Chief Electoral Officer to amend or delay the federal election, both of those are beyond imagination. The only way we would have a referendum is on an issue of national importance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion before us here today.

First of all, I would like to inform the government that the Bloc Québécois will support this motion that the House reject the amendment proposed by the Senate to Bill C-16, for the simple reason that it appears to be a dilatory amendment.

I would like to talk a little bit about the other chamber. It is made up of non-elected people who are appointed based on political patronage. We still maintain that the value of the Senate remains to be proven and this amendment reflects that.

Indeed, the amendment proposed by the Liberal senators in the other place ensures that a federal, provincial or municipal referendum would change the application of Bill C-16, which calls

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for fixed date elections. We could understand a federal referendum. We could also understand that there could be a provincial referendum. However, a municipal referendum is a different matter. First, we need only think of the number of municipalities in Quebec and Canada. Second, consider the number of issues that can lead to a municipal referendum.

My colleague the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was a municipal councillor here, in Gatineau. I do not know if he was in municipal politics when he lived in the Quebec City region, before becoming member for La Peltrie.

I was a municipal councillor in Boischatel, where I live, from 1987 to 1993. In municipal democracy, there are many reasons for holding a referendum. Citizens may sign the register to oppose a zoning change or a bylaw. In Boischatel, we almost had a referendum. There was opposition to replacing the police force vehicles. We could have made the decision to hold a referendum on replacing those vehicles, which had about 385,000 km, which would have cost several thousand dollars.

Imagine how ridiculous the Senate amendment is: a municipal referendum could lead to Canadian elections being postponed on this law becoming inoperative. In my mind this clearly demonstrates that the amendment is frivolous and ridiculous. That is why we agree with the government that this Senate amendment should be defeated.

In the last few minutes allocated to me, I would like to discuss Bill C-16. The Bloc Québécois reaffirmed that it is in favour of the principle of the bill that was studied by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, of which I am co-chair.

We had some reservations about the date chosen as polling day by the government, the third Monday in October. We would have expected the government to be a little more open-minded for one, simple reason: the members of the Bloc Québécois suggested the second Monday in May, a somewhat more pleasant time of year in terms of temperature. It is possible to have snow on the third Monday of October. That is the reality in a northern country, and in certain regions where the snow arrives earlier than in others. It is possible, although highly unlikely, that there could be a snowstorm in Windsor on the third Monday of October. However, in northern Quebec, Nunavut, Yukon or Labrador it is plausible that there would be a snowstorm on the third Monday of October.

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•(1250)

That is why we in the Bloc Québécois proposed the second Monday in May. We introduced an amendment, but it was defeated in committee. That is democracy in action. We also suggested that the third Monday in October not be chosen simply because in Canada and Quebec, the Thanksgiving holiday always falls on the second Monday in October. Because of religious tradition or the Roman calendar, Easter never falls on the same date. Whereas Thanksgiving is always celebrated on the second Monday in October, whether that day is October 9, 10 or 12.

Advance polling will therefore take place on Thanksgiving weekend. This is probably the last long weekend when people can visit family out of town, and it is a time when people may be busier than usual, because they have to close up their vacation homes and cottages, turn off the water and so on. In addition, people travel across the border, as they take advantage of the long weekend to go away. If the third Monday in October were chosen, advance polling would take place on the second Monday in October, on Thanksgiving weekend. We believed that, to a certain extent, this could work against our goal of having the highest possible voter turnout.

Yesterday, the voter turnout in France was 84% or 85%. Clearly, they have a healthy democracy. Furthermore, a review of participation rates in federal elections here since 1960 reveals a downward slope, which is cause for concern. Duly elected representatives of the population are being chosen by fewer and fewer people over the years. People are losing interest in politics. Obviously, this is not good for democracy. That is why we, the Bloc Québécois, have suggested another date.

I would note that Bill C-16 would remove the Prime Minister's prerogative to call a general election at the most propitious and convenient time. Prime Minister Chrétien excelled at that. Our fusty senators' amendment comes as no surprise, because, quite simply, they want to hang on to the old-fashioned approach that enables them to bamboozle the opposition parties.

Prime Minister Chrétien was an expert at this. As soon as an opposition party got a new leader, Prime Minister Chrétien used the opportunity to call a snap election, thereby taking advantage of the newly elected leader's inexperience and the leadership convention, which is, of course, an event that divides the members of Parliament belonging to that party, who have to take sides and support one candidate or the other.

It is clear that the wounds have not yet healed among the Liberals on this side of the House who participated in the last leadership convention, which the current Leader of the Opposition won. A leadership race is a divisive event. Anyone who needs to be convinced of that has only to look at how Prime Minister Chrétien handled himself.

•(1255)

My party leader, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, was elected leader of the Bloc Québécois on March 15, 1997. Then, we had a general election on June 2, 1997.

On July 8, 2000, the Minister of Public Safety was elected leader of the Canadian Alliance. We have nearly forgotten that that party was once called the Reform Party. The party has changed names a

number of times. It reminds me of new Coke, classic Coke and Coke zero. We have had a hard time keeping track of this party's name over the past few years. Its current name is the Conservative Party of Canada.

So, on July 8, 2000, the current public safety minister was chosen as party leader following the Canadian Alliance leadership race. Prime Minister Chrétien called an election to be held November 27, 2000, although the previous election had taken place on June 2, 1997, within the normal, usual or standard timeframe of four years. In fact, as we all know, the Constitution states that a term can last for up to five years, but the normal length is four years. Prime Minister Chrétien therefore took advantage of this opportunity to call an election.

On March 20, 2004, the current Prime Minister was elected leader of the Conservative Party of Canada and an election was called for June 28, 2004, once again, within the four-year time frame, on the occasion of a change in party leader.

Thus, I feel that Bill C-16 would remove the Prime Minister's prerogative to call an election when he or she feels the planets are best aligned to take the opposition parties by surprise.

For all these reasons—and I am sure we will have the opportunity to further discuss Bill C-16—I would like to reiterate that the Bloc Québécois will support this motion to reject the Senate's proposed amendment to Bill C-16.

•(1300)

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment on the member's concern about the set election date. He suggested May but I think he should take into consideration that May would not be a very good time for most farming communities. Although I do not know about Quebec, I do know that May is smack in the middle of seeding time on the prairies and much field work is being done prior to those weekends. If it is a late Easter, as sometimes it is, or, as he mentioned, Thanksgiving never being on the same weekend, it could cause problems if the election date were set during that time.

As he said, this is not handy either because he might be away closing down cabins while those in the prairie provinces are opening up their cabins in May. May is not really that good for the farming communities but it is also not good because graduations and weddings are usually held then, whereas that is never an issue at the end of October.

I just want to know if the member ever took into consideration farming communities that perhaps would not be in favour of a May election date.

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[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my point was not to reconsider the date that had been chosen. I simply said that at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, we had suggested May, but we were defeated. We will live with it. We will bear that in mind and accept a fixed-date election on the third Monday of October.

My colleague has informed me that seeding and various agricultural activities take place in May, but I would think that they also take place in October. So, it will probably be hard to find the best date.

That said, we are opposed to the amendment put forward by the Senate that would allow a referendum, particularly a municipal one, to change the date in October.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, within three or four days of the bill's coming into effect, there will be a municipal election in the Yukon. Does the hon. member agree that it will be a good bill in that respect? Personally, I find it very confusing. I have been through two elections at the same time before. People get confused when the enumerators come to the door. They think that the enumerators have already been there and wonder for which election they are being enumerated. Does the hon. member think that is good and will there be more flexibility for the Chief Electoral Officer?

Also, the minor amendment we are talking about is at the discretion of the Chief Electoral Officer. Of course, he would not change a federal election for a minor municipal issue. Does the member have confidence in the Chief Electoral Officer to make rational decisions?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the second question. I have confidence in the new Chief Electoral Officer, Marc Mayrand. He appeared before us in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and told us about his work history. I had complete and utter confidence in Mr. Kingsley, as I have complete and utter confidence in everyone at the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. However, rejecting this amendment is not a reflection of lack of confidence. It would be an aberration to include in legislation that a federal, provincial or municipal referendum could cause a change of date. We will simply avoid that risk and we will reject the amendment from the Liberal senators. It will not be included and the Chief Electoral Officer will therefore not have to make a possibly controversial decision.

I want to thank my colleague for reminding me about municipal elections. That was indeed one of the reasons why I asked that this be changed to May. I had forgotten. I raised this point to mention that I found and still find this bill to be flawed. It can be improved. In Quebec, municipal elections are also held the first Sunday in November. Under Bill C-16, we will have—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michel Guimond: I am not sure what my colleague is yapping about, but he is breaking my concentration. Mr. Speaker, perhaps you could ask him to take it outside.

In Quebec, these elections will be held the third Monday of October, 2009. Quebec has fixed date municipal elections and all the municipalities in Quebec will be in an election period on November 1, 2009. This will necessarily cause confusion. Not everyone is up on politics. I know that because I have been a federal member since 1993 and some people wished me good luck in Quebec's provincial election on March 26. I told them I was not campaigning because I was working at the federal level. People are used to seeing us, to seeing our faces in the newspapers and from time to time on campaign signs. I agree with my colleague, this can cause some confusion. However, a member who is involved, who goes door to door and meets his constituents, will be able to set things straight quite easily.

• (1305)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord is quite right about the noise in the House. I would appreciate all members paying attention to the question of the member for Ottawa Centre.

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I were on the committee that studied the bill. Does he agree that if we entertain this motion from the government that it will have the unfortunate consequence, unintended perhaps from his party's support of the government motion, of actually delaying the bill being put into place?

We all supported the intent of the bill. It is a good step in terms of giving all Canadians a sense of when an election would take place. It takes away the opportunity of the government to manipulate the election date for its own purposes.

Could I get an indication as to the hon. member's concerns that perhaps it will delay the bill's coming into force, and the concerns he might have to get the bill going versus the concerns he might have about the amendment? Should we not follow a speedy process on the bill?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, that does pose a problem in terms of balance.

We were faced with accepting a bad amendment and the possibility of the government using that to delay adoption of the bill. It is all about perception. The government patted itself on the back and boasted that this bill required it to go ahead with fixed date elections. Now, if it uses delaying tactics to postpone adopting the bill, the government will have to bear the blame.

• (1310)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, earlier you agreed with the member who just spoke about being interrupted. I would like to disagree because when one colleague accuses another of yapping, I do not believe that the Speaker should say that it is all right.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member for Ottawa—Vanier is also right. What I wanted to address, when I intervened just before, was not the yapping but rather the interruption of one member by another.

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord has the floor.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my colleague was not even present when I made the comment. He arrived at the last minute and —

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In one of his last comments, the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord alluded to the fact that he has been here since 1993. Therefore, with his experience, he knows that we do not mention the presence or absence of members.

[*English*]

I now recognize the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill C-16.

I want to start my comments by recognizing my predecessor, Mr. Ed Broadbent, who brought forward an ethics package before the last election. The ethics package he proposed was to clean up politics and some of the ways we might do that.

Interestingly enough, one of the proposals Mr. Broadbent put forward in his ethics package was for fixed date elections. The NDP is happy to support Bill C-16 because our party put the initiative on the table. It was an initiative we took to propose ideas rather than just oppose ideas. That is very important. I believe our role as responsible parliamentarians is not just to oppose, which is certainly necessary when in opposition, but also to propose. We felt it was very important to propose fixed date elections. Of course we support Bill C-16 since it was an NDP proposal before the last election. This is not something that we proposed in the midst of an election. It is something we actually presented to the last Parliament because we thought it was very important.

Mr. Broadbent also had in his ethics package, which our party was happy to put front and centre in the last Parliament, his ideas to clean up politics and the need to deal with things like floor crossing. Floor crossing is still rampant in this place and it must be dealt with.

The idea of fixed date elections is very important to the NDP. It is a good idea. There were consultations with people who have fought for fair elections, people in the large community of democratic reform. Fair Vote Canada is non-partisan and many parties are represented in that body. Mr. Segal, Mr. Axworthy and Mr. Broadbent are involved. I am not sure if any of the Bloc members have signed on with Fair Vote Canada, but I encourage them to do so. They may want to look at Fair Vote Canada's ideas and tenets that all votes should be fair votes and that the system be fair. Part of that is fixed date elections.

When the bill was before committee we proposed amendments to it to clarify things like confidence. We put those ideas forward as something to consider.

Bill C-16 is not long. It does not deal with constitutional change. We thought that was reasonable. Mr. Broadbent put forward the

same proposals, that we did not need to open the Constitution to make this kind of change, which in effect is a practice in what we are doing. It still gives Parliament the option of removing confidence from the governing party which would then trigger an election.

We believe that this was a pragmatic and reasonable thing to do. We had seen the abuse by governments before that would use the date of an election simply to make sure that it had the upper hand on the other parties. In the end what the government was doing was trying to have the upper hand on Canadians. We saw that as a manipulation of the government's responsibility and power. If the government thought it might be favourable to call an election, it would do the polling. The government would probably do cross-tabulation, where a couple of ideas are taken from different regions and put together to make sure that the government would win a majority. Inevitably, the cash would be distributed throughout the land and would fall off wagons everywhere. Money would be given to areas where the government of the day needed to shore up support.

This is clearly anti-democratic. The fact that a governing party can manipulate the date of an election for its own benefit is anti-democratic. Sadly, that has been the case with previous governments. It happened in the last majority Parliament. The Liberals saw an opportune time and called an election in order to get another majority.

In the bill we should not only address fixed date elections, but also the way in which the votes are counted. It is important to note that in the majority governments of Mr. Chrétien, notwithstanding that he had the most votes, a disproportionate number of seats were allotted to his government.

• (1315)

I say that not just to point to Mr. Chrétien and the Liberal Party. The same thing happened at the provincial level. I can think of the NDP winning a certain percentage of the vote and a disproportionate number of seats. Therefore, it is not about partisanship but it is a reflection of the people's will.

The fact that a fixed date election was something we could do without opening up the Constitution was fair. It is a little different than what we will be debating later today, Bill C-43, which is the idea that we can have plebiscites on who should represent citizens in the Senate and still skirt the Constitution.

I think we have pretty much tested the limits of how far we can skirt or go around the Constitution and practice with Bill C-16. I know that members of all parties agreed that Bill C-16 made sense, that we did not need to open up the Constitution. I would challenge that, though, on Bill C-43 which we will be debating later.

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Juxtaposed to Bill C-16, when we look at having plebiscites to have people decide which person they want representing them in the Senate and then go to the Prime Minister, and then the person would be appointed, it skirts the Constitution a little too far. In fact, it says that is about as far as they will go because they do not want to touch the Constitution.

The Constitution is not a suggestion list. It is a fundamental foundation of how our country is to operate. I would suggest that Bill C-16 is a practice in terms of how the government could operate in setting an election date versus the bill we will be debating later, Bill C-43, which actually goes too far in terms of avoiding the Constitution simply because they do not want to get into the muck of a constitutional debate.

If we are serious about real, democratic reform and Senate reform, then we need to address it and not run from it. Bill C-16 gave us the opportunity to take away the potential abuse of governments to use an election date for their own political partisan advance.

When we looked at the act we proposed amendments and the Bloc proposed some amendments. We have heard some dates from Bloc members for the fixed election date. However, I concur with other members who suggested that having it in the spring was not doable and having it at certain times in the fall was not doable.

The timing we came up with is perfectly reasonable to compromise in terms of meeting the needs of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, be it those who live in rural areas or in the north. I think the timing of having it in the fall makes perfect sense, particularly for our farming communities that need time to bring in the crop and the harvest. Having an election after that is what we have in front of us.

I want to turn my attention now to the amendment that came from the Senate. As my colleague from Winnipeg Centre suggested, we do take issue with the author of this amendment and where it comes from. However, it is important to look at the amendment. It is not a long amendment. It simply brings up a point that, quite frankly, was not debated extensively in committee. It was to take a look at the religious significance of a provincial or municipal election, or a federal, provincial or a municipal referendum, and that the chief electoral officer may change the date of the fixed election.

Therefore, it still ascribes to the chief electoral officer the fact that he or she must follow the actual fixed election date calendar generally but if these circumstances occur, there is the option that he or she may, not must, change the date.

Particularly for my friends in the Bloc, I would like to think of a circumstance where there is a referendum at the provincial level. Quebec has had this experience more than any other province in Canada. Would it make sense to actually have a fixed date for a federal election set, and at the same time there is a provincial referendum? As we know, a referendum in Quebec often does not just take the attention of Quebecers. It often takes the attention of the whole country, as it should. It is about the federation itself.

• (1320)

It is reasonable for the chief electoral officer to look at the election date and, if he or she sees a conflict, he or she may decide that we should not have a federal election on the same date as, for

example a referendum in Quebec on something as potent as whether Quebec remains in the federation. That is an example of why we should look at this.

This amendment would not change the spirit of the bill. It is simply a what-if scenario. As I have already mentioned and underlined, it would give the chief electoral officer an option. As an officer of Parliament, the chief electoral officer has certain key responsibilities, one being that he or she is accountable to Parliament and must abide by legislation of Parliament.

Bill C-16, which is in front of us, has been agreed to and passed. The chief electoral officer would need to abide by it as a responsible officer of Parliament. It would simply provide the chief electoral officer with the opportunity, if there is a conflict, to deal with it.

As my colleague from Winnipeg Centre said, notwithstanding that we have some problems with the messenger, although we will not shoot the messenger, in this case the Senate having sent it to us, the message is something that we certainly can live with. For that reason, we will quietly support the amendment. It is common sense but it could probably have been done by giving the authority to the chief electoral officer at another time. However, it is in front of us now and that is why it is important to acknowledge it and take a position on it now.

I want to move now to what the bill will mean, when it is passed, in terms of Canadians' confidence in our electoral system. Many more things need to be done in terms of real democratic reform to ensure every vote counts. I submit that at this point in the history of our country we do not have a system where every vote counts. However, at least this will be an opportunity to let Canadians know that, in this case, the next election will be in 2009.

We only need to look at the past couple of weeks where, sadly, the discussions and discourse in the House and around the country have been all about whether there will be an election, yes or no, and whether the government is in a position to get its elusive majority.

On the weekend, CBC had an interesting comedic overview of that. A skit was conducted as a sports broadcast and people were doing a comedy of what it is like when discussing politics. One asked, "Jim, do you think there is going to be an election?" The other responded no and they decided to discuss it the next day. They would act out the following day and have a commentary on whether there was going to be an election.

It is certainly an interesting conversation for some of us but for most Canadians it is an incredible waste of time, not to mention ink, airwaves and electricity. We should be spending our time talking about what we can do in Parliament, not speculating about when the election will be.

Canadians did not send us here to talk about when the next election will be and it is incumbent upon all of us to keep that in mind. When I go door to door and talk to my constituents about what concerns them, it is not about when the next election will be. When they do ask me whether there will be an election, I respond that 2009 is what is in that legislation and that as far as I am concerned that is when the next election will be.

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That is why it is incredibly important that we support this bill and that it goes through as quickly as possible. Therefore, I do not think it is plausible or possible to support the government's motion to send the bill back to the Senate and get into that game of Ping-Pong. We need to pass the bill now so Canadians know there is a bill that has a fixed date for elections and that any manipulations or strategic moves by the government will be seen as just that because its own act will be in front of us saying that the next election is in 2009.

The bill is important because it gives us predictability and the government would not be able to manipulate the calendar. Canadians would know that, notwithstanding all the conversations that people have had in the political chattering classes, the next election will be in 2009. The whole gamesmanship of deciding when the time has come to get a majority would be put aside and we could get on to issues that matter, like the environment, the prosperity gap and ensuring that Canadians' health system will be there for them when they need it.

• (1325)

At the end of the day those are the issues that matter to Canadians, not whether the government can pull the plug, call an election and get a majority to do whatever it plans to do. I have some concerns about what the present government would do if it had a majority but I will not go down that path.

I was on the committee studying Bill C-16 and we looked at other jurisdictions. Ontario now has fixed date elections and it has been the practice in many other countries. Some people had concerns that this would mirror the American political model. I would allay their fears because we have other jurisdictions in Europe and elsewhere with Westminster traditions that have fixed date elections and it works for them.

When we do have fixed date elections we need to ensure there is no manipulation of the public purse. What I mean by that is if we had taken the suggestion of the Bloc to have fixed date elections in the spring, we could have seen the government come out with a budget with all sorts of goodies, which kind of sounds familiar, like the last budget we saw here to possibly manipulate citizens so it could get a favourable return on its investment, in other words, a majority government. Having the fixed date election in the fall makes sense.

Some work should be done on when political parties are allowed to spend money in order that we do not have a largesse of spending that benefits one party or another, whichever has the most cash in the bank so to speak. We also do not want perpetual elections like some people were concerned about with this legislation. That just requires us being responsible as parliamentarians

As my colleague from Winnipeg Centre just mentioned, we need to look at election expenses and the rules around election expenses and we need to tighten that up. My colleague put forward amendments to Bill C-2 to tighten that up so people would not have an advantage of playing around with finances to benefit them. When we get this bill passed, and I hope it is sooner rather than later, we will need to keep our eye on that. As with any legislation, once the legislation is passed, it inevitably changes the way things are done. We will need to look at the effects the bill might have on things like election expenses.

We hope people will not get into the habit spending a lot of money before a writ as well as during a writ because they know an election is coming, or we have candidates who are playing around with loopholes in the Election Expenses Act, like loans from someone with deep pockets and who owns a fairly large multi-national corporation. We saw that in certain leadership contests where they did not pay back the loan and it is no problem. We must plug that loophole but there are others, people who own car dealerships, et cetera.

Work still needs to be done to make things fairer but this bill is a good start. Canadians will now know exactly when the next election will be. We need to focus on the bill, on what it sets out to do and on what all Canadians believe it should do, which is to give us a fixed election date. The government would no longer be able to play around and try to orchestrate its own defeat. We have responsible work being done in the House and taking away the government's ability to manipulate the date of an election will bring more fairness to the system.

We will talk at another time about what we can do in terms of reforming our democratic system but this is the first start. The NDP is proud that the government adopted our idea and we support it fully.

• (1330)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the people who are watching this debate I just want to say that they should not get led to believe that Ed Broadbent brought this idea to the House of Commons. This idea goes back to the Reform Party, the party that I supported. One of the fundamental principles of the leader of the Reform Party, Preston Manning, was set election dates and Senate reform.

Those NDP members who love to give themselves credit for this had better read their history on it. It also was part of our platform in the last election, as I recall. The New Democrats never put it in their election platform but they are talking today like they had. I just wanted to correct the record.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, that is rather interesting, but I submit this to the member. I know the former Reform Party, or whatever it calls itself now, there was Alliance and then Reform, spoke about such things as recall and other interesting things such as pensions and Senate appointments. I believe Mr. Manning had something about a triple-E Senate in the party's platform.

Government Orders

I am not sure where Mr. Manning is now on those issues, but I know Edward Broadbent and our party fought for democratic reform from the onset, back in the 1960s. We had put fixed election dates forward as a proposal in an ethics package, along with floor crossing. That was not during the election campaign. The member suggested it was in her party's platform, and I trust her on that. I am talking about before the last election. We talked about cleaning up politics, and the government stole from that package. I am glad to see it brought some of those ideas forward. I hope it goes further and looks at that ethics package and at real democratic reform and follows up on this,

For the record, the member is in the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party was not on the record for that until the last election. Before the last election, we were. Those are the facts and that is the history.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two short questions for the member.

First, he said that he had a problem with the author of the bill came. The author was the former chief electoral officer. Does the member have a problem with him?

Second, the member suggested that the government put out all kinds of goodies in the last budget to get elected. I would like to know what those goodies. There was nothing for national housing, almost nothing for aboriginal people, nothing for the poor and nothing for undergraduate students. The income tax rate went up from 15% to 15.25%. What goodies did the government give out in the last budget?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I have two points. It was the messenger, not the author. I thank the member for the opportunity to make the correction. I simply meant where it came from in terms of being written, and that was from the Senate.

As for the goodies, there were no goodies in this. I am talking about the good old pork barrel politics that I think Allan MacEachan would have been proud to see. The budget reminded me that it was a little of this and a little of that. I am talking about those kinds of goodies. Rum bottle politics I believe it is called, where the government tries to give a little here and a little there. There was kind of a little of this and that, but nothing in the end for anyone to make a difference. I was simply referring to the idea of passing on goodies, not the facts.

The facts are students were abandoned. Seniors did not get a leg up. We called for a national housing strategy and finally pushed the Liberals to amend their budget so we would get somewhere on that, as well as the environment, instead of corporate tax cuts.

I agree with him that there was a little of this and that but nothing in the end.

• (1335)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Ottawa Centre for bringing the debate into focus and reminding us, and perhaps listeners back home as well, why we are supporting the idea of fixed election dates.

Could the member perhaps elaborate on is this? He has said that if we bring in fixed election dates, even with the motion to amend coming from the Senate, there would be a more productive period within each Parliament. The current status quo leaves us with the

election period and then a brief productive period where Parliament actually gets something done. Then we are all on pins and needles, using all our energy and resources waiting for the axe to fall again. At the whim of the prime minister, there could be election any time, or as soon as the prime minister does not quite like the way Parliament is operating. The choice of when to call the election is all in the hands of one person or when the polls are favourable.

It reminds of a quote by Will Rogers. He said, "The promising season ends on Election Day. That same night, the alibi season begins". That takes us through to the next election. It reminds me of the current status quo where we have a very brief productive period in Parliament. Perhaps by implementing fixed election dates and getting over this standoff that we have now, we would do a service to the Canadian public who I think broadly support this idea.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his quote. I want to address something that we have seen recently. We know Canadians have heard that the government is ready to go to an election. We only have to think of two weeks ago when it displayed its so-called war room, not far from where we are right now. I am sure it is very impressive, with all the latest technologies.

Is that the priority of Canadians, to look at the Conservative Party's war room, to look at the latest bells and whistles of that party, or would they rather see some action on issues like climate change, child poverty, skyrocketing tuition fees and homelessness? The Conservative Party thought it was important enough to display this over the top war room, which is in the south of the city.

It is a really important point that we have fixed date elections so we get away from that side of politics and get to the politics that should be in front of us in this place, making good laws and helping Canadians, not helping out ourselves or our fortunes in the future.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have sat here and listened to most of the debate on the motion by the government House leader today. I think there is certainly great unanimity around the notion that we need Bill C-16 and we need it passed. What is lost in all of this is the whole reason we have brought this forward, and that is to get rid of the kind of exploitative situations that governments have taken in the past to monkey around with election dates for the benefit of partisan advantage.

The fact is we have a bill in front of us. It went through the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, through the Senate and through the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. Then at the last minute, out of left field, we get this final grasp at a straw to kick into motion one last shred of an ability to get a partisan favour into election dates.

Government Orders

Has the member not thought about looking through the lens of trying to improve this? Why could something that has gone through this kind of scrutiny not just be passed and sent back—

• (1340)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Ottawa Centre has one minute to respond.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I fully subscribe to the idea of getting on with it. That is why I am proposing to the government that it forget about the motion and about the ping-pong back and forth. The amendment is not that significant. It would not undermine or change the intent of the bill. It would simply give more guidance to the Chief Electoral Officer.

At the end of the day, Canadians will like the bill. With all due respect to all of us here, they will not look back and ask if people remember the day the Senate sent the bill back to the House with one amendment and then changed it? No. They want to see results. They do not care about our navels, they care about results. This is navel gazing by the government. Let us get on with it, tout de suite, maintenant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have to say at the outset that the Bloc Québécois will be supporting Bill C-16 in principle.

Let me start by saying that, in 1998, at the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie's initiative, the Bloc Québécois Bloc launched a number of reflection exercises, including one on citizenship and democracy, in which it was agreed that, in a sovereign Quebec, a fixed election date system would be much more suitable than the British system which is currently in place in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Indeed, holding elections on a fixed date would allow parliamentarians to plan their work better, giving them a better chance to undertake it.

Personally, I remember very well that, under the previous minority government, the international trade subcommittee never got going because we did not know when an election would be called. That caused very serious harm to industry in Canada and Quebec, given a context where Canada is lagging behind terribly in terms of globalization and free trade.

We also feel that it would promote voter turnout. We know that, in the bill, the third Monday of October is the proposed time to hold elections. It was precisely selected because that is a time of year when people are available to take part in electoral process and elections. People are certainly more available than they were for the June 28, 2004 election, and probably more available than for the last election. As hon. members will recall, that election was called in November, then came the Christmas period and, in January, we went to the polls.

We therefore believe that having to hold elections on a fixed date would not only allow to better plan parliamentary work, but also foster improved voter participation.

We see many advantages and I do not feel I need to drone on about this for too long. It is a matter of fairness between the parties. Indeed, we all know that, at present, the governments in power and the Prime Minister exploit the calendar and the current situation in

order to call an election at any time they like. During Mr. Chrétien's era, for example, we rarely saw terms last longer than three and a half years. He would wait for the right time and call an election only when it was in his best interest and that of the Liberal Party. We believe, however, that all Canadians and all the parties should be aware of the exact framework for the rules of the game. Obviously, we would know when the election date would be. As I mentioned, this would foster much more rational governance and, we believe, promote political participation. Certain months are completely inadvisable, if we really want to increase voter turnout. Thus, by knowing the rules of the game, by knowing the date in advance and choosing a date that appears to be at the most convenient time of year for all Canadians and Quebecers, as is the case in Bill C-16, we will be in a better position to encourage voter participation.

I cannot ignore the fact that knowing when the election will take place could help with the recruitment of some future candidates. I know very well that, in Quebec, some very valuable people have left their jobs believing that an election was imminent. When they had found other jobs they could not leave when Premier Jean Charest called the election. Others were unable to run because they could not leave their professional responsibilities at the drop of a hat, or the roll of the dice.

Therefore, we believe that we would just be reflecting what is happening in today's modern democracies around the world. You may be familiar with the studies published by Henry Milner of the Institute for Research on Public Policy. Of the 40 democracies he studied, there are only 12 that do not have fixed election dates.

Naturally, if a minority government were to lose the confidence of the House, the Prime Minister would be able to call on the Governor General to ask that an election be called. However, he could not do it based solely on the fact that the polls were favourable, for example following a given decision. Following a temporary increase in support for the government in power, he could not call on the Governor General and have her dissolve Parliament without valid reasons.

• (1345)

Given the current system, as I mentioned earlier, the Bloc Québécois will support the principle underlying the bill. We think that the new system being proposed is much fairer and more modern. It will support voter participation in the campaign and the election, and it will not challenge the government's responsibilities. That is why we support this bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member from the Bloc. I know the Bloc is supporting the amendment put forward by the government to send this bill back to the Senate.

Government Orders

I want to put forward the reasonableness of the argument in terms of dealing with the merit of this Senate amendment. In terms of fixed election dates, it seems to me that taking into account what is happening in a local context, whether it be in Quebec or in any other part of Canada, is reasonable. I am just curious as to why the Bloc would support the government amendment and not support the amendment from the Senate.

I realize there is all kind of other subtext going on with this debate in terms of it being embroiled with the Senate and what it can or cannot do. We in the NDP are looking at this straight on in terms of whether this is a reasonable amendment. This amendment requests the Chief Electoral Officer to take into account what may be happening in local jurisdictions, whether it is a plebiscite or a referendum. This happened recently in Ontario where a fixed election date was moved to accommodate a religious holiday. This is not mandatory. This would give the Chief Electoral Officer the scope to consider that as part of what would be recommended to the government.

In terms of a legislative initiative, it seems to us that the Senate amendment makes sense and the response from the government to send a message back indicating that it does not agree with it does not make sense. I would like to ask the member this. Why would he not agree with the original amendment that has come forward on this bill that would give the Chief Electoral Officer a little more scope to consider what advice he would be offering?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the NDP member's question, I would quote the famous writer who said that perfect is the enemy of good.

In this case, the Senate may have tried to do too good a job, and messed up as a result. According to subsection 56.2, if the fixed date, the third Monday in October, coincides with a provincial or municipal election, the Chief Electoral Officer may choose to hold the election another day.

However, according to the Senate's amendment, that list should include federal and provincial referendums—which makes sense to us—but also municipal referendums—which we consider excessive. The election could be delayed if a mayor decides to hold a referendum. In Quebec, a lot of referendums are held concerning issues under municipal jurisdiction. They can be about anything, so this would be going too far in our view.

We should send this back to the Senate so it can get rid of this amendment and keep it down to federal and provincial referendums. We do not think it makes sense to give a mayor the opportunity to delay a national election.

Provincial and municipal elections—in Quebec, at any rate—are always held on the same date, which is known well in advance and which makes for far fewer problems. Furthermore, municipal elections in Quebec are usually held in November. That is why we support the government motion.

● (1350)

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the life of me I cannot understand why the opposition

parties wants to take this piece of legislation and move it backward instead of forward.

Hon. members are all pretending to support the legislation, but they want to amend it to give the government even more tools to put off having an election every four years. That is the reality of it. If we were to have four year terms, the municipalities, the provinces and we hope the federal government would not bring in a referendum or cause an election to occur.

The hon. member is giving government more opportunity to not follow the four year rule but to have its friends in a municipality or in a province or perhaps the government itself do something that would cause an election not to be held. Why would the hon. member want to amend the bill to actually defeat the purpose of the bill?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I must say that I do not understand why my colleague opposite is so enthusiastic and aggressive, since we support what the government wants. If he wore his headphones, perhaps he would truly understand what the Bloc Québécois thinks.

We agree with them, not because they are nice—my colleague has just made that clear—but because the amendment made by the Senate is excessive and, in our opinion, makes no sense. He should remember that.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote on the motion be deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): So indeed. Pursuant to the request of the chief government whip the recorded division stands deferred to Tuesday, April 24.

Statements by Members

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● (1355)

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2007

The House resumed from April 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-52, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we last considered this bill, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood still had three minutes left.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about Bill C-52 which is the budget implementation bill. Contained therein is a provision with respect to interest deductibility. Interest deductibility is probably a bit of an arcane issue for most Canadians. It allows Canadian companies to deduct interest when they in fact are competing to acquire a business abroad.

These Canadian businesses of course are competing worldwide. They compete with Japanese companies. They compete with American companies. They compete with European companies and yet this provision now would effectively handicap the ability of a Canadian company to acquire companies elsewhere. This is a very significant issue.

It is a significant issue in many ways, but let me bring it down to how it is significant for those of us who are concerned about economic issues and those of us who are concerned with the prosperity of Canada.

When a Canadian business acquires a foreign based business, it generally does so with the advice of lawyers, accountants and financial services people, et cetera. All of those people get jobs by virtue of these acquisitions.

In addition, once the acquisition is completed, then all of those collateral services are then engaged to complete the acquisition, along with a whole array of technical people to make sure that the integration of the companies proceeds smoothly.

Let me give a personal example of that. My son works for a large Canadian bank and his job is to make sure that the computer services of that bank are integrated with the acquired banks or financial services companies that that bank acquires. For instance, if it acquires a bank in nation X, then it is my son's job to go down, along with an array of others, to facilitate that integration.

A consequence of that is that this is a Canadian job. It is a very good Canadian job and he is multiplied dozens and hundreds and thousands of times over. Those are the kinds of very jobs that we in Canada want to secure. We want to acquire those kinds of technology jobs which will be the way of the future.

Yet, this budget provision does exactly the opposite. That, along with the income trust decision, we could not imagine two more wrong-headed decisions.

I see that my time is up. It is quite regrettable because these are wrong for Canada and that is why this party will be voting against the budget.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS*[English]***NUTRITIONAL MEDICINE**

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to draw the attention of the House to one of Canada's most noteworthy medical pioneers. Recently Dr. Abram Hoffer was recognized by his peers at the 36th annual conference on Nutritional Medicine Today, held in Toronto. Tributes also were received from the Prime Minister and the Governor General of Canada.

There are few physicians in the world today who deserve more credit for establishing the clinical value of vitamins, minerals and nutrients.

In 1950 Dr. Hoffer was appointed head of psychiatric research for the province of Saskatchewan by the then premier, Tommy Douglas.

He has published more than 500 articles and books and was instrumental in founding the Canadian Schizophrenia Foundation and, with his close friend Dr. Linus Pauling, the International Society for Orthomolecular Medicine.

Dr. Hoffer's promising work has restored lives and hope to thousands of patients suffering from schizophrenia and related mental disorders. He has inspired a new generation of orthomolecular scientists to re-examine the role of vitamins and minerals in correcting biochemical deficiencies in disease states.

Dr. Hoffer is now 90 years old. It is his hope that effective use of low cost non-patentable nutrients will find its rightful place as a front line approach in restoring health to the suffering.

● (1400)

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

* * *

EARTH DAY

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to wish you and all members a happy belated Earth Day. Each year, millions of people observe Earth Day to celebrate the gift of life and to remember our responsibility to live sustainably and with respect for all living things.

On Sunday we in Prince Edward Island were honoured to share our Earth Day with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who was on hand to witness the cleanup activities of our riverbeds and streams and to talk to concerned citizens all across the province. Wherever he went he was met by huge crowds who supported his message for a greener Canada.

The Leader of the Opposition's trip underscored the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development in sensitive ecosystems like that of our province.

*Statements by Members***ST. CLARE SCHOOL**

I want to publicly thank the leader for his visit. His message was appreciated by all Islanders.

As another Earth Day passes, let all of us in this House remember our responsibilities to future generations.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the tragic events of last week should guide our reflection during National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. A number of activities have been organized with the theme “It's time to listen”.

Taking this opportunity to adopt and carry out a recent suggestion from the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the government has announced the creation of the position of ombudsman for victims of crime. This is great. Unfortunately, like Mr. Boisvenu, the president of the Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association, the MMPFA, we are sorry to hear that the first person to occupy this important position is a unilingual anglophone. Listening is good, understanding is better.

Mr. Boisvenu should be congratulated, as should the numerous volunteers in this association who inspire him to keep going, for the support they provide to families that have been caught up in the effects of murder. He can always count on the support of the Bloc.

This is the time to listen, to pay attention and to understand their demands in order to better direct our actions towards a better future

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

* * *

[*English*]

SUDAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the coming weeks, STAND Canada, Students Taking Action Now: Darfur, will be asking politicians to take action on what is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, essentially a genocide.

The struggle for peace in Darfur has been long and fraught with real difficulties. For far too long the international community failed to act while the people of Darfur watched their area burn.

An opportunity for Canada to take a leading role in bringing stability to war-torn Darfur has now emerged. The government of Sudan will consent to the deployment of 3,000 UN troops, plus equipment, to support the AU force in the region.

Canada must seize this opportunity and be at the forefront of the international response to this positive announcement. I urge the government to demonstrate Canada's commitment to the people of Darfur by contributing to the UN heavy support package and through renewed long term diplomatic initiatives encouraging the stable political environment required for meaningful and inclusive peace negotiations.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not long ago I challenged the grade six students of St. Clare School in Calgary Northeast to write about the responsibilities of Canadians to their country. The students in Mr. Benvin's and Ms. Quartararo's classes responded with 30 excellent essays.

I am proud to announce that Amberlyn Aguilar is the winner of the essay contest. She wrote in part:

As young Canadians, we have important responsibilities.

We can never get in trouble with the law if we don't steal, murder, do vandalism, or commit abuse. To make our school, community and homes a better place, we can respect the property of others, respect elders, stop prejudice and follow Jesus' moral teachings to love and forgive everyone. To prepare ourselves for responsible adulthood, we must learn to get involved in our community, make a difference in the world, stand up for what we believe in and vote for who we know will be a good government.

I express congratulations to Amberlyn and to all the students who participated. I ask them to always remember that they are never too young to make a difference.

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DAVENPORT COMMUNITY BUILDERS AWARDS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to six outstanding community builders who are all recipients of the first annual Davenport community builders awards. They were selected from among many persons in my riding who were nominated.

Father Fernando Couto was chosen for his work with youth, immigrants, the elderly and the less fortunate.

Andrea Dawber was chosen for her park improvements and work on green initiatives such as Trees Davenport.

Felicidade Macedo Rodrigues was chosen for her lifelong work on immigrant and refugee issues through the Working Women Community Centre.

Dyan Marie was chosen for her efforts to bring schools, artists and community groups together to help build a more livable and vibrant neighbourhood.

Jutta Mason was chosen for her work with Dufferin Grove Park, making it a great community institution and a model for other neighbourhoods.

Wolfgang Vachon was chosen for his commitment to helping youth at the Dufferin Mall Youth Services, which enhances the lives of so many people in our community.

On behalf of all residents of Davenport, I ask all members of Parliament to join me in congratulating these outstanding community leaders. Their dedication is what makes Davenport and Toronto such a vibrant and beautiful community.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

GLOBAL ROAD SAFETY WEEK

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in order to highlight the importance of reducing the 1.2 million fatalities and 50 million serious injuries and disabilities occurring each year on the world's roads, April 23 to 29 has been designated Global Road Safety Week by the United Nations.

Young road users are the focus of the first ever Global Road Safety Week.

Canada's national road safety program, Road Safety Vision 2010, has the goal of having the safest roads in the world.

Canada has a great deal to offer to low and middle income nations in dealing with their growing road safety challenges.

Canada has sent eight young people with an active interest in road safety and injury prevention to Geneva to participate in the UN's World Youth Assembly for Road Safety on April 23 and 24.

I express congratulations to all involved. I am proud that these young Canadians have heard the call to action and invite all Canadians to join them in being part of the solution.

* * *

[Translation]

EARTH DAY

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in Montreal, we celebrated Earth Day. More than 25,000 people joined in the "Kyoto, pour l'espoir" march to show their dissatisfaction with the Conservative government's inaction and fearmongering on climate change and the Kyoto protocol.

This march, which was organized by the Coalition Québec-Vert-Kyoto, shows once again that the people want the government to meet the Kyoto targets. The government must take appropriate action now to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. The time for talk is over. It is time for action.

The success of the march proves that people are ready for action and that the Government of Canada needs to stop trying to scare people with its apocalyptic report, take action and meet the Kyoto targets.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to inform the members of the House and all Canadians that April 22 to April 29 is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week.

Every day in Canada, organs and tissues are used in transplantation procedures to improve both the duration and quality of life of many.

There is a significant shortfall between the number of organ or tissue donations and the need. As Canada's population ages, the shortfall is likely to increase.

To ensure a strong Canadian system for organ and tissue donations, I urge each of my colleagues here in the House of Commons and all Canadians to sign donor cards that will allow for the posthumous donation of their organs and tissues and to inform their family members of their wish to donate.

Thousands of Canadian adults and children are counting on our generosity.

* * *

FREDERICTON CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Climate Change Summit 2007 was held in my riding on April 10 as a lead-up to the launch of Fredericton's planned city-wide greenhouse gas reduction campaign in May.

More than 150 participants attended. Summit attendees watched a dynamic presentation that included the science and impact of climate change, an outline of the city's own current and future GHG reduction initiatives, and details of the status of key GHG emission sources across the city.

It was encouraging to see individuals and groups come together and express themselves on how citizens can help find a solution. Fredericton's plan is to be the first municipality in Canada to achieve Kyoto targets. The campaign will target a 6% community reduction and a 20% corporate reduction in GHGs by 2010.

I am proud of my community and its citizens.

* * *

●(1410)

[Translation]

NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second National Victims of Crime Awareness Week will take place from April 22 to 28. Throughout the week, communities across Canada will distribute information about the impact crime has on its victims.

The Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association is launching an orange ribbon campaign. The ribbons are a mark of support for the families of murdered or missing persons.

[English]

The theme for this year's event is "It's Time to Listen". This government believes that it is time not only to listen to victims of crime but also to act in their best interests.

Last month this government committed \$52 million to increase services for victims of crime. The money will assist provinces and territories to develop and deliver new services, such as offsetting the costs victims incur to attend sentencing hearings and to present victim impact statements.

Statements by Members

I ask the House to join me in recognizing National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and to acknowledge victims and those who help them.

* * *

LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, exactly six years ago today the House passed my motion to require alcohol warning labels against drinking while pregnant as part of an effective FASD prevention strategy. The vote was an overwhelming 217 to 11 for labels on all alcohol beverage containers.

Six years later, we have no follow-through, no action and no labels. It has been six years and there have been five health ministers, four of them Liberal, who have shamelessly bowed to the alcohol industry and thumbed their noses at Parliament by putting this motion on the shelf, where they hoped no one would notice.

Canadians do notice. Thousands still sign petitions. Groups like the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Medical Association and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health have called for labelling. More than 20 countries, from the United States in 1989 to Finland this year, use labelling as part of their prevention arsenal to stop FAS, a preventable tragedy.

Canadians want action. It is time for the government to end six years of shame.

* * *

ZIMBABWE

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why has the Government of Canada forsaken the people of Zimbabwe?

President Robert Mugabe is terrorizing his citizens through the use of torture, gang rape and murder. He is starving his people to death. He has kicked out the NGOs, which has resulted in a critical shortage of medications. The result is that a Zimbabwean woman can expect to live a paltry 32 years and a man 37 years, which are the lowest life expectancies in the world. The people are so desperate that they are wiping out their wildlife just to be able to eat.

What has Canada's government done? It has cut CIDA's funding to Zimbabwe for human rights organizations and relief organizations. This is an unconscionable act. Enough is enough.

I call on the government to increase aid from \$4 million to \$20 million for food and other essentials; to expel the Zimbabwean ambassador to Canada; to appoint a special Canadian envoy for the crisis; and to pressure the UN Security Council to sanction Robert Mugabe and bring him before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Act now and save Zimbabwe: that is what the government should be doing.

[*Translation*]

WORLD BOOK AND COPYRIGHT DAY

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we are celebrating the 12th annual World Book and Copyright Day. This day is rightfully among our priorities, but is not among those of this government, which considers the fate of our authors and their survival to be least of its concerns.

Our authors are key players in the survival of our respective cultural identities, architects of our “collective and individual selves”. Through their creative talent, they allow us to transcend ourselves, to structure ourselves and to build ourselves. They help us to think for ourselves and to understand the world in order that we may make a positive contribution to its transformation.

The Bloc Québécois invites everyone to salute the genius of our authors by taking the time to read and it reiterates its commitment to work tirelessly to defend the rights of our creative talent. It is a matter of principle.

* * *

CENTRAIDE OUTAOUAIS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 11 I was very pleased to attend the seventh annual Bouquet of Thanks recognition gala put on by Centraide Outaouais.

Tribute was paid to those who unceasingly work to improve the well being of their fellow citizens.

The recipients of the 2007 Bouquet of Thanks awards are: Gérard (Ti-Lou) Parent and Suzanne Lauzon, Louise Jeanvenne, Ginette Robitaille, Pierre Archambault, Donald W. Farley, the Patro de Fort-Coulange/Mansfield, Hydro-Québec, the City of Gatineau, the Energy and Paperworkers' Union of Canada Domtar Local 33, Pageau Morel and associates, CIMA+, IP Monitor, the Centre de santé et de services sociaux du Pontiac and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

Congratulations to all these people and companies. Their generosity and consideration toward the community are remarkable. By giving we can do even more.

* * *

●(1415)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc members participated in Earth Day with the ecologists, acting as though they are protecting the planet. However, for 13 years, Quebec has shown no leadership within Canada, which lost control of its greenhouse gas emissions under the former government.

Fortunately, in the past year, our government, along with the Conservative members from Quebec, has put an end to this inaction and is taking concrete measures: yes to the Quebec sustainable development plan, with \$300 million—more than the Bloc, relegated to the opposition benches, is asking for—; yes to public transportation; yes to innovative solutions; no to accelerated capital cost allowance for oil sands; and yes to recycling, renewable energy and biofuels.

Oral Questions

Industrial representatives from these sectors are here from Bellechasse today, on an economic mission for action, and I salute them.

The days of delays and lip service from the Bloc are gone in Ottawa. Today, the Conservatives of Quebec are taking action for the environment.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's *Globe and Mail* raises shocking allegations about the treatment of Canada's Afghan detainees, including savage beatings, electrocution and extreme cold.

Before the Prime Minister smears those who dare raise questions about our mission in Afghanistan, he might consider the simple question on the minds of Canadians today: Are these detainees being tortured?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously we are aware of these allegations. In fact, very recently, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, the government signed a new detainee transfer agreement with the government of Afghanistan, with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Obviously, officials of our government will be following up these allegations with officials of the government of Afghanistan. What we will not do is what the Leader of Opposition suggested earlier, that we bring Taliban prisoners to Canada. That will not be the position of this government.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will certainly say that, as things stand at present, we cannot turn detainees over to the Afghan authorities. Even the chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has said that his agency is unable to monitor the treatment of Afghan detainees.

How can the Prime Minister be sure the local authorities will honour the Geneva convention?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, we recently signed a new detainee transfer agreement with the Afghan government. We are going to hold talks with the Afghan authorities to monitor progress and make sure the new standards are met.

At the same time, we are not going to consider the proposal made by the leader of the Liberal Party to bring Taliban prisoners here to Canada.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in that case, we will have to keep them under our control in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister cannot tell Canadians that he will continue to turn human beings over to the Afghan government as things stand now.

As for his Minister of National Defence, first he tells us that the Red Cross will monitor the treatment of detainees. Then, he tells us that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission will do the monitoring. But the commission says that it is unable to do so. And now, despite these statements, there are more and more signs that detainees are being tortured.

Will the Prime Minister demand that his Minister of National Defence resign?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, these are serious allegations, and the government takes them seriously.

[English]

Once again, we take such allegations seriously. That is why we have concluded an agreement with the Afghan government. It is why we will be in discussions with them to pursue this matter and to ensure that they have the capacity to undertake their terms of the agreement.

At the same time, I am not sure precisely what the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting. We are not going to bring Taliban prisoners to Canada.

As for the Minister of National Defence, his job is to make sure our forces in Afghanistan have the tools needed to do their job, and he is doing that job.

• (1420)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the Minister of National Defence said that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission would guarantee the treatment of detainees. The minister must have known that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has no capacity to do any such thing. Then the House leader said that the government had given the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission \$1 million to carry out its duties. The government had done no such thing and CIDA had to contradict them.

This is just one part of a staggering picture of misinformation and mismanagement. What is being done now to get the situation under control?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, as the deputy leader of the Liberal Party knows, the government has signed a new agreement.

The previous Liberal government had an agreement in place that has proven to be inadequate despite the Liberals' assurance, and despite what the deputy leader of the Liberal Party himself said last year. He said:

I have been in places of Afghan detention myself and have seen the work that the International Committee of the Red Cross does, and I believe it is the best guarantee of their safety and freedom from abuse.

He gave that assurance himself.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been in Afghan places of detention and I have no confidence in the capacity of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to protect prisoners.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

They were beaten, whipped, starved, frozen, choked, electrocuted. These are very serious allegations, and Canada's honour is at stake.

When will the Prime Minister replace his incompetent Minister of National Defence with a minister who can make sure our allies and Canada itself respect the Geneva convention?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that our forces in Afghanistan treat the detainees with proper care. They follow all the rules.

We have made a recent agreement with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and it has guaranteed that it will report to us any abuses of any detainees we transfer. I have the personal assurance of the leader of the human rights commission in Kandahar and the national level.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, 25,000 people demonstrated in favour of complying with the Kyoto protocol by taking part in the "Kyoto pour l'espoir" march in Montreal. Meanwhile, the Minister of the Environment waged a fear campaign against the Kyoto protocol, based on a study that predicts an economic apocalypse, no less, if Canada goes ahead with meeting the Kyoto targets.

Does the Prime Minister realize that what is more likely to cost Quebec and Canada dearly is his government's inaction on climate change?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the opposition parties that asked the government to detail the costs associated with the Kyoto protocol. It would cost a great deal to cut greenhouse gas emissions by a third immediately. This government will soon announce real greenhouse gas emission reduction targets that will preserve jobs and the health of Canada's economy.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the basic premise behind the Minister of the Environment's report is biased. Whereas his study says that a carbon tax of \$195 a tonne would have to be imposed on businesses, a far more serious UN study refers to a tax of between \$25 and \$50 a tonne.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his fear campaign against the Kyoto protocol is baseless and will benefit only his friends, the oil companies, who want to keep on polluting the environment with impunity?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, a tax of \$25 a tonne will not allow us to meet the Kyoto targets by the dates set by the opposition. The challenge is simple: if the opposition has such a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it should table that plan. But up to now, it has been asking the government to table a plan because it does not have a no-cost plan for complying with the Kyoto protocol.

● (1425)

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Kyoto protocol uses 1990 as the reference year for calculating greenhouse gas reductions. Now the Conservative government is planning to use 2006 as the reference year.

Does the Minister of the Environment realize that by selecting 2006 as the reference year, he is penalizing Quebec, especially the province's manufacturing sector, by wiping out 16 years of environmental efforts, and rewarding those who have done nothing, such as big oil companies?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that this government considers climate change to be one of the greatest threats facing the world today.

I also want to make it very clear that Canada, under this government, remains committed to the principles and objectives of the United Nations framework on climate change and the Kyoto protocol.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that setting 2006 as the reference year means that his plan is based on the polluter pay principle? Does he realize that by setting intensity targets instead of absolute targets, he is condemning future generations by endangering the environment because, even if oil companies pollute less per barrel, they will increase their production, thereby polluting more and destroying the environment?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking specific questions on our framework announcements which will be coming out shortly. I encourage him to wait. The announcements on those targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be coming out very shortly.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the revelations concerning torture victims in Afghanistan are positively appalling and Canadians are very concerned about this. The NDP raised this issue a year ago. Afghan authorities use torture in order to mentally and physically break their victims.

Will the government finally do the right thing, which is to immediately put an end to the transfer of prisoners, launch a public inquiry and dismiss the Minister of National Defence today?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, we take these rumours seriously. We are asking our officials to investigate this with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and with the Afghan officials.

Oral Questions

I might remind the member for Toronto—Danforth that we recently had an agreement with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It has promised to advise us if any of our detainees are abused.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a moment ago the Prime Minister was enumerating the responsibilities of the Minister of National Defence. He forgot to mention that one of his responsibilities is to ensure that Canada is abiding by international law.

The fact is the minister has, by his own admission, misled the House. He stated himself that it was his responsibility to ensure that transferees were handled properly at our end and at the Afghan end.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and instruct his Minister of National Defence to stop the transfer of prisoners now and get a full inquiry going, and then ask for his resignation?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission which has the authority to go into the Afghan system. It will advise us of any abuses. We said that we would provide any logistics support it needs to carry out that function and that is our stand.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be back.

The Minister of National Defence recently said that Canadian troops could stay in Afghanistan for over a decade. Additionally, last week he confirmed that cabinet has not even discussed this issue.

For months the government has given confused and conflicting messages about the Afghanistan mission. Will it now be clear with Canadians and support the Liberal motion that establishes 2009 as the end of our combat role in Afghanistan?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member alleges things that I never said. I said that the current military commitment is at the end of February 2009.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians and our allies deserve a clear and honest answer on when Canada's combat duties in southern Afghanistan will end.

Tomorrow there is a vote on the Liberal motion that gives the government an opportunity to be straightforward for a change and yet all we hear from the minister is rhetoric.

The question is not one of support for our troops. We all support them and their good work. The question is, will the minister do the right thing and commit to end Canada's combat role in Kandahar in 2009 and inform NATO allies of this deadline immediately?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to take the opportunity to welcome the hon. member back. We are all delighted to see that he is looking in good health.

As I said last week in answer to this question, the government's position is clear. Our allies, the international community, the Afghan government, nobody is asking us to make a decision on 2009 this week.

I have to say that only the Liberal Party would consider a clear position to be a position that we must withdraw two years from now right away.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this minority Conservative government has never been clear about the mission in Afghanistan and has never bothered to think about when or how this mission will end.

The Minister of National Defence now says that the Canadian Forces could pull out on the condition that the Afghan forces double their size, which seems very unlikely to occur by 2009.

Will the minister finally admit that he has no intention of pulling the Canadian Forces out of Afghanistan in 2009?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position is that the military commitment is until the end of February 2009. At an appropriate time our government will discuss any possible changes to that commitment.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to be completely inconsistent when it comes to Afghanistan.

The minister says one day that we are not at war and then says the exact opposite the next. One day, he says we are in Afghanistan to exact revenge, and the next day, he says we are there to beat the Taliban. In the past, he has said that we would not beat them with military force.

Given that the equipment recently purchased will not arrive in Afghanistan until a few months before 2009, will the Minister of National Defence finally admit his secret intention to extend the mission in Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about flip-flopsters, they are over there. The Leader of the Opposition voted against the extension in Afghanistan; now he supports it. Members over there are flip-flopping all the time. They are the ones who have no consistent position. That party has had three positions in the last year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last March we pointed out the dangers of turning over prisoners to the Afghan authorities. In April, we took it a step further and referred to a report by the U.S. State Department, which listed all the corrupt practices found in Afghan prisons.

What has the minister done since then? Nothing, even though a colonel responsible for human rights in the Afghan forces stated, "In some cases, individuals have to be tortured, otherwise they do not talk".

In light of such serious accusations, the minister did nothing. There is only one thing for him to do—resign.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, our government has done something. We have signed an agreement with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and it has promised to inform us of any abuses of detainees in its system. This is a unique agreement that only Canada has.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canada's representatives advised the prisoners to provide true information in order to avoid being mistreated. Even the Minister of Public Safety was informed of this on his last visit to Kandahar.

Why did the Minister of National Defence not take action sooner? What is the Prime Minister waiting for to ask for the resignation of the Minister of National Defence?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have an agreement with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It will inform us of any abuses in the system.

● (1435)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence no longer has the credibility to manage this department. He has been hiding the truth for several months.

My question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Will he assume his responsibilities and does he intend to take action so that Canada will stop transferring prisoners to the Afghan authorities until such time as he has negotiated a new agreement that guarantees the safety of prisoners?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been stated a number of times already by both the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, Canada does take its responsibilities very seriously. These allegations that have been published today have not been confirmed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

We are looking into the issue. I fully intend to take this up with my counterpart. Other officials will be consulted as well. Canada will continue to do its best to see that definitively Afghan prisoners are not tortured nor abused.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister cannot get out of this one because he is responsible for the application of international treaties. Other countries, the Netherlands in particular, have succeeded in ensuring the safety of prisoners. I would like to remind you that Canada is a signatory to the Geneva Convention against torture.

Will the minister undertake to do everything possible to stop the transfer of prisoners until he obtains an agreement with guarantees,

like those the Netherlands has achieved, to monitor and have access to prisoners no matter where they are in Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said that the Government of Canada still intends to work with the other countries and participants in this agreement. Obviously we still need to research the information and consult with the other countries and other people, particularly those from the government of Afghanistan.

* * *

*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of moving forward on the fully funded 2005 climate change plan and keeping Canada on track to promote a strong low carbon economy and meet Kyoto, the Conservatives have systematically killed each and every single program.

On the heels of his Chicken Little report, does the minister think that Canadians are not intelligent enough to see through his shock and awe delay tactics? How much longer will he insist on employing doublespeak to mask 15 months of incompetent Conservative inaction?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, imagine that, a Liberal trying to make recommendations on the environment.

After 13 years of doing absolutely nothing, we now have a government that is moving forward, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and cleaning up the environment.

I have a very interesting quote. This is from the Commissioner of the Environment speaking about the Liberal Party. It says, "There is a gap between what the government said it would do and what it is actually doing". Good intentions are not enough. We are getting it done.

[Translation]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised Canadians that new air quality legislation would be part of his plan, and that the bill would be referred to a House committee in order to find consensus on what action to take. Today we learn that the Minister of the Environment has abandoned the air quality legislation because he did not like the way the House committee had amended it.

Why should Canadians believe that a real plan will be implemented when this government outright refuses to accept the recommendations of the committee that it supported?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest maybe that member is a little frustrated because we are getting the job done.

He said that when Canadians find out what it is going to cost for their plan, they are going to scream. The Commissioner of the Environment said, "When it comes to protecting the environment, bold announcements are made and then often forgotten as soon as the confetti hits the ground".

Oral Questions

It was shameful what the Liberals did. We are getting the job done.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the government ran the entire Bush playbook, trying to scare Canadians into opposing Kyoto with torqued and distorted information.

Canadians do not need to be the Prime Minister's psychic to know that the environment minister's fearmongering was a diversion, an attempt to disguise the fact that the government does not have a plan to fight climate change and will not cap emissions until 2020.

When will the environment minister stop misleading Canadians and offer something more than just fear and repackaged programs?

• (1440)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was one of the questions that was asked of the sponsor of Bill C-288. We asked, what is the cost? Unfortunately, the Liberals would not bring the real cost, so we had to do the work for them, as it is too often.

This is what Mark Jaccard said:

—the Kyoto Protocol is likely to trigger a major economic recession. From what I understand of our legal options for compliance with Kyoto and my knowledge of the energy-economy system, I concur with this conclusion.

He is right. The Liberal way does not work.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government introduced a deeply flawed clean air act. It sent it to committee for Parliament to fix. Parliament did its job. After much work and compromise the committee approved a bill that would take real action on climate change.

Today we learn the response of the government, which is to toss it in the garbage and to disrespect the House and Canadians who elected a minority government. The Conservatives ditched project green, now the clean air act, and have left us with nothing.

Will the minister now say in public what he has said privately, that he has killed the clean air act and abandoned the work of Parliament?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not support the Liberals' plan and their amendments to it. For example, political interference in setting air quality standards is not acceptable either.

Here is an interesting quote from somebody that was a witness. He said, "It would be devastating for the whole community...It would be suicidal for our economy". Do Canadians know who said that? Buzz Hargrove.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for too long, victims of crime in the country have felt left out of the criminal justice system, many feeling their concerns and rights are secondary to those of the accused.

My community of St. Catharines and many other communities across the country that bear the scars of atrocious criminal acts have called on Parliament to get tough on crime and give formal voices to

victims. Seven years ago an all party committee recommended a voice and the former Liberal government did not listen.

Would the Minister of Justice inform the House on how the Conservative government is responding to these demands.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his commitment to the rights of victims of crime. For too long, the rights of victims of crime have not been heard to the extent they should in our criminal justice system. That is why I am glad our government is committed to the office of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

In that regard, I am pleased to announce today the appointment of Mr. Steve Sullivan, a long-time human rights advocate, to that post.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all across Canada people are worried about climate change, worried their kids' asthma is getting worse, worried that year after year the temperature rises, yet the government does not do anything about it.

Yesterday on Parliament Hill hundreds gathered to demand action on climate change. The crowd and all Canadians were encouraged to call the Prime Minister at 613-992-4122.

Did he get the message, or is his political will box full? Where is Bill C-30? Will he bring it to the House now?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first government in years that is taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to clean up the environmental mess left after 13 years of Liberal inaction. We are getting the job done. They did not.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that plus ça change, plus c'est pareil.

Over the past few months, MPs have spent hundreds of hours hearing witnesses and debating on how to fight climate change in Canada. However, it seems the Conservative government does not care if Bill C-30 is ever brought to the floor of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking you today to get a search warrant to see if we can find Bill C-30 and bring it back to the House because the government is not going to do it. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, if you can find it, get it back to the House so we can debate it, get it passed and fight climate change now.

•(1445)

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that questions to the Speaker are out of order, but I see the Prime Minister would like to respond, so perhaps he will answer the hon. member's question.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did note the recommendation of the hon. member, that people call me on this issue. I am gathering from some recent press reports that they should be able to reach me without calling at all; I can just hear through mediums.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister did not count on the fact that his proposal to eliminate interest deductions would cause a mass exodus of head offices from Canada, according to a KPMG report. According to a survey released today, entrepreneurs give the minister a failing grade and there are growing calls for the Prime Minister to clean house at the Department of Finance.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his Minister of Finance is in way over his head?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the economy is strong. We have the highest rate of employment in 30 years. Taxes are being reduced. We have increased productivity.

The member opposite cannot even get his facts right. We have more than twice the number of global leaders with their offices in Canada now than 10 years ago. There is no hollowing out. I can tell members that we have more strength in the Canadian economy.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his advertisement for the Liberal government. The problem is going forward because of his measures.

Last week the minister said that the blacked out information was top secret and he ordered the document to be recalled. It is hard to find any information in this sea of black, but right now enlarged versions of this document sit proudly on massive billboards across the country, testimony to the government's stunning lack of accountability.

Does the minister want these massive billboards to be returned to his office, or would he like me to return the document that I have—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, who came from Bay Street, was back on Bay Street on Friday handing out brochures for a golf tournament in Markham—Unionville. That is how seriously he took this issue.

What the member said after October 31 was that it was absolutely the right thing to ensure tax fairness and to work for Canada's

productivity. Who else spoke on that? A former deputy prime minister, who said reversing the income trust decision would run afoul of espoused Liberal principles—

The Speaker: The hon. member for London West.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee continues to hear conflicting testimony regarding the RCMP pension scandal. Each day brings new contradictions. Even the Conservative former chair of the public accounts committee has admitted he is surprised by the number of people implicated in this scandal.

Will the Minister of Public Safety finally recognize that this issue goes deeper than a powerless investigation and will he call the full judicial inquiry, which is clearly necessary, to get to the bottom of this issue?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to get answers as quickly as we can on this awful situation. I do share a concern that the member has just raised. I too am surprised by the continuing testimony of things that appear to have gone wrong, one after the other. One after the other they happened under the Liberal regime.

However, we want to get answers and we want to get them quickly. The RCMP deserves that. Canadians deserve it. That is the plan and the track that we are on right now.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is about money that belongs to the RCMP front line officers and Canadians are wondering why the minister seems to have no interest in actually finding out what really happened.

It appears the government is only interested in investigations when they score political points for the government and simply does not care about ensuring that the cloud hanging over Canada's national police force has to be lifted.

Will the minister stop this investigative charade he started and launch a full public judicial inquiry?

•(1450)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very serious about getting answers right away.

I have to correct something I said the other day. I said that the only time Liberals were concerned about front line police officers was when those officers' representatives were on the Hill and that was the only time they showed concern, by meeting with them.

I have to correct part of the record. In fact, the member who just spoke would not even meet with her representatives from the Police Association last week.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance started off by throwing his weight around with the banks about their ATM fees. Last Thursday, even though the banks were unable to justify their exorbitant fees, the minister gave in and believed everything they told him.

Instead of knuckling under to the banks, will the Minister of Finance tell them that unless they voluntarily reduce their transaction fees, he will have no choice but to bring in legislation?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue of ATM fees of the banks was raised in this place some months ago. As a result of that, I approached the banks about it. I asked them to take into consideration that choice for consumers was very important and that some consumers in Canada had less choice because they were older, or they were seniors, or they suffered from disabilities or they were students on campuses that had limited availability of ATM machines.

I am pleased to report to the House that at least five of the banks have responded positively on those issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it took no time at all for the minister to give in to the banks' demands. If the minister really intends to take action, he should look to the Bloc Québécois' proposal to amend the Competition Act and force the banks to provide that information.

If the banks continue to refuse, will the minister take action, or will he just close the file and let people continue to pay exorbitant fees?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not share with the hon. member the view that the Government of Canada should be dictating day to day policies to the banks, the credit unions and the trust companies in Canada. They should be free to compete and create their own choices. In fact, we see that working in Canada. We see the credit unions, for example, in their association, having different policies with respect to ATM charges. This is good. Competition and choice are good for the Canadian economy.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Church finds it "completely unacceptable". A Roman Catholic administrator, along with a bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Ontario, says it is "totally incomprehensible". The Anglican Church of Canada expressed its "strong disappointment and sadness".

They are sorry. When will this meanspirited government, for once, show respect and apologize to aboriginal Canadians for the legacy of the residential schools?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member, for her edification, that it was in fact the Conservative government that concluded the agreement with the Assembly of First Nations relating to residential schools survivors. I am sure she is equally pleased by that.

We continue to work together through the court approval process. We continue to make progress toward the final implementation of the agreement. That is what we will continue to do.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers want to do their part to help the environment. They want to invest in facilities that will transform their crops into biofuels, but these facilities are expensive and capital is not readily available or accessible.

What are the Minister of Agriculture and the Secretary of State for Agriculture doing to help farmers help our environment?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a very insightful question. Today we announced a \$200 million eco-agricultural biofuels capital initiative that will help farmers build or expand transportation biofuels facilities. We want to help our farmers and our environment.

[Translation]

This \$200 million program will encourage farmers to produce renewable fuels. We are determined to ensure a prosperous future for farmers and to leave a clean environment to our children.

* * *

● (1455)

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the previous Liberal government concocted the egregious softwood sellout and the Conservatives worked with the Liberals to push it through. The previous Liberal government concocted the even worse security and prosperity partnership, so-called deep integration, and the Conservative government is working to push it through.

On Thursday and Friday in Calgary, there are closed door meetings where members of the government will be sitting down to decide what else they can give away to the Bush administration, our energy resources, our water, Canadians' privacy. Who from the government is participating and what are they giving away?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are so many factual mistakes in that question, I do not even know where to start.

There is absolutely no indication whatsoever that we will be giving anything away. These are discussions that we have from time to time, as all previous governments would, on such an important matter.

Oral Questions

He should put away his tinfoil hat and his discussions around black helicopters and get back to the facts.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the Conservatives campaigned on standing up for Canada. What Canadians did not know was they were actually campaigning on giving away Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, they are actually giving away Canada. Water is our most precious resource and they want to give it away, just like softwood lumber, just give it right away.

The meetings in Calgary are closed to the public and they are closed to the media, despite the fact that massive water diversions are on the agenda. Will the government stop its reckless and irresponsible push to give away Canada's water?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I submit to the member from the NDP that there has not been a more transparent government in recent history when it comes to our discussions with the United States and other countries. We have developed a very respectful, businesslike relationship.

There is no intention whatsoever to give away bulk water. In fact, the member would know that we recognize the need to protect bulk water with respect to our natural basins.

He is, however, factually correct when he did state the previous government had left the door open when the member for Kings—Hants said, "It is very important that we do not dismiss at hand the export of water".

* * *

THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's image consultant, or door opener—we still have not seen her job description—has an uphill task for her latest extreme makeover.

Not only is the Prime Minister changing his image, but he keeps changing the story. First she did not exist; then the party paid her, something he castigated the former leader of his party for doing; then they admitted she was on the taxpayers' dime. Now she is on the PMO tour carrying the prime ministerial luggage.

Having slashed funding for literacy programs, student summer jobs and women's groups, how can the Prime Minister justify to Canadians this latest spending priority?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I knew several—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The member for Labrador asked the Prime Minister a question. He has risen to answer the question. All hon. members are going to want to hear the answer. The Prime Minister has the floor. We will have a little order.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, of course I knew several days ago this question would be asked.

Obviously here we do not spend money on psychic consulting or image consulting or whatever else, but I have to say that when I watch some of these male reporters who are much older than I am, with the perpetually blonde and red hair, it is an interesting concept.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We are on question period at the moment. The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville has the floor now, and we will keep on with questions for a few more minutes.

* * *

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a much more serious note, my constituents in Leeds—Grenville are concerned that 36% of federal offenders are convicted of a new crime within two years of completing their sentence. They want us to end the revolving door justice system created by the Liberals by creating a fair and effective corrections system that places the priority on protecting Canadians.

Can the Minister of Public Safety update the House on our platform commitment to review the operations of Correctional Service of Canada?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I announced on Friday that the review would begin and it has begun. We want a report back by October.

There are a number of disconcerting elements within our system and the hard-working, dedicated men and women within the correctional service system face a changing offender profile. Seventy-five per cent of the offenders who get out on early release, and that is required by the way the laws are written, will actually reoffend. One out of four offenders in our system is actually in there for homicide.

Some questions need to be addressed. The review is going to do that. Tony Cannavino, president of the Canadian Police Association, has said that we need to end this back and back and back process and get some answers.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PASSPORTS

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is swimming in surpluses. Yet, it is incapable of providing fair, adequate services for a simple passport application. Backlogs continue to accumulate every day. Canadian and Quebec travellers are losing time and money because of this situation. Even worse, people in rural regions are particularly inconvenienced, including those in my region, for instance.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs recognize the problem and does he intend to set up a passport office for Bas-Saint-Laurent and the Gaspé as soon as possible?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question. I must say that my department is working very hard to address this issue. I know it is a very difficult situation.

[English]

Since this issue has come to light, we have taken the step of opening 58 new receiving offices through Service Canada. We have hired 500 new employees. We hope to have them all on stream very soon to address this bottleneck in the process.

We recognize and appreciate the patience of Canadians with regard to this issue. We will continue to look for ways to increase efficiency and speed up this process.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Health lost his cool in an interview with the *Vancouver Sun* saying that members of the group Families for Early Autism Treatment are trying to intimidate him.

This is an organization of parents with autistic children. They are trying to get the federal government to provide the support they need to raise their children, but the Minister of Health has labelled them as extremists.

Is this really what Conservatives think of people who try to get their government to do the right thing? Does the minister really believe that advocating for one's child's health and well-being makes one an extremist? Will the minister tell us what other advocacy groups are on his list?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, this government, I was pleased to announce on behalf of the Prime Minister and the government, has done more when it comes to autism and ASD in terms of the federal capacity to deal with this issue than any other previous government.

When it comes to research, when it comes to ASD surveillance, when it comes to a research chair, when it comes to reorganizing Health Canada to make sure that it can deal with ASD, this government has put kids with autism and parents who are suffering as a result of their kids having autism on the front burner. We are proud of this government for doing so.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development of Alberta.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I thought I would correct the record on the misinformation from the Minister of Public Safety to say that I did meet with the head of the Canadian Police Association. As witness to that, I had the leader of my party and also the justice critic.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2006 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal annual report.

* * *

● (1505)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Monday, October 30, 2006, your committee has considered Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (age of protection) and to make consequential amendments to the Criminal Records Act, and has agreed on Thursday, April 19, 2007 to report it with one amendment.

I might point out that this particular legislation first went through the House in the form of a private member's bill and was supported by a number of members on this side, the member for Wild Rose, the member for Lethbridge, the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells, in an effort to make our streets and our country safer for children. Now we see the fruits of that labour over the number of years that we have been here. We are pleased to submit this report with one amendment.

* * *

PETITIONS

VISITOR VISAS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition signed by people in my riding and in other ridings.

The petitioners wish to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Republic of Poland has successfully joined the European Union, that Canada and Poland are active members of NATO, and that Poland is using biometric passport technology. The petitioners therefore ask for the lifting of visitor visa requirements for Poland. They believe it will increase family visitation, tourism, cultural exchanges and trade missions.

The Canadian Polish Congress, representing 800,000 Canadians of Polish heritage, is strongly recommending the lifting of such visa requirements for Poland.

TRADESPERSONS TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION DEDUCTION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions today, both of which were circulated by members and supporters of the building trades, the first in the golden horseshoe and the second in and around British Columbia.

Building trades across the country have lobbied successive governments for over 30 years to achieve some basic fairness for their members. They want tradespersons and indentured apprentices to be able to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable incomes so they can secure and maintain employment at construction sites that are more than 80 kilometres from their homes. It makes no sense for tradespersons to be out of work in one area of the country while another region suffers from temporary skilled trade shortages simply because the cost of travelling is too high.

To that end, they have gathered hundreds of signatures in support of my bill, Bill C-390, which allows for precisely the kind of deductions that their members have been asking for. I am pleased to table the petition on their behalf and share their disappointment that this item was not addressed in the government's budget in March.

[Translation]

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to present a petition on behalf of the citizens in my riding, who condemn the Conservative government's decision to cut the youth employment initiatives program by \$55 million.

As we know, this program also includes the career placement program, which is extremely important to the students in my riding, as it is to students in ridings across the country.

A cut like this to the career placement program is extremely harmful to young people in our society, and to young people in rural areas. These citizens think the government's decision to cut funding is wrong and unacceptable.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to reinstate the necessary funding, which suffered a \$55 million cut, to ensure that the career placement program and the youth employment initiatives program can continue as they were under the Liberal government.

• (1510)

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER INDUSTRY

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present in the House today a petition on the issue of the softwood lumber industry.

The petitioners decry the situation where \$1 billion in funds owned by the Canadian softwood industry have been used to subsidize our U.S. competitors. They say that it is a bad precedent for the softwood lumber industry but also for other industries in Canada. They have said that this agreement has triggered layoffs. In fact, it has triggered layoffs in my own community.

They ask that this agreement be renegotiated and that the Canadian industry be provided with loan guarantees and the political

Government Orders

and moral support that the industry deserves to defend itself and to defend Canadian interests.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present six petitions on behalf of the residents of Sackville—Eastern Shore, plus the other residents residing in that great province of Nova Scotia.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to repay the over \$1 billion that was mistakenly taken from them when Statistics Canada made the error on the consumer price index in 2002, costing these seniors well over \$1 billion. May I remind the government that the meter is running.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the government on behalf of these petitioners that it should remember what a senior did to Brian Mulroney in the 1980s. These same seniors can do it to this government in 2007.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2007

The House resumed from April 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-52, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-52, the government's bill to implement its budget.

I had the privilege of speaking to the budget itself when it was first tabled in the House and was pleased to represent the concerns of people in my riding of Hamilton Mountain during that debate.

Unfortunately, there was little time to explore any one issue in greater detail so I am pleased to use this opportunity today to focus on just one specific area, and that is the budget's appalling silence on the decline of Canada's manufacturing sector and its failure to create either a steel or an auto sector strategy.

With the government's fiscal capacity, the budget was a huge opportunity to invest and yet the government chose instead to squander this important opportunity. It is no wonder that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

Government Orders

Workers are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet as the prosperity gap in the country grows. While we are seeing stagnating wages for average workers, folks at the high end are doing better and better. The top 100 CEOs in this country make in a few hours what the average Canadian worker makes in an entire year. The earnings of the richest 10% of Canadian families now stand at 82 times of those of the poorest 10%.

The rich are making more while working families are working harder and longer, 200 hours longer on average, just to make ends meet. At the same time, we are experiencing a crisis in the manufacturing sector. Over the last five years we have lost 4,300 jobs in the steel sector in Hamilton alone with another 300 jobs in jeopardy once Stelco's hot strip mill is closed. Some of the losses were from bankruptcies and plant closures while others are the result of continuous downsizing where there are still more losses to come as the nature of the industrial marketplace changes in the global economy.

The job losses did not begin and end with the steel industry. We lost Studebaker, International Harvester, Westinghouse, Proctor & Gamble, J.I. Case, Firestone and hundreds of smaller plants. Those are just some of the big names from Hamilton's past, and the list of losses continues to grow.

More recent ones that pop to mind, again from just the past five years, are Siemens Westinghouse with 332 layoffs and Camco where 716 lost their jobs when the plant closed and 284 more workers ended up on temporary layoff. The Tiercon plant closure saw another 700 jobs lost. There were bankruptcies and plant closures at Rheem, Philip Environmental, Hercules, Mak Steel, Frost Fence, Dominion Castings, Cold Metal Products and ACI Automotives. New permanent layoffs are happening every month in the industrial manufacturing sector in Hamilton and there is no end in sight.

Across Canada, a quarter of a million manufacturing jobs have been lost since 2002; more than one in ten jobs due to layoffs, plant closures and the non-replacement of retiring workers.

I have seen the impacts of these job losses first-hand. In Hamilton I have been meeting regularly with the workers and retirees at Hamilton Specialty Bar who are once again uncertain about their futures and pensions because the company that runs the plant is under bankruptcy protection for a second time. The first time the Hamilton Specialty Bar plant went into bankruptcy protection it was the United Steelworkers, not the government, that did the work to find a new buyer for the plant to save both jobs and the pension plan.

This time the Steelworkers are working just as hard but there is no investor or buyer in sight. Once again, the government is doing nothing to help them. If no buyer is found the plant will shut down for good in May, which means that 380 workers will be out of jobs and 500 retirees will lose up to 20% of their pensions.

These are good jobs we are losing. Manufacturing jobs pay 28% higher wages than the national average. More often they come with decent pension and benefit packages.

Some analysts and politicians will tell us that there is no reason to worry, that these jobs are being replaced by jobs in other sectors. However, all jobs are not created equal.

Statistics Canada recently found that workers displaced by firm closures and mass layoffs who find other jobs suffer an average decline of 25% in annual earnings. That is a loss of \$10,000 for a typical manufacturing worker. That is devastating for ordinary workers and their families but it also has a huge impact on our communities.

With a loss of one-quarter of a million manufacturing jobs, the total loss of Canadian earnings is estimated at around \$2.5 billion annually. Just think of what that means in terms of spending and revenues for other sectors of our economy.

• (1515)

Workers are losing their jobs but the government's budget is doing nothing to address the growing crisis in the manufacturing sector. Workers are finding it harder and harder to get by but the budget is doing nothing to close the growing prosperity gap.

How did we get here? First, through downloading, funding cuts and trade deals the Liberals and the Conservatives have drastically reduced the capacity for the federal government to play a positive and helpful role in ensuring that the fundamentals are in place so that economic and social assistance can adjust, innovate and change at the same time as ensure a cushion for the blows of the unchecked market.

Second, with the limited capacity they do have, successive governments in Canada have had no vision and no plan to get right those things that we as a society expect from our federal government.

In their recent budget, the Conservatives simply stuck to the same old tried and failed path. Rather than working to close the prosperity gap with their budget, the Conservatives actually widened it. They maintained over \$8 billion in corporate tax cuts, tax cuts brought in by the Liberals.

The budget provided no money for the things that would make life more fair and affordable for everyday Canadians, things like child care, pharmacare, transit, housing and student debt. Of course, the Conservatives, like the Liberals, have not put forward a plan to deal with the loss of manufacturing jobs.

New Democrats, on the other hand, have consistently fought for justice for all workers in their workplace. For too long workers have been left behind while Conservative and Liberal governments give handouts to their corporate friends.

Government Orders

It is time for fairness. I would urge the government to amend its budget bill to include initiatives that will make life more fair and more affordable for workers and their families. At a minimum these should include: secure pensions, by putting workers' pensions at the front of the line when employers go bankrupt; adequate employment insurance, by overhauling the EI system which denies two-thirds of workers any benefits; a reliable safety net, by reforming the social assistance programs that have become an ineffective, unaccountable patchwork since the Liberals abolished the Canada assistance plan; the protection of workers' rights, by protecting collective bargaining rights with progressive measures like outlawing replacement workers that prolong labour disputes; and a fair trade policy, by making workers and the environment a priority.

We in the NDP have a different vision of the kind of economy that we should be creating in the 21st century. I believe that the economy ultimately must be judged on how well it meets the needs and aspirations of the people it serves.

I believe that in a market economy the federal government has an obligation to ensure that the social and physical infrastructures are in place to ensure individual goals and collective needs are met. That is why we are working to strengthen the public service and health care and why we are working to get results on climate change, on labour rights and on real equality. Getting results on these issues will make life more secure and affordable for ordinary Canadians but they will also create a competitive advantage for our economy.

The budget exhorted Canadians to "aspire". All Canadians had hoped for in the budget was a little bit of fairness. Their hopes were dashed when the finance minister rose to read the budget.

Canadians deserve more. They deserve better. They deserve the fairness they have been asking for.

• (1520)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I often speak with seniors in my riding and they tell me that their hydro bills, their Roger's cable bills, their heating bills and their property taxes, et cetera, have increased and yet for 10 to 15 years their guaranteed income supplement has not caught up. They recently received a tiny increase.

Some of the seniors in my riding are desperate. They are asking the government what it plans to do to increase the guaranteed income supplement for seniors.

Since this increase in the guaranteed income supplement is not in the budget that is in front of us, what is the NDP's plan to ensure that ordinary Canadians, especially seniors, can live their lives with dignity and have some money to pay the rent and buy food?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, my colleague hits the nail right on the head. Seniors in our community are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. They have worked hard all their lives. They have played by the rules. In fact, they have built the very system that they hoped would be there for them in their retirement years, but unfortunately that system is crumbling around them.

My colleague was addressing income supports only. She is absolutely right. There was no mention in the government's budget of substantial increases to the GIS, the OAS or the CPP, all of which are critical components of most seniors' retirement incomes.

Worse than that, though, the government is not even willing to live up to its legislated mandate, which would mean that the cost of living increases must be paid to seniors on those retirement income supports. We know there has been an error in Statistics Canada's calculation that has underestimated the cost of living increase. As a result, seniors are actually owed money from 2001 until 2006, when that mistake was fixed.

However, the government has refused to fix it retroactively, and we are talking about some of the poorest, neediest people in our communities. Seniors need their incomes. They need their incomes, and not for luxuries, as they are not buying plasma TVs and iPods; they are just trying to get buy. They are trying to pay for their heat, hydro, rent and food, the basic necessities of life. The government has not been there for them. Worse yet, it has not even lived up to the obligation it has to index their incomes as a result of the cost of living increases.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's statement. It seems pretty clear that she has some concerns with respect to seniors and seniors' incomes. That is shared by the government. That is why the government has moved to change taxation for seniors in such a dramatic fashion.

We have increased the age credit and the pension allowance. We took 655,000 taxpayers completely off the tax rolls in budget 2006 and over 200,000 in budget 2007, the overwhelming majority of those being low income seniors.

This government cares about seniors. It cares about looking after them. We are putting money into health care. We are reducing their burden. These are seniors' priorities. This government listens and we are getting it done. I would like to know why the member does not support that.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to share with the member why I do not support that, and I thank him for giving me the opportunity.

Yes, the budget created a tax credit for pensionable income, but that is not the income support that most seniors rely on. That credit is purely on private pensions. Seniors who actually rely on public income supports like the GIS, the OAS and the CPP do not benefit from that change at all.

Worse yet, what the government also did, and what the member forgot to remind our colleagues about, is that it raised the lowest tax rate. The Liberals reduced it from 15.5% to 15% and the member's government raised it back up to 15.5%. The very poorest seniors in our country are now paying half a per cent more in income taxes than they were before the member's government took over.

Seniors deserve more than lip service from the government. I would encourage the member and his government in the next budget to realize that opportunity and to stand up for seniors and give them more than empty rhetoric.

Government Orders

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak about Bill C-52, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007.

In this House, the Bloc Québécois has decided to vote in favour of this budget. This budget is important to the Bloc Québécois, as my colleague from Joliette has explained in detail. Still, I would like to go a bit farther and explain the Bloc Québécois' position on this budget.

We have always said that the Bloc Québécois is in Ottawa to defend the interests of Quebec until Quebecers decide, by a majority vote in a referendum, to create their own country. Needless to say, I hope this happens as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Bloc is in Ottawa to defend Quebec's interests. Implementing this budget will serve Quebec's interests.

The bill we are studying today contains five categories of important tax measures that were announced on March 19: a tax fairness plan, some tax relief, continued GST refunds for conferences and tours—something the Bloc Québécois called for—changes to the rules for RRSPs and RESPs, and a surtax on inefficient vehicles.

Implementation of this budget will have very important benefits for the Bloc Québécois. First and foremost, \$3.3 billion will be paid to address the fiscal imbalance. Despite what the Minister of Finance says, it is not true that the fiscal imbalance has been corrected.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Far from it.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Far from it, as my colleague from Saint-Lambert says. The fiscal imbalance is a long way from being corrected completely, but we have taken a step in the right direction. That is why we are supporting this bill.

If it were not for the Bloc Québécois we would not even be talking about the fiscal imbalance. If it were not for the numerous interventions by the Bloc Québécois, stemming from the Séguin report in 2001, we would not be talking about correcting the fiscal imbalance. Our colleagues in the Liberal Party still have a hard time saying the words “fiscal” and “imbalance”. The leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Opposition, does not even want to say it. Imagine what this would be like if the Liberals were in power.

The current government listened to the arguments and is implementing a policy that will allow Quebec to recover \$3.3 billion during the third year. Furthermore, this year Quebec will receive more than \$2 billion, which will be extremely useful in meeting the needs of Quebec.

In order for those who are watching us to understand, the fiscal imbalance is not complicated. They try to make it complicated, but it is not. The needs are in the provinces and the money is in Ottawa. That is the fiscal imbalance.

The Bloc is calling on the federal government to stop spending and to start giving the provinces, and Quebec in particular, the money they need for education, health, implementing its cultural program, etc. The federal government has to stop trying to interfere in Quebec's jurisdictions. That is what we mean by correcting the

fiscal imbalance. If it were not for the repeated interventions of the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa and the unanimity at the National Assembly of Quebec, we would not even be talking about this here today.

• (1530)

We would still be seeing a huge gulf forming between the federal government and the provinces, in that all the money goes to Ottawa and none goes back to the provinces. We are told that we in Quebec are whiners, but people need to realize that if the government stopped spending in provincial jurisdictions and started transferring money to the provinces, including Quebec, we would not have to beg for our money. It is indeed our money.

For the information of those who are watching us, there are currently 16 strictly provincial jurisdictions, of which 13 have been invaded by the federal government. The federal government has no business being there. It needs to withdraw and transfer money instead. When it comes to child care, the environment, education, health, culture and sports, I sincerely think that the Government of Quebec knows what it has to do for the welfare of Quebecers.

At least one step has been taken toward correcting the fiscal imbalance. However, we must point out in this House that it is far from being resolved. The Bloc Québécois will continue to ask for this issue to be resolved.

If the government really wanted to correct the fiscal imbalance, it would transfer tax fields. Forget about equalization; it has become rather complex. Our plan would transfer tax points to promote development in Quebec and the other provinces.

Unfortunately, that is not the government's plan. I know that work will be done, and the Bloc Québécois will keep a close eye on the government in the Standing Committee on Finance so that someday—so long as Quebecers are not sovereign—the fiscal imbalance will be resolved.

Another important envelope to be allocated when this budget is implemented is the \$328 million ecotrust funding that Quebec is to receive. This money will support Quebec's plan to fight climate change.

It is quite simple, really. The government has to understand that it must stop messing around and invest in protecting the environment. We know that the Minister of the Environment has been unable to give a straight answer about whether or not it is important to comply with the Kyoto protocol.

In Quebec, there is no such ambiguity: the parties in the National Assembly are unanimous, as is civil society. We want the Kyoto protocol to be implemented because it is extremely important for protecting our environment.

The minister should stop scaring us by saying that if Kyoto is implemented, it could cost us a fortune and there could be a recession. Has the minister forgotten that Quebec has already begun implementing the Kyoto protocol? Hydroelectricity is our main source of power. Research is being done in this field, on developing hydroelectric and wind power—in which the federal government has not invested one red cent.

Government Orders

I do not have much time left, but I would like to touch on another file that is very important to the Bloc Québécois: the GST refund for foreign visitors. We asked for this; in fact, it was one of the main things we asked for.

In closing, I would like to say that this budget is inadequate. More must be done. Federal transfers in this budget are not quite enough to eliminate the financial pressures that Quebec is now feeling. The current government did not keep its promise to eliminate the fiscal imbalance entirely.

• (1535)

There is still a lot of work to do, and the Bloc Québécois will be paying close attention to the implementation of this budget over the coming months.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

He says that he will support and vote for the 2007-08 budget because the main advantage for Quebec is our plan to restore the fiscal balance.

I agree. We have a very good plan for restoring the fiscal balance. There is a lot of money for all the provinces and for Quebec.

However, I do not agree with the member when he says that the fiscal imbalance has not been corrected. I know it has been because the Premier of Quebec, Mr. Charest, has more money and he plans to lower taxes by \$700 million. Therefore I know that the fiscal imbalance has been corrected in the province of Quebec.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect for my colleague, I would invite him to listen to more than just the Premier of Quebec because the fiscal imbalance has not been corrected.

The Premier was in an election campaign. He said that he intended to invest the money received from Ottawa in tax reductions.

The government has to take into account that the elections were held on March 26. We shall see what the Government of Quebec will do with the budget to be tabled in early May. No one, not a single person in Quebec, from any party in the National Assembly, has said that the fiscal imbalance was resolved when the current government tabled its budget on March 19. Absolutely no one.

What was said is that it was a step in the right direction. The groundwork has been laid and we have to continue. But we must go further because the imbalance consists of at least \$3.3 billion per year for Quebec. The government is not giving Quebec that amount this year. It is giving \$2.2 billion.

The fiscal imbalance can be calculated any way you want. We all have the figures. I do not wish those listening to become lost in speculation. However, the fiscal imbalance definitely has not been resolved. There continues to be financial pressure on the Government of Quebec.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his excellent speech.

I would like to add another point that concerns the fiscal imbalance and that is not talked about as much, but whose effect is extremely difficult for Quebeckers to accept. I am thinking of the

fisheries. The federal government has not taken any action in the shrimp fishery crisis. Yet fisheries fall under federal jurisdiction. During a crisis, someone should step in and do something.

Just recently, the Quebec government, as it did last year, had to announce measures amounting to \$8.5 million.

We know the imbalance is far from being corrected, since in seven years we will be in the same situation we are in today. Money is not guaranteed from one year to the next.

I must also add that there are imbalances when it comes to action in certain areas. Fisheries is unfortunately a good example of such an area.

• (1540)

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. If there is one thing he knows well, it is fisheries. I must say that I am less familiar with them, because I come from Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

I also know that if the federal government stopped spending money in provincial areas of jurisdiction, particularly in Quebec, and started giving Quebec the money to take care of its own affairs, there would be fewer problems. If the government stuck to its own affairs, that would be a big step in the right direction. The fisheries are a good example, as is Parks Canada, whose buildings are falling apart in some areas.

[English]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-52, the budget implementation act. My time today will give me an opportunity to address some of the points I did not have time to cover in my response to the budget.

Again, my main objection to this budget is that it accomplishes so little with so much.

The Conservatives managed to spend more money in this budget than in any one that preceded it and yet they have managed to help truly no one. I compare this Conservative budget to taking an entire crate of oranges and squeezing only one glass of juice from it.

[Translation]

In order to help solve the many problems facing our country, the previous Liberal government had created a number of social and economic programs, including the Canada millennium scholarship foundation, the summer career placement program intended for students and not-profit groups, as well as the CANtex program for the textile industry. We recognized the needs and came up with solutions. In some cases, the solutions found did not solve all the problems, but constituted an improvement nonetheless. We, the Liberals, showed Canadians that the federal government supported them and implemented action plans.

[English]

What do Canadians see from this government?

They do not see new programs. They do not see new initiatives. They do not see a government standing beside them.

Government Orders

They see a government that is obsessed with cutting programs and that uses smoke and mirrors to fool people into a sense of trust and confidence by spending more money than any other previous government in Canadian history.

[*Translation*]

Canadians can see that the current government does not support them and is interested only in slashing programs.

[*English*]

This is not a claim that the Conservative government's budget does not include any positive news. Nevertheless, the few good measures included in this budget are not enough to properly address the needs of this country.

I can use many examples to illustrate my point, but I will begin with perhaps the Conservatives' biggest failure: child care.

The Liberal government had signed deals with every province in the country to create new child care spaces. The Conservatives had no right to cancel these agreements. No new child care spaces have been created since their time in office, and paying a monthly allowance of \$100 to parents for each child under six does not make Canadians forget about their broken promise.

Child care advocates and experts have stated that if the government is identifying child care as one of its priorities and then turning around and giving money to the provinces, it is an admission of the failure of their original so-called child care plan. One advocate even said the Conservatives have conceded that the former government had the right plan and it is following in those footsteps, with the huge exception of having 80% less of the funds that were available.

[*Translation*]

In terms of social policy, the previous Liberal government had an overall plan for Canada when it concluded child care agreements with the provinces. While respecting provincial jurisdictions, the agreements were modelled after the Quebec child care system.

● (1545)

[*English*]

The Liberals had a vision for Canada that took into account the needs of the modern family and also took into account a vision for the country that looked decades down the road. The Conservative answer is cheap vote buying that might look good in the short term but guarantees nothing for our future.

The poor platform in this budget does not stop at child care. The Conservative government has been abandoning Canadian businesses, especially the small and medium sized businesses that are the job creators in this country. The government expects that with a few piecemeal announcements Canadians will not see the effect of the numerous slashed federal programs.

I have received countless letters from business owners and their employees about the negative effect the government's actions will have on their businesses and jobs. One of these actions was the cancellation of the visitors rebate program. As vice-chair of the finance committee, I heard from various industry stakeholders about the terrible impact this cancellation will have on their industry.

The government did not give a satisfactory answer as to why this program was cut. As a result, the finance minister admitted his mistake by establishing a federal foreign convention and tour incentive program, but this solves only a small part of the problem the government created, as it does not address any tourism initiatives for individuals visiting the country. American tourism is on the decline in this country and the Conservative government seems intent on doing nothing to change that.

[*Translation*]

The budget also shows serious deficiencies when it comes to adult literacy. The Department of Finance announced funding for literacy programs, but this gesture appears somewhat hypocritical after the drastic cuts made to adult literacy programs last fall. The Conservatives must know that giving with one hand while taking away with the other is a hypocritical and deceitful way to govern.

[*English*]

One of the most dishonest showcases of the government is that of the environment. The announcements contained in the budget and those being debated today are positive ones, but some of these are simply a reintroduction of the previous, proven Liberal environmental programs.

Canadians do not believe the government's sudden about-face on environmental issues and Canadians still do not trust the Conservatives on this issue. This distrust is with good reason. In the recent budget, the Conservatives cut back Canada's commitment to renewable energy to 4,000 megawatts from 5,500 megawatts of support for clean and sustainable production.

The budget also keeps tax breaks for new oil sands expansion in place until 2015 to help with their plan for explosive growth. It slows our planned cleanup of lakes and waterways. It replaces rewards for those who make energy savings changes with gimmicks that cost thousands of dollars for every tonne reduced. It reduces funding to our provincial partners by half. There is no plan to make sure polluters pay for using the atmosphere as a free garbage dump.

It is obvious that the government has no plan for the environment. The public cannot be fooled into thinking that a few announcements or a rebate on a dozen cars constitute a vision for Canada's environment and for combating climate change.

In my presentation today, one focus has been on how the budget has failed Canada's business community, which helps Canadians by providing jobs, goods and services. During the budget debate, I spoke about how just the fact that the government refuses to lower the income tax rate to the Liberals' rate of 15% is reason enough that I cannot support the budget, in that it does not treat all Canadians fairly.

I have already discussed the failure of the Conservatives on the tourism front, but I would like to pay attention to some specific initiatives that were being promoted by business groups during the finance committee prebudget consultations and have been ignored by the government.

Government Orders

Canada is not keeping up the pace as it should be in the global economy. Not many people dispute the fact that one of the most important challenges before us as a country is lagging productivity, but the budget has the country standing still on this issue.

Other countries are moving forward. The changes for accelerated capital cost allowances are definitely a good measure, but it is not enough for industries, especially those in the manufacturing sector that have previously invested in capital and equipment either last year or even this year prior to the budget. They get no help.

The problem is also there with regard to industries that do not require capital investment but rely heavily on human resource investment. These industries also need help to keep Canada at the forefront of global competition and they have been shown nothing in the budget.

[*Translation*]

Money has been invested in universities to ensure that tomorrow's workforce is on the cutting edge, but the paltry sum allocated to the Canada foundation for innovation is barely enough to ensure its survival.

•(1550)

[*English*]

Although there are investments for Canada's 4,000 post-graduates, how about the hundreds of thousands of undergraduates who are being left out in the cold?

Although the changes to the sustainable technology development fund will help bridge the financing gap between ideas and commercialization, there is much work to be done to make our tax rates internationally competitive as well as expand access to Canadian goods in overseas markets.

The Liberal government had solid plans and programs in place to deal with the challenges facing our industries.

In 2005 we put forward the CAN-Trade strategy, which provided \$485 million over five years to help Canadian businesses succeed in emerging markets. The Conservatives scrapped this initiative and have now replaced it with \$60 million over the next two years.

The Conservative budget also cuts \$970 million from the indirect costs of research program, which provides support to Canada's universities.

[*Translation*]

These are only a few examples of this government's catastrophic lack of vision. Some of the measures announced in the budget and debated here today constitute a few steps in the right direction but those steps are too little and too late.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my other life I happened to be involved in the tourism industry. The hon. member mentions the government's position on the former GST visitor rebate program. I know, having dealt with that program first-hand, there were a lot of problems with it.

He talks about the fact that small business was not being listened to, but let me quote Mr. Tony Pollard, who happens to be the president of the Hotel Association of Canada. In its release he says:

The Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) has congratulated [the] Finance Minister...and [the Prime Minister]...for their recognition of the importance of hotels in the new federal budget.

We applaud [the] Minister [of Finance] for maintaining the convention and tour component of the GST/HST Visitor Rebate Program...The Minister has always told us that he greatly values the economic development contribution of hotels across Canada. He listened to us.

This is what we hear from the industry.

I know the hon. member sat on the finance committee. Now that the government has recognized and fixed the program, which did have a lot of problems and which I know first-hand from my involvement in my private business, could the hon. member tell us why he thinks the government was not listening when in fact the industry leaders are telling us that the government did listen?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of issues. I have no problem with the hotel and convention industry getting their GST back, but I think part of the problem was that the program was not made better. It was cancelled and then reintroduced only for the foreign convention and tour aspect. Meanwhile, visitors who come here and rely on getting a GST rebate back are not going to get it.

We are in a competitive world. We are competing for tourism dollars. One of the attractions that Canada offers is this GST rebate, whether we believe it or not. In his previous business maybe he found this not to be a profitable type of business, or nobody obliged him. However, the witnesses we heard before the finance committee felt this business was not only profitable for them, it was also profitable for the tourism industry in Canada and it was able to attract additional visitors to Canada.

We should be listening to those people and finding a way to make the program work so Canadians benefit from the tourism dollars that come into the country.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of serving on the finance committee in which we saw the absolute horror of the financial damage done to thousands of seniors with the income trust debacle, the pure lie of the Conservative government of promising not to make any changes in income trusts and then coming in with a huge change wiping out \$25 billion of savings from seniors from the market capitalization.

We heard that this was done on the basis of tax leakage by the government. Experts told us that this was not the reason. The governor of the bank told us there were business sectors in there that were perfectly legitimate and in which it was perfectly useful to have.

Government Orders

Could the member tell me if it would have been possible in this budget to repair some of those damages? Does he see anything in the budget that should restore confidence in the voters of Canada in the ability of the current government to manage our economy?

• (1555)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, there are different ways in which the whole income trust issue could have been addressed. It is not for me to say, but the Liberal suggestion is the one that I would have chosen.

The government's solution was to hit the seniors with a \$25 billion to \$30 billion hit and then give them an extra \$1,000 on income splitting if they made \$50,000 to \$60,000 on their pension incomes. I am not sure that is a solution. I would rather have seen more of a delicate approach toward the income trust aspect announcement so Canadians in general would not have been hit with a \$25 billion to \$30 billion market devaluation overnight.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about a missed opportunity in the federal budget, and that is, one of investing in a national children's food initiative to make safe and healthy food available to all of Canada's children.

The children's health and nutrition initiative calls for universal nutritious food programs to make breakfasts, snacks or lunches available to any child in Canada under the age of 18 in venues most appropriate, as decided by each local community. This would be based on a flexible, made in Canada community development model. This initiative would be delivered through existing programs, local organizations and communities and parents groups, based on community models that are proven. We know they work.

Any non-profit organization, parent council, principal or local government could start such a program, but the food would have to be nutritious, with an emphasis on locally grown food. The federal government would provide \$25 million to get this under way. The federal government would also set national standards to ensure we achieved healthy nutrition in every part of Canada.

This initiative would mean that no Canadian child would go to school hungry and would help working families address real concerns relating to childhood obesity and malnutrition.

Overweight and obesity doubled among the six to seventeen year olds between 1979 and 2000 and obesity tripled among Canadian teenagers. Many children's diets are poor and diet-related outcomes, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol are rising among Canadian children. Poor nutrition has been linked to low academic performance, classroom behaviour problems, low self-esteem, as well as long term health risks. More than seven out of ten children do not eat the recommended daily minimum of five servings of vegetables and fruit as recommended by Canada's food guide. Even more alarming is that a quarter of grade 4 students and almost half of grade 8 girls do not eat breakfast every day.

Health Canada estimates that diet related cases of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain forms of cancer among adults rob the national economy of \$6.6 billion annually due to health care costs and lost productivity.

The sad truth is Canada is one of the few developed countries without a nationally funded child nutrition program. Child nutrition

programs already operate in some parts of the country, but not all Canadian children have access to these programs and the continuation of these efforts usually is subject to fundraising and volunteer time.

Dramatic changes have been made recently in other jurisdictions. For example, the British government is spending an extra £240 million, that is \$520 million Canadian, to subsidize healthy ingredients for children's school meals. However, we do not have that in Canada.

In the U.S., 29 million children participate in the national school lunch program through more than 98,000 schools and child care institutions. On a typical day, 59% of these kids receive free or reduced price lunches. About 9.6 million children also participate in the school breakfast program. The total federal funding for these programs was \$8.8 billion U.S. in 2005. However, we do not have that in Canada.

In Italy 68% of school meals use organic products and many municipalities are emphasizing local and traditional food. The 140,000 meals serve every school day to children in Rome must include a healthy and organic snack and a warm meal based on traditional recipes. The government offers rebates to public sector caterers that purchase local and organic products.

The incentives help increase the production of quality foods, lower environmental impacts, because they do not have to fly food from different places, provide more sustainable local employment and support better child nutrition and health. However, we have nothing like that in Canada.

• (1600)

Today and tomorrow, children and youth advocates across Canada are gathered in Ottawa for a National Learning Summit on Middle Childhood. Breakfast for Learning, a national organization, will be presenting a paper on child nutrition, and children's health is very much on the agenda at this conference.

The benefits are clear, For children. It means better health and a better opportunity for learning. I saw that first-hand as a school trustee 20 years ago. If children are hungry, they do not learn. This is not just about hunger, or poverty, or undernourishment. It is about bad nutrition, about junk food, about obesity. If children are obese, they cannot participate in all school activities and they also have trouble learning.

Government Orders

We can think of the human toll on children and their families, but let us also think about the toll on society and on the health care system. Total health care spending was \$4,548 per person in 2006, with more than two-thirds of direct health care costs being expended on chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain forms of cancer. These kinds of disease rob the national economy of \$6.6 billion annually due to health costs and lower productivity.

If we do not do something about children's health today, it will get worse. It is already really poor. Bad eating habits can last a lifetime and can be passed on to the next generation. Therefore, this initiative is also good for the economy.

Having healthy children means better learning, better academic performance, reduced medicare costs and higher productivity for Canada. Also by emphasizing local and sustainable food sources, the initiative will support production of quality food, strengthening the local farm communities and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The need for this is very clear and so is the support from leaders in this children's healthy nutrition initiative.

We have a list of a broad range of groups that support this program, such as food writer, Natalie MacLean of Ottawa, James Chatto, Sasha Chapman, Liz Feltham and award winning chef Susur Lee, Sash Simpson, Chris MacDonald, Chris Wood, Winlai Wong, Ian Sorbie, Chris Klugman, Anthony Walsh and so on.

Therefore, food writers and chefs are all in support of this program. It is time for Canada to show leadership in children's health with a practical children's healthy nutrition initiative.

Good nutrition is vital to the health of children in Canada. Unfortunately, the Conservative budget has massive corporate tax cuts, but nothing to ensure that safe and healthy food is available to all Canadian kids.

It is not fair and it is a complete missed opportunity.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Trinity—Spadina represents a beautiful riding in downtown Toronto. I have many fond memories of it, having lived there for many years on Brunswick Avenue and on St. George Street.

Nevertheless, I listened to her debate on the budget. While I disagree with her about her arguments with respect to agriculture, because I think the government has done a lot for Canadian agriculture and for our food supply in the last year or year and a half, it is work that is much needed, and we are moving in the right direction in Canadian agriculture.

I am particularly interested in her comments about sourcing local food supplies. We all know in the House that chicken, eggs, milk, milk products, like butter and cheese, and turkeys are all locally sourced. They are produced through supply management and therefore they are Canadian produced and Canadian consumed.

However, with respect to other commodities like beef, wheat and products like that, which are not in the supply managed chain, how does she propose to ensure that locally grown products are locally consumed? Is it through some sort of marketing identification

program like Foodland Ontario, or is it through some other measures?

I would be interested to hear the views of the member Trinity—Spadina on this.

• (1605)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, many things can be done to ensure locally produced food is available, whether it is local markets or community markets. For example, in June in my riding there will be a new community market for local farmers to bring food into the communities and sell it directly to people who want to shop locally.

Also there is a proposal in Toronto right now to establish a processing centre so that the foods that are being produced in southern Ontario can be processed in a place in Toronto, for example, and then can be kept. It can be an incubator to help some of the ethnic communities, for example, that want to create or process their food. It will create a lot of jobs and it will help local farmers. It will also be able to be sold back to a lot of the citizens, not just in downtown Toronto but across southern Ontario where there is a very large population.

Instead of bringing food from different places, such as Chile, Mexico, China or many other places, we can eat local food. It is good for the economy, for the farmers, for our kids' health and for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

If there were a national food program, whether it is in schools or community centres all across the city and in different parts of Canada, we could do bulk purchasing.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for emphasizing food for schools. I also congratulate the thousands of volunteers across the country who work in that area. I have always been very supportive of this. It is absolutely fundamental. I have arranged a room so its members can lobby on the Hill. I cannot imagine any member of Parliament who would not support food for learning. It almost should be a human right that when a child goes to school they do not need to go hungry. How can they even concentrate when such a basic need is missing?

Along the same theme, would the member support another initiative I am trying to push, which is to increase the subsidy for fresh foods in the far and remote north? It is a different situation in the north. The food is so expensive that even middle income people might not be able to afford the food for their children, certainly not expensive food. Dried junk food might be cheaper because the freight rates are not so high.

Would the member support increasing the subsidies so that high quality fresh foods and vegetables and nutritious foods can be sent to the children of the north?

Government Orders

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. In some of the northern communities right now it is cheaper to buy a bottle of Coke than fresh milk or apples. It is a desperate situation especially in some of the aboriginal communities. We have worked together with them through breakfast for learning. All the volunteer sectors across Canada are saying that we need to invest in food, especially in remote communities, which is why this model we are talking about is a made in Canada, very locally driven initiative.

Some of the food will be more expensive in other locations, which is why the Canadian government must invest in this. We are only talking about \$25 million. It is not a very expensive program. I hope one day that all Canadian children will have access to nutritious and healthy food.

•(1610)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the budget. It would be impossible to not have a few good things in a budget of this nature. This is the biggest spending budget in the history of the country. What is disappointing is the missed opportunity to assist Canadians and to build a nation.

The government, obviously, was trying to find pockets of potential support, people who would be more apt to change their vote to them in a federal election and stuff their pockets, so it wanted to do a few things for them, but there was no consideration to building a nation.

I believe that the way to build a nation is by helping those who are most in need achieve their potential. We cannot make everybody rich nor can we make everybody equal but we can assist people to achieve their potential. However, we do not see that in the budget and we do not see any attempt at it. We do not see any real investment in education or any real investment in assisting the people who are struggling the most.

What is worse, when I look down the line, I see more budgets like this. I see transfers of some \$37 billion to the provinces, not on the basis of need but on the basis of demographics, where the potential is to win an election.

I even see areas of high need, like Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan where a promise has been broken. In the case of Nova Scotia, the Atlantic accord has been completely shattered. When the Conservatives were in opposition they were screaming out for the accord. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland were to get the benefits of the accord independent of any other programs, independent of any future changes in the equalization program, another part of the cost shared program.

What do we have now? The premiers must decide whether to take the new equalization formula instead of the Atlantic accord. All of a sudden, the premiers are forced to play a game of roulette. The provinces can take the instant money now and forego any future benefits of the non-renewable energy and non-renewable resources and the investments that could happen in their provinces.

Now we hear rumours that the government is negotiating in order to save the suggestion of the member for Central Nova and Premier MacDonald. It is trying to find some little deal that would permit the Premier of Nova Scotia to say that he supports the federal Conservative government. The Conservatives have him over a barrel. He is coming up to an election and he is in a minority

situation. The popularity of his provincial government is not very high. He will need to come up with some agreement. He will need to settle.

That was not the intent of the Atlantic accord. The intent of the accord was to give stability to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Here we have, exactly as we had in the income trust question, a bald-faced lie with a broken promise. The Prime Minister promises one thing but at the end of the day does something completely different.

The other thing that scares me for the future is the fact that the Conservatives have committed to another GST cut. They keep putting it back because they are running out of room. They are spending money very fast. They are making these transfers to the provinces but they are limiting their ability for revenue in the future. The real risk here is that in a few years, if trends continue and there is some decline in the economy, we could be in Mulroney-type deficits again, which is very scary.

The Conservatives say that they want to cut the GST by another percentage point in a few years. That is \$6 billion. If they put \$6 billion toward the child tax credit, that money would take one million kids in this country above the poverty line. That is not rich and it is not out of poverty but it is above the statistical measure that we call the poverty line. It is, in my opinion, the absolute least that someone needs to survive in this country. One million kids could be brought above the poverty line. There is some potential to do it but that is not the intent. According to the government, it is not here to build a nation, it is here to worry about the next election.

I was pleased to see pension income sharing for seniors in the budget, which is a good thing, but there is a whole segment of seniors who I see every day in rural Nova Scotia who are suffering and having a hard time and there is nothing in the budget for them. The budget increases taxes for them by 0.5% but they have received no assistance. I am talking about single seniors.

•(1615)

If a senior couple live in old stock housing, as they typically do in rural areas, and they both receive the senior benefits and the guaranteed income supplement, they can get by. However, when one goes, the other is left with the same expenses and a lot less revenue. It is often the wife who is left behind and often some of the work and the repairs that could be done by the spouse cannot be done any more. The costs are more but the government has nothing in the budget to assist these people.

Government Orders

We have the small craft harbours in Atlantic Canada and the Minister of Fisheries did not receive a penny. He was not able to get any assistance from the federal government. When he was a member of the fisheries committee he was asking for more money for small craft harbours. Along with my colleagues, I was able to get \$100 million over five years for small craft harbours but that expires this year. The \$20 million a year will not be replaced and the total amount was reduced. The Conservatives voted for a motion put forward by the member from Prince Edward Island to increase and put back the \$50 million. They voted for it but they did not do it. They then cut that \$100 million over five years, which means \$20 million less work is being done to support these communities.

While in opposition, the Conservatives screamed that the port of Digby had to be taken care of and yet there is not a penny and not a word, not taking it back as it should be.

It is not their fault that the problem is there. I was not elected at the time but the Liberals were in government when it was done. It was a bad contract negotiated by Transport Canada. For 16 months the government has had the report indicating that it is the federal government's fault, a bad contract, and yet it has done nothing. They have not taken that port back but they screamed about it forever.

We see huge investments in the Coast Guard. The Conservatives re-announced the money that we had already announced. The government has changed the tact of the Coast Guard. I always understood that the Coast Guard was there providing for the security of mariners. However, apparently the Coast Guard is now out there to save ministers. Two vessels were taken from Halifax and moved to two different ridings in Newfoundland, with no logic to it other than to try to save a couple of ridings because the government knows the political problems it is having in Newfoundland.

A fisheries research vessel was moved from the Maritimes to Newfoundland because the Minister of Fisheries was worried about his own election success. He is not worried or concerned about the future of the fisheries, as I mentioned earlier.

When we were examining the main estimates in the House, the Minister of National Defence was before us. I asked him about a contribution to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre operating out of Cornwallis Park. He said that absolutely the funding would be there, that there would be funding from external affairs, from CIDA and that he at national defence would do his share. It has been operating internationally out of that area for seven years and creating very good jobs and doing good work around the world. Now we hear that the government will cut the funding. That is the rumour and usually those rumours are true when they are heard.

There is no mention of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre in the budget, not anywhere. It will not be found on any line, although the minister promised and said it in the House.

The minister also said that Greenwood would be very pleased with the investments at the Greenwood base. What do we hear now? We hear that the work on the upgrade of the Aurora aircraft will stop and that the fleet will be cut by half at the Greenwood base. That is the rumour that we are hearing. Apparently the minister was to announce it a few years ago but he is having so much trouble in his public

acceptance that he backed off. We hear that it will be announced after the election. That is absolutely unacceptable.

We also know about the income trusts and now we hear of the foreign investment income trust polices being cancelled. As a great saviour for tax fairness, we hear that a bunch of Canadian companies are being sold offshore. This is a hollowing out of our corporate sector. This is the same as the government did with income trusts, the other bald-faced lie.

Finally, I would like to talk about education. Nova Scotia has more seats in its universities per capita than any other province in this country but is that reflected in the transfers for education? No. It is completely per capita, by the individual number of people living in each province. Once again, we see that Quebec and Ontario get the gold mine and Nova Scotia gets the shaft.

This budget is absolutely unfair to the people who need the support the most, the people who want to develop their potential and build this country, not just a meaningless Conservative majority.

● (1620)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech and he seemed to drift from one side to the other on the budget. I am not exactly sure what he was getting at.

I would point a couple of things out in his speech. He spoke a little bit about post-secondary education. I am very proud of what the government has done on post-secondary education with a 40% increase in post-secondary funding.

I am very proud of the investments that the government is making in infrastructure. The member forgot about infrastructure which was a major failing of the previous government. The Liberals allowed infrastructure to decline to the extent that they did, a \$60 billion deficit nation-wide. I never heard anything about that in the member's speech.

I would also like to know why he alluded a couple of times to income trusts and so forth. I am very proud of the actions the government has taken. I would like to know why he supports his government's position for a corporate tax holiday? Why does he think corporations should not pay tax? I would really like to know that because what people in my riding of Peterborough do not like hearing is that they must pay taxes while others do not.

We believe in tax fairness on this side of the House. I would love to know why the Liberals do not.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, everybody in the House who clearly understands it believes in tax fairness. The problem is that the member does not understand it. He believes the buzzwords of a Harris flunky on tax fairness. As we heard the critic for finance say, every time the Minister of Finance talks about tax fairness, taxpayers have to reach into their pockets to give more.

Government Orders

Tax fairness does not include a system of taxation for investments that puts external companies ahead of Canadian companies and reduces the competitiveness of Canadian companies. In order to grow, often companies have to grow internationally. If our companies cannot invest internationally, they are going to be sold internationally and that is the absolute truth.

I believe in tax fairness. We need a good tax regime. We cut taxes on this side after we eliminated the deficit. We cut taxes by over \$100 million, I think \$130 million and some, to make ourselves more competitive. We made investments in education, research and development, and infrastructure.

There is still a lot to be done, but what did we see? We saw the Conservatives inherit the best financial and fiscal situation of any government ever and they cut the infrastructure program with provinces and municipalities. They made a straight transfer of less money to the provinces and ruined the partnerships that had been created with municipalities, communities, and provincial governments just to get their quick sound bite. I do not think a fashion consultant is going to be able to fix the incompetence of this government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and address one of the points he raised toward the end on a matter that in my view is essential and very important to our communities, and that is the matter of small craft harbours.

The situation is beyond catastrophic. As we know full well, a solution had been implemented by the previous government, the Liberal government, but unfortunately the Conservative government is up to its old tricks. At least the Liberals made an effort for small craft harbours. Nonetheless, the budget far from addresses the situation.

The solution that was introduced, when a wharf was dilapidated or causing problems, was to install a gate rather than repair what should have been repaired over the years. The simple excuse was that this was in the interest of safety for those who use the wharf.

Instead of repairs being made, the situation was allowed to deteriorate to the point that the safety of the fishers from the various communities was jeopardized.

I can only support the hon. member's initiative in this matter. However, I would like to point out that the port administrations in these communities are being run by volunteers. Recently, during a meeting of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, these people told us they were exhausted. In my opinion, it is high time the federal government stepped in.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. He is quite right. When I was elected in 2000, the annual budget allocated to the small craft harbours program was approximately \$100 million. That was nowhere near sufficient.

The quality of our small craft harbours has consistently diminished. The size of the boats was increasing and the harbours were getting bigger. Modern harbours were needed. Old harbours could not even be maintained. Funding was increased by \$20 million

per year for five years. It was still insufficient, but it was an improvement. It was a great leap forward.

In our election platform, we promised to increase this amount by another \$150 million a year. That is what is needed. Some \$250 million a year is needed for five years to restore and maintain our harbours, and some \$150 million a year will be needed to prepare for the future. At present, there is a decrease of approximately \$35 million a year.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to enter into the debate at the final stages of the implementation of the budget put forward by the Conservative government.

I represent the riding of Winnipeg Centre which has the highest aboriginal population of any riding in Canada. There are roughly 16,000 people who self-identified themselves in the last census as being either first nation, Métis or Inuit. I point out that this would be by far the largest aboriginal reserve, were my riding considered a reserve. On the face of it, the city of Winnipeg, and more often than not the inner city of Winnipeg, the city centre I represent, is becoming increasingly the area where first nations people leave the desperation of their reserves to seek opportunity.

Let me say by way of introduction that the social condition of Canada's first nations, Métis and Inuit people is Canada's greatest failure and perhaps Canada's greatest shame. Fully 46% of all the families in the riding of Winnipeg Centre live below the poverty line. I say that with no pride, believe me, and 52% of all the children in the riding of Winnipeg Centre live below the poverty line. These are staggering statistics.

It ties in with my first point that overwhelmingly the face of poverty in my riding is Indian, if I can use that term. People are not finding opportunity as they flock to the inner city. They are living on the margins. They are living on the edge. I point this out only to make the point that when we do not deal with social conditions, we run the risk of social unrest.

I want to recognize and pay tribute again, by way of introduction, to the aboriginal leadership within my riding and on first nations reserves, among the elders, the chief and council, for keeping a lid on social unrest that is just at the verge of boiling over at any point in time.

Let us not kid ourselves. We are living in some kind of a vacuum in the House of Commons if we do not recognize and acknowledge that there is an underclass in Canada, and it is native. That underclass will not remain peaceful when it loses hope.

We lived through the Oka crisis. This is a cautionary tale I am speaking of here, but we lived through the Oka crisis and we were virtually on the edge of civil unrest at that time. The Oka crisis was not isolated to that area of the outskirts of Montreal. In fact, there were rumblings of discontent right across the land. The leadership in other areas kept a lid on that social unrest and discontent, watching what would be the outcome of Oka.

Government Orders

Fortunately, we got through that with a minimum of violence, a minimum of social unrest on the condition that we gave some promise and some hope. That was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, a five year, \$500 million comprehensive royal commission on the state of the social conditions of first nations, Métis and aboriginal people. That was hope. There was hope generated. There was optimism in the land that finally Canada would decide once and for all that society does not move forward unless we all move forward together. There is an enlightened self-interest associated with not having a permanent underclass.

That was the optimism around the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. That hope, that optimism, has been dwindling ever since the tabling of the royal commission, which I believe was in 1995. Since then it has been gathering dust. There was a summary report on the implementation of the recommendations of the royal commission. It was called "Gathering Strength" and the joke in Indian country was that it was gathering dust because not a single one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had been implemented, not one.

• (1630)

To this day, the hope and the goodwill that was generated by the recognition of the social conditions that first nations people face has been dissipating and dwindling to the point where we are back at this crisis point, where I do not know if the leadership of first nations, Métis and Inuit communities can hold their dissidents back. I do not know when that is going to boil over into social unrest.

We have seen the riots in L.A. We have seen in the civil rights movement, the major American cities boiling over and then blowing up. It was burn, baby, burn as people were lashing out in their frustration and the inequity of living in the richest and most powerful civilization in the history of the world, and we cannot even provide for the basic needs of a family to survive if they are Indian and living in the inner city of Winnipeg.

There might be 1,000 reasons for it, and I am not making excuses here, but believe me the reason is not that people are not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, as some critics would have us believe to be the case. There are inequities that have not been addressed. There are legal obligations that have not been addressed and not budgeted for in this budget, to stay on point and to stay relevant.

My colleague, the Minister of Indian Affairs, says that we are spending more money than ever on the aboriginal peoples, up to \$10 billion, but he is being disingenuous in a sense because some of that \$10 billion is in fact just meeting legal obligations in court cases that we have lost over land issues or land claims. That is not part of the social spending that we believe is necessary to elevate the standards of living conditions of aboriginal people to the mean average that Canadians enjoy.

I say this with the greatest respect. We have failed in our mission by ignoring the greatest social crisis in our midst. I have spoken to first nations leadership and I will be speaking to them this Wednesday at a rally in Winnipeg specifically about this budget. They feel that their legitimate claims and concerns have been ignored by a government that would rather see them simply get on with it, solve their own problems and move on.

There is nothing more unfair than treating unequal people equally. There is an equality issue we have to deal with here. A lot of people say that aboriginal people have the same opportunities as any other person in Canada. I read an appalling paper written by a Professor Tom Flanagan, who was an adviser to this government, I understand, called *Why Don't Indians Drive Taxis?* Why do they not just get on with it? Other immigrants come to this country and they drive taxis, and their children go to university, and within a generation they are middle class. He just does not get it. If that is the type of logic that is informing the policies of this government, then we are on the road to conflict.

I do not know how much longer the aboriginal leadership can hold their people back because they deserve a medal for patience so far and for the restraint that they have shown in seeking an essentially Gandhi-like commitment to peaceful negotiation and demonstrations. That will not last forever.

I caution this government and all members of Parliament that we cannot have our heads in the sand about the inequities that are inherent in our current paternalistic relationship with first nations. Unless we address a meaningful transfer of control of land and resources, no amount of social welfare is going to change the status of aboriginal people.

We are embarrassed internationally by the third world conditions. Some of the only successes aboriginal leaders have seem to be when they block a railroad or a highway, or when they go to the United Nations and show the rest of the world this glaring social crisis that we have in this country, where a significant number of Canadians are being left behind.

Living in the richest and most prosperous civilization the world has ever known, there is no excuse to have a permanent underclass. We are not trying hard enough if we are not bringing aboriginal people along with us in the prosperity of this great nation.

I felt it was my duty to use these few minutes to remind the House of Commons of our obligation to live up to the legal obligations, our commitments to aboriginal people, whether it is in the implementation of treaties or the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

• (1635)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just as the member thought it was his duty to remind us of how important aboriginals are, I too think it is our duty to remind people that we found it was important to address aboriginals with a strategy. Therefore, we did commit to aboriginal Canadians, provinces and territories to find a workable, innovative solution.

For example, in budget 2006, we provided \$300 million for off reserve aboriginal housing and \$300 million in affordable housing, and also \$300 million starting in 2007-08 for aboriginal communities in the priority areas of education, women, children, families, water and housing.

Government Orders

In 2007, we had initiatives such as \$14.5 million over two years to expand the aboriginal justice strategy. As the member said, is not always about money. It is about addressing some of the social issues too. The \$300 million to give first nation members the opportunity to own their own homes is a very good start. I know that in our riding and in Saskatchewan one of the issues was that many of the aboriginal women said they would appreciate being able to own their own homes and to have property and matrimonial rights. I could go on, but I think the member can see it for himself.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the total commitment to first nations, Métis and Inuit issues in this budget is \$14 per head. That does not even scratch the surface in the appalling need that is illustrated out there. It is not lost on aboriginal leadership that we seem to be able to find billions of dollars at any time at the drop of a hat to buy more tanks or to buy submarines that do not even float, or sink, or whatever they are supposed to do.

However, if we try to raise the point of the appalling social conditions of first nations people and the incidence of poverty and neglect and the wasted opportunity of another generation of children not taking part fully in all that our society has to offer, people scream bloody murder that we are giving money away to the Indians again. This is an appalling contradiction.

I should remind my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, that the \$300 million in the 2006 budget is money that the NDP negotiated and it was wrestled out of the Liberals in Bill C-48 to be spent on aboriginal housing. It was like pulling teeth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre and, since I sit on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I am rather concerned.

I do not know what the recommendation will be, since we are divided on the matter at this time. First nations are facing a serious problem. To pursue what my hon. colleague was saying, certain communities are located in very isolated regions, while others are near municipalities, whether large or small. Furthermore, some aboriginals are leaving their isolated communities to settle in larger centres such as Winnipeg, Regina or Prince Albert.

I do wonder, however—and I know how important this debate is—does my hon. colleague believe that we will solve the problems facing aboriginal communities simply by pumping in more and more money? There are two types of problems, since aboriginals who live near large centres face different problems than those who live in isolated regions.

Does the hon. member believe that pumping in more money will solve these problems?

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, when we look at the reality and divide the total allocation of the department, whether it is \$9 billion or \$10 billion—people differ on it—it is roughly \$9,000 or \$10,000 per person to pay for everything from housing to infrastructure to education to health care to welfare.

We spend \$9,000 per person for high school alone in the province of Manitoba. The whole system is chronically underfunded. I see a former minister of Indian affairs nodding his head. Some problems cannot be solved by throwing money at them. For other problems, that is exactly what is required.

We can find \$14 billion a year to keep 50,000 soldiers going. We have \$10 billion a year to meet our legal obligations to a million first nations people. We are falling short by a factor of 10.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Yukon, Northern strategy; the hon. member for Windsor West, Automobile industry; the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Manufacturing industry.

[*English*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Mount Royal.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, March 19, 2007, the government presented its budget to the House of Commons. Today, we are debating the budget implementation act. What I would like to do now is address the budget in light of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, whose 25th anniversary we are now commemorating and indeed celebrating.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is, in effect, a veritable people's charter of rights and freedoms because it has had a transformative impact not only on our laws, but on our lives. In particular, it has had a transformative impact on the most vulnerable amongst us, be they the aboriginal people, the disabled, women and the like.

If we go around the country and ask people, as I did when I was the minister of justice and since then, if they are better off now than they were before the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted, the answer is invariably yes. When we speak to the vulnerable among us, we see that it is particularly true. This is especially important because the test of a just society is how it protects those who are the most vulnerable.

Regrettably, the budget not only fails to meet the needs of all Canadians, particularly those of the vulnerable, but it dismantles the very institutions and instruments that were created to protect the most vulnerable and to defend their rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Government Orders

In particular, the budget, among other things, ignores the need for a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid system, dismantles the Law Commission of Canada, and the court challenges program, fails to meet the needs of our aboriginal people, and does a disservice to women and students. Let me look at these particular areas in turn.

Number one, on the matter of legal aid, one of the last initiatives in which I engaged as the minister of justice was to preside over a meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers of justice in this country. At that meeting, the ministers there assembled unanimously recommended the need for a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid system for Canada.

The ministers understood then, and it is important to reaffirm now, that, for example, section 10(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms confers upon an arrested person the right to retain and instruct counsel without delay; that article 14(3)(d) of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights confers upon an accused person the right to legal assistance and goes on to stipulate that this legal assistance is to be provided by the government if the accused cannot pay for it; that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is to provide as much protection in our domestic law as international human rights laws provide, as exemplified by the international covenant. For example, international law imposes upon Canada an obligation to provide legal aid to indigent people and to protect the rights of indigent accused; therefore, section 10(b) of the charter can be said to constitutionalize our international obligations in this regard.

Moreover, this constitutional responsibility, as we have taken note of late, is particularly compelling now as there are more and more indigents before the courts without legal assistance, and therefore, in the absence of such legal assistance, for which we have a constitutional responsibility to provide. We are arguably in the face of people being denied the right to a fair trial.

What is true with respect to the need for comprehensive criminal legal aid is no less true with respect to the need for civil legal aid, because here the absence of civil legal aid impacts disproportionately on the most vulnerable amongst us. We only have to look at child custody proceedings to see the impact with respect to the absence of civil legal aid or where claimants are seeking to exercise their rights, particularly the elderly with respect to social assistance or with respect to aboriginal people, and I can go on.

The absence of civil legal aid, together with the absence of criminal legal aid, speaks to the importance of a comprehensive responsibility that we now have to in fact bring into play. I am delighted that the leader of our party has spoken about it and has said that if this party were to form the government we would both increase criminal legal aid and make provision for civil legal aid.

•(1645)

Indeed, this would reflect and represent the open federalism that the new government, as it calls itself, speaks about but does not implement, because this open federalism, if the Conservatives were to implement it, would act upon the unanimous recommendations of federal, provincial and territorial ministers of justice to in fact have a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid program.

That brings me to the second area, and that is the dismantling of the Law Commission of Canada. Here I can speak from my own experience and involvement as a minister of justice, and before that as a law professor and human rights lawyer. This is a Law Commission of Canada that was dismantled even though it played an indispensable role in the lives of Canadians, in bridging the disparities between what might be law on the books and law in action, providing to me as minister indispensable research and advice with respect to matters that come before a minister, and which also provided through the minister independent research advice and related policy options to the Parliament of Canada, to whom the minister reports.

This engaged Canadians in an ongoing conversation about their rights, about the disparities, and sometimes about what is law on the books and the exercise of that law in action, particularly in terms of partnerships that the Law Commission of Canada formed with the youth of Canada, the elderly of Canada and the aboriginal people of Canada. Therefore, it is not surprising that the occasion of the dismantling of the Law Commission of Canada was regarded as a blemish not only on Canada but on our international reputation.

I can tell members that wherever I travelled internationally, whether it be in Argentina or Europe, I was asked how we could go ahead and dismantle the Law Commission of Canada which, apart from the value that it certainly had for us as Canadians, had value for others internationally in terms of the independent quality of expertise, research, advice and counsel. It was acting as a kind of international counsel to the world community, particularly with respect to how it would protect, among other things, the rights of the vulnerable.

That is why I am delighted as well that the leader of our party has announced that not only would he restore the Law Commission of Canada but he would protect it in law because the Law Commission of Canada is a creature of Parliament. Being a creature of Parliament and answerable to Parliament, it should be protected by Parliament as well. Therefore, the Liberals would reinstitute a Law Commission of Canada and protect it in such a manner that it could not be dismantled by administrative whim or fiat in opposition to the needs of the people of Canada.

This brings me now to the third area and that is the court challenges program. The court challenges program is not as it has sometimes been spoken of by members of the new government, as they call themselves, who should look more to our experience with it and see that it has not been the vestige of the special interests as they have claimed; rather, it has been there for the people of Canada to promote and protect equality rights and to promote and protect the rights of the most vulnerable.

Government Orders

The court challenges program was there to promote universal access to the exercise of the rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to promote and protect the equality rights provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In its principles and precedents, in a manner in which it found expression before the courts, the court challenges program became responsible for articulating those arguments before the courts that ended up in the elucidation of those principles and precedents, which provided the protection for the most vulnerable among us as it protected the fundamental rights and freedoms under the charter.

That brings me now to the question of the aboriginal peoples and the disregard by the government with respect to the Kelowna accords. The disregard for the \$5 billion set aside for aboriginal needs meant also the disregarding of the seven Rs of aboriginal justice that we sought to put in place.

When I speak about the seven Rs, I am referring to: the recognition of the aboriginal peoples, the original inhabitants of this country; the respect for their specific and distinguishable constitutional status under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and under the Constitution; the redress by the government for past wrongs; the redressing of the over-representation of aboriginal people in the criminal justice system; the under-representation of aboriginal people in the justice system of judges, lawyers and prosecutors and the like; and the importance of bringing about the kind of responsiveness that our constitutional framework requires in our relationship with aboriginal people.

I will conclude—

• (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, currently there are 27,000 first nations children in the care of child welfare agencies across Canada. The main reason for taking children into care is physical neglect due to poverty.

The member talked about the vulnerable. We know that most of the aboriginals who live in big urban centres are single parents.

Right now under the Conservative budget a single mother on welfare does not get the \$310 per child tax credit. She does not get the worker's tax credit because she probably cannot go to work without affordable child care and there are not enough spaces. Her national child tax benefit is also being clawed back from the provincial government.

Is it fair that for single parents this budget offers absolutely no relief, especially for single parents who may be from first nations and who are living in urban centres?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased about the question. Not only does it touch the fundamental issue with respect to the protection of the vulnerable, but it addresses the question of poverty that is inextricably bound up with all the issues that I addressed, among others the need for a comprehensive system of civil and criminal legal aid. In fact, single mothers are among the groups that remain unprotected or are disproportionately impacted upon in the absence of a civil legal aid system.

When we look at the budget, clearly, it fails to help working families. In 2006 the Conservatives promised 125,000 new child care spaces over five years. Some 15 months into the government's mandate, Canadian families realize that there has been absolutely no implementation with respect to that particular obligation.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all acknowledge that the federal government has a responsibility for the provision of legal aid within its responsibility for criminal law. However, a big part of the legal aid system in this country is the provincial legal aid system, a system of legal aid run by the various provinces under their responsibility for property, for civil affairs and for the administration of justice.

The budget significantly increases the transfers to the provinces by \$39 billion over the next seven years, one of the biggest increases to provincial transfers in recent memory. It is money that the provinces will be able to use for a variety of purposes, including enhancing their legal aid programs.

Before the hon. member answers my question, I would point out that this is a very significant transfer that is going to enhance the access to legal services for Canadians, especially those who cannot afford it.

I would add that after the former minister of finance under the Liberal government slashed the transfers to the provinces in 1995, the following year in 1996-97 the Ontario legal aid assistance program issued 75,000 certificates, a drop of 150,000 certificates from previous years.

• (1655)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind the hon. member that as I said, when we held a meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers of justice and we discussed their civil legal aid as well as criminal legal aid, it was because we appreciated that we had a joint responsibility in this regard. We worked out foundational principles with respect to a comprehensive civil legal aid system as well as a criminal legal aid system, which would protect provincial jurisdiction and the administration and delivery of services.

We are talking about the fundamental need to have these services delivered to begin with. I did not see a word about that in the budget. The words "civil legal aid" are not mentioned. The words "criminal legal aid" are not mentioned.

A kind of abstract reference to a transfer speaks nothing to those who need the particularities of the delivery of legal services, legal aid program developments, comprehensive and sustainable developments set forth in a budget. We do not see any of that anywhere in that budget.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because this is the budget implementation bill, I tried to look at my riding of Surrey North in terms of what the budget's implementation will mean for the constituency I represent. On average, it is a constituency of fairly low income per family as it relates to the rest of Surrey, although it is mixed.

Government Orders

We have people who do not have homes to go to. We have people who suffer from very serious challenges in their lives, health challenges, drug and alcohol challenges, a variety of challenges. I tried to look at what the budget's implementation will mean for this group. Also, my riding is full of people who want to have hope that there is something in their future that they can hold onto. Every single one of us needs something we can hold onto if not for ourselves, then for our children, our friends or our neighbours.

What does the budget do for Surrey North? I looked at it from a prosperity gap perspective. Does it make the gap wider or narrower between those who have and those who have not? That seemed to be a simple measurement.

One of the things the budget implements is a reduction in services for women who are victims of violence. What does that do? That widens the prosperity gap. Women who are victims of violence have very few financial choices, sometimes no choices. The support services on which they depend for counselling are gone. The women's service organizations that have done some very fine research and projects funded by the federal government are gone. When I look at what it implements for women who are victims of violence, and their children who witness that violence, I see a much broader gap than there was before.

It implements also a feeling of discouragement and disappointment for young people who will not be able to go on to post-secondary education. Nowhere in the budget was there a reduction in tuition fees or a new system for repaying fees in a way that is workable for students when they graduate which is what we called for.

What does that mean? Those bright, excited young people see those who have, the ones at the other end of the prosperity gap, going on to post-secondary education, but the people at the other end of that widening prosperity gap, those who have not, cannot afford post-secondary education. It is not that there are not more seats. There are more seats in many different programs, but if the young people cannot afford to go onto post-secondary education, it does not really matter very much if there are more seats. The gap between those bright young people who can access post-secondary education and those who cannot is growing in Surrey North.

This budget also implements a loss of job opportunities. It expands the gap between people who are able to go into the workforce because they need to, never mind those who choose to, and those who either choose to or do not need to. There are many lone parent families or two parent families where the parents need to have wage jobs just to put food on the table probably about 27 days a month, not even the whole month.

There is a lack of opportunity and a growing gap in opportunity, particularly for women because there is no affordable national child care program, which was promised. People were counting on that. They were excited about it. They saw doors opening for them in the future because there would be safe, affordable child care and they would not have to worry whether their children were all right, because some children are not old enough to talk and to tell their parents.

● (1700)

There will be more women who will not be able to get into the workforce. The gap between those who can afford child care and those who have absolutely no ability to access any kind of safe affordable care continues to grow. The prosperity gap between those who have and those who have not continues to grow in that area.

I have an interesting constituency. I do not get the thousands of phone calls every day that other members say they get. Every once in a while I do get a spate of phone calls about an issue, and the job protection issue is one of them. The CAW layoffs, the layoffs in the forest industry affect Surrey North very much. A lot of people are mill workers. There are the layoffs at the airport as well. These are the issues about which I have had phone calls in my office every single day.

What is there in the budget to help people who have lost their jobs? Nothing. And so the gap grows in my riding, and probably more in my riding than in any other Surrey riding, between those who have jobs and those who do not, or those who have help to get into another job and those who do not.

Nobody is standing up for what has indeed, if we count the forest industry, been thousands of lost jobs, and there will be more because there is no money for the pine beetle infestation. What happens? The gap continues to grow between those who have jobs and those who do not. We will see more people who do not have jobs than those who do.

In Surrey North there is a wonderful organization called Kla-how-eya Aboriginal Centre, which is urban aboriginal people doing extraordinary things. There has not been one bit of support in the federal budget for those people, because they do not happen to live on reserve currently. The access to education, access to the sorts of supports they need to be successful and that the organization needs to be successful are not there. Just as we thought we were starting to close that gap for aboriginal people, the gap will actually grow wider in Surrey.

There is a health gap too in Surrey North, which also relates to a prosperity gap. Many seniors live in Surrey North. Those seniors often require home support in order to stay in their homes, which actually costs the health care system less in the end. Those seniors call an MLA's office, an MP's office, a union office or a seniors adviser and say, "I have two prescriptions here and I cannot fill them both, so which one do I fill?"

The gap between those people who can and cannot afford the medication they need to treat an illness and to stay healthy is growing. We do not have a national strategy or any kind of standard for catastrophic drug coverage across the country. British Columbia is probably better off than many other provinces, but I still see the gap growing in this area. Members should think about what they would do if their grandmothers and grandfathers called them to ask which drug to take because they could not afford to fill both prescriptions.

In terms of how the budget's implementation will impact on the lives of seniors in Surrey North, they will again be part of the growing gap of people who cannot afford the very basic necessities to keep them safe and healthy.

Government Orders

There is a health gap as it relates to the environment. We are right by a freeway. The South Fraser Perimeter Road, a four lane highway, goes right through a small part of Surrey called Bridgeview. The effect on the environment and on people's health will be tragic. That is federal money that has gone—

• (1705)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member of the New Democrats and she touched on two issues in particular on which I want to focus. One was on tuition and the other was on prescription drug costs.

In both cases our government has significantly increased transfers to the provinces in this budget. We have provided \$39 billion in new money over the next seven years to provinces throughout Canada so they can better deliver the services for which they are responsible.

Tuition, as well as prescription drug costs, is a matter of provincial responsibility. In fact, tuition rates are not set by the Government of Canada. They are set by individual provinces. Quebec sets rates at a certain level. The province of Ontario sets rates at another level. The province of British Columbia sets them at even a different level.

The same goes for provincial drug formularies. Those are set by the provincial governments. They determine what drugs are to be on the formulary and what the cost should be. They determine who is eligible for government assistance.

In both cases these are provincial areas of jurisdiction. Our government has significantly increased transfers to the provinces so they could better deliver services in these two areas of responsibility.

What are the hon. member comments on this, in light of our government's action and in light of the fact that these are provincial areas of responsibility.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, the federal government transfers money to the provinces, but the federal government also has a responsibility for leadership. Surely, it does not pass out money with no accountability attached to it. It brings together health ministers, education ministers on post-secondary education or whomever from across the country. It knows the issues across the country. Surely, it does not put out money where there is no accountability as to whether it is spent on the areas that have been identified. Home care, drugs, tuition costs have been identified as serious issues that impede the progress of people in the provinces.

In this day and age I do not think any business, including government, should put out money with no accountability as to how it is spent or no indication of how it should be spent.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the member agree with the previous speaker who said that the budget was a failure in relation to human rights.

Just to emphasize the point, I do not know if the member saw the disturbing article on Friday in CP about a simple human right involving a young girl who wears a hijab. When cabinet ministers like the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, the Secretary of State for Sport and the Minister of Transport were asked, they went fleeing. Finally, a government member said the real reason was, “an

order not to comment came directly from the Prime Minister's Office”. If the Prime Minister's Office is so adamant that it is of so little importance that his MPs are not even allowed to speak about human rights, then the budget is a reflection of that.

Did she agree with the previous speaker on that?

• (1710)

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine not taking an opportunity to answer that kind of question because it is so clear it is a human right.

I am very blessed. I come from Surrey, British Columbia, where young women have been wearing hijabs in any sport they like. Young Sikh men wear turbans or head coverings to play whatever sport they like and have been for a very long time. The first RCMP officer ever to wear a turban comes from Surrey, British Columbia.

I would welcome the chance to say the country stands up for the human rights of individuals. In point of fact, these are religious rights. These are symbols of people's religion. We do not deny that in our country to anybody. I would have rushed for the opportunity to answer.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the budget implementation bill.

It seems to me that in January of 2006, in the election of last year, when the public gave its decision in the election, it gave the Conservative Party a minority. It did not say, “Here is a majority”. It said, “Here is a minority. Now all of you go make it work”.

What concerns me, among other things, is that it appears that many times the Conservative Party thinks it can behave as if it has a majority, which it does not have. We have seen many instances of that. At the same time, since it does not have a majority, we have a Prime Minister who clearly wants a majority and wants to have an election. He has already unveiled his fear factory in the southern part of Ottawa somewhere. It is clear that the government will say or do just about anything to get that majority.

Therefore, we saw a budget that I would describe as a divide and conquer budget, a budget that is aimed at certain key target groups that might help get that 40% or 41%, to get majority that the government is after. It is divide and conquer.

It is not surprising though, in many ways. What kind of government is it? What kind of government has it been? What kind of Prime Minister have we seen over the past 15 months or so?

We have seen a Prime Minister who cancels child care spaces. A child care program, which would provide thousands of spaces, was cancelled. In its place, what do Canadians get? They get a monthly amount of \$100 which is taxable, which is taxed back, so they will lose most of it anyway. In addition, it provides no spaces whatsoever. To me, that is deliberate, it is deceitful and it is despicable.

Government Orders

We had the promise in the last election that the Conservatives, if elected to government, would never tax income trusts. They could not have been any clearer about their intention. They must have known the risk that other companies in the future might turn into income trusts, but they decided to take the chance, to be reckless and made the promise anyway. What did they do? They broke their word and wiped out the savings of thousands of savers, of seniors who relied upon their word.

What kind of a Prime Minister is that? What kind of a government is that? It was deliberate, deceitful and despicable.

We have a Prime Minister who pledges, in writing, to uphold the Atlantic accord, the accords with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. Then he rips them both up and throws them in the faces of the people of those two provinces.

There is an old Gaelic proverb that some of my colleagues may have heard by now, because it was in a brochure that was sent out by Conservative MPs in those two provinces during the negotiation of the accord. The old Gaelic proverb is, "There is no greater fraud than a promise not kept". Those are not my words. That proverb is from a brochure sent out by Conservatives during the negotiation of the offshore accords, so they should be familiar with that because it was part of their propaganda strategy.

It is ironic that we see a time now when their own words come back to haunt them in the wake of what can only be described, and what has been described by the Premiers of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia and by the minister of finance of Nova Scotia, as a betrayal. Even the Conservative candidate in the riding of Halifax is recognizing this is a betrayal, and she cannot accept this part of the budget. It is deliberate, deceitful and despicable. That is the description of the government.

What did Danny Williams say about this government, its nature and the way it has been behaving on a variety of matters? He said:

This is the same prime minister who basically reneged on money for women , for literacy groups, for volunteers, students, minority rights, has not lived up to the Kyoto accord, for aboriginal people.

It is deliberate, deceitful and despicable. That is what the Conservative government is all about, as we have seen in so many examples. The Prime Minister broke his clear promises in Nova Scotia and in Newfoundland and Labrador.

• (1715)

I know the accord pretty well. I was part of the negotiations. The words in it in fact say that the accord applies to the equalization program as it exists at the time. Therefore, no matter how the program changes, the provisions of the accord and the benefits that flow from it still apply. They still flow.

It cannot be said, as the Minister of Finance tries to do, that the province can still have the accord, but it can only be applied to the old equalization, that the province cannot have the new equalization and the accord. This is not the deal that was signed. This is not the deal that we made. This is not the deal that Conservative MPs from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia argued for so vehemently for in the House two years or so ago. This is deliberate, deceitful and despicable.

Nova Scotia's finance minister, Michael Baker, a Progressive Conservative, in his budget speech not long ago, Friday, March 23, said:

The new federal equalization formula essentially forces Nova Scotia to give up a portion of potential future revenues that were guaranteed under the Offshore Accord.

One of the ways the media described it was "last week's hatchet job on the offshore accord".

This again proves that unfortunately Canadians cannot trust the Prime Minister to keep his word or even to honour a signed contract. It is phenomenal. Who would have thunk it? It is disappointing, deceitful and deliberate.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Disingenuous.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes, it is disingenuous for the government to say that it will not tax income trusts and then to do it, or to say it will respect the offshore accords, knowing what they contain, and then not do it. That is absolutely disingenuous.

I believe Canadians across the country, certainly in my province and in Newfoundland and Labrador, will hold Conservative MPs to account for the promises they break.

Back in 2004, my hon. colleague, the member of Parliament for South Shore—St. Margaret's, said:

This is about fairness and the future of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. This is about honesty and about keeping promises.

What is he saying now? He says now that if Nova Scotia has to give up the accord, it would not be so bad. What a change. What happened? How did he become suddenly a changed person? How did he go from a Conservative MP and a Nova Scotia member of Parliament to a harpercrit? It is a decision that he has made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halifax West knows that I have been very attentive to his speech. He also knows that I have been respectful of his experience in the House and that experience is sufficient for him to know not to identify by name any member of the House.

He may want to go on with his train of thought, but not get me up again.

• (1720)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your attentiveness. I will certainly take your advice, as always.

Let me just say that the decision by my hon. colleague for South Shore—St. Margaret's was a deliberate decision. It was disappointing and it was deceitful.

Here is what the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley said in 2004.

I call on the government to... just get down to the point and say, "We made a promise. Now we are going to keep it".

Now he has changed his mind. He decided to say that the important thing was Nova Scotia could choose. I have already explained what this choice is about. It is not the deal we made. This choosing nonsense is not the deal that he and his colleagues insisted that our province deserved. That was disappointing, deceitful and deliberate.

Government Orders

In March of last year, the new finance minister, although after 15 months we can hardly call him new, said that equalization had been made a mess because of these deals with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. The Conservative members of Parliament from those two provinces made the decision, the deliberate decision to say nothing then. This is plain disappointing.

What is the part time ACOA minister saying today? The poor member for Central Nova is so despondent about this betrayal that there are unsubstantiated reports that he spent the weekend after the budget planting potatoes, but he got over it because when Nova Scotians said it was a betrayal—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Peterborough.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure where to start with that speech. It lacked any basis in fact whatsoever and rambled from one area to the next. But one thing I would like to ask, since the member brought it up, I would love to know why the member stands up for corporate tax holidays.

In fact, I mentioned a little while ago that I read an article in the *Toronto Star* today, a paper that generally is quite favourable to the member's party. Following this line of thought that the Liberals happen to be following, which is supporting a corporate tax holiday, corporations not paying their fair share tax, that is not going to ring very well in the homes of Canadian voters. I would like to know what the member's own constituents in the province of Nova Scotia think about his stance in supporting corporate tax holidays. I would love to hear that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, my comments have an entire basis in fact.

The first question I would have for him when he poses this kind of comment, is how is it that he did not make those same complaints about a policy of not allowing income trusts when his party promised it during the election? Why did he not object then? Where were his objections? Where were these strong and vehement opposition comments in relation to this issue when his own party was promising it would not tax income trusts?

Suddenly, he has a totally different point of view. However, I am glad he brought it up because it gives me the chance to remind members that when Nova Scotians talked about what happened in our province as a betrayal, the minister for the province said to get over it and "We'll see you in court". What kind of an attitude is that? It is a shameful response.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ordinary Canadians are paying more and more for drugs. Last year the average increase was 9%; actually every year since 2000. It costs about \$20 billion for Canadians to buy drugs. The amount spent on prescription drugs has doubled since 1999. We also know that at least four million people in Canada have no access to public or private insurance plans for drugs. It is really time for a public pharmacare program.

The Liberals did not deliver it even though it was promised and the Conservatives, in this budget, have no pharmacare program. What is the member planning to do about that?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Trinity—Spadina raises an important issue. It certainly was not one that I had a chance to address in my comments, but she is entitled to raise it.

All of us are concerned, I think, about the rising cost of prescription drugs and the need to provide for that. My hon. colleague seems to forget, when she talks about the 12 years and two months that the Liberals were in government, that when we arrived in government there was a \$42 billion deficit.

I know that never was an issue of concern to the NDP members and that they never supported any of the measures taken to deal with that deficit, get it under control, and put our country and its economy on a much better basis, on a basis that provided thousands and millions of jobs across this country.

We can recall the 1993 election when Kim Campbell, then leader of the of the Conservatives and then prime minister, said there would be no jobs created until the year 2000. As it turned out, under a Liberal government between 1993 and 2000, there were two million jobs created because the economy was put in a better position. The economy reduced poverty, it allowed us to put money into health care, and it allowed us to do all kinds of good things. There were not many of those that the NDP members supported but there were one or two of those they actually supported, but never any of the efforts to get us in the place to do it.

• (1725)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague, who I thought gave an inspired speech, a very simple question. The Conservative government raised taxes on the poor. Does he think that the Conservative government violated one of the basic principles of a government, that is, to care for that group which is most needy in our society, and does he not think the right thing to do would be to drop the taxes on the lowest income earners in this country?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, obviously in the budget a year ago the Conservatives raised income taxes on people in the lowest income bracket. It was an outrageous thing and I have no excuse for it.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today with an opportunity to speak to the budget implementation bill, especially from the perspective of residents of east Vancouver.

A budget is a test and measure for any government. To me a budget is about who gains and who loses. When we look at the Conservative budget that was brought out a couple of months ago, it was very clear that many Canadians felt they had lost. When we look at a riding like east Vancouver and see some of the pressing issues that people are dealing with on a daily basis, there was really nothing in the budget that helped people.

Government Orders

It strikes me as a massive contradiction that on the one hand we can spend billions of dollars in Afghanistan, I think more than \$4 billion to date, on a war that is simply unwinnable, a mission that is totally wrong for Canada, yet we can ignore pressing issues in our own country, such as homelessness or lack of affordable housing.

British Columbia is getting ready for the Olympics in 2010. There is certainly a lot of pride and activity taking place, but there is also a lot of concern that as we approach the Olympics things are going to get very expensive, that we do not have the right kind of investment in our social infrastructure and that a lot of people are going to get left behind.

One of the recent initiatives that took place was a remarkable process that brought together representatives of government, the city, NGOs, local community groups and business. It was the 2010 B.C. in the city housing table that looked at issues around the Olympics, with particular focus on housing.

It was remarkable that this diverse group of organizations and different interests came together and agreed that for the 2010 Olympics we needed to build a minimum of 3,200 units of social and affordable housing in the city of Vancouver. If it is not done, then we are going to see a real tragedy take place. Already homelessness has doubled in Vancouver in the GVRD over the last few years.

I raise this because to me housing is a very basic human right. Housing is a very basic issue that affects Canadians. If there is no adequate, safe, affordable, secure housing, then pretty well everything else in one's life is going to go wrong. It is a basic thing that needs to be there.

When we look at the fact that homelessness has actually doubled and there are many more tens of thousands of people who are threatened to be or are on the verge of being homeless, then to me it is simply astounding that in the last federal budget put forward by the Conservative government there was no new money for an affordable housing strategy. There was no new money for even a housing strategy that would have focused on the so-called marketplace, nevermind co-op or social housing, which I know the Conservatives generally are ideologically opposed to.

This is a very glaring omission in the Conservative budget and it is something that concerns us greatly, not only in my own community of east Vancouver but in British Columbia generally. Even the B.C. Liberal government has woken up to the reality to some extent on the housing crisis in British Columbia. It recently announced a number of initiatives that would begin to at least take some initial steps to deal with the housing crisis that is going to loom greater and greater as we approach the 2010 Olympics.

The large question that people have is this. Where is the federal government? Why is the federal government not at the table providing a strategy and the funding complement to ensure that people are not sleeping on the street, that people are not paying 40%, 50% and 60% of their incomes on housing, and that people have the right access to secure, safe and affordable housing?

That is one very severe problem with this budget. On the one hand it is spending billions of dollars in Afghanistan, continuing with \$8 billion corporate tax cuts, and yet it is not focusing any money to a basic need such as housing.

● (1730)

Let us be very clear; it is not a lack of fiscal capacity. The federal government is rolling in cash. We have seen a \$13 billion surplus last year. We have seen a \$5 billion surplus this year. The last two Conservative budgets are very ideologically driven. They are driven in terms of offering a few tax incentives. They are driven in terms of providing a few individual incentives, but they do nothing to eliminate the growing inequities that we see in our society where the gap between poverty and wealth is getting bigger and bigger.

A budget is an opportunity for any government, but particularly the federal government, to look at that big picture, to look at that macro picture, to look at the fact that we have lost 250,000 manufacturing jobs since 2002, to look at the fact that we have a housing crisis, to look at the fact that most women in this country find it harder to keep pace, and most families find it harder to keep pace because they cannot find child care and if they do, they cannot afford it.

Those are some of the measures and it is very disappointing, which is an understatement, to see that this federal budget did not address any of those questions. Most of the groups that I know and work with in my riding have been struggling even to keep going. Many of them faced a lot of difficulties in even knowing if they would receive the limited funds to continue in the new fiscal year, whether it was arts groups, housing groups who rely on emergency housing programs, or women's programs.

Even at that very basic front line service delivery level, many organizations have been thrown into near crisis because they could not get a clear answer as to whether or not their very small operating funds were actually going to come through under the Conservative government. That is a pretty sad state of affairs.

In the aboriginal community there are many organizations that are really struggling to make ends meet. The demands that they face in terms of providing emergency programs, shelter programs, training programs are enormous. The need out there in the community is simply enormous. In the 10 years that I have been an MP, whether under the Liberal government and now under the Conservative government, we have seen these demands get bigger and bigger. What has happened in this country is that the social safety net that people used to be very proud of, not only does it have holes in it but it is really now non-existent.

There are many artists in east Vancouver. There is nothing in this budget, even a simple thing like tax averaging that would give artists a little bit of a break.

Within the NDP we voted against the budget because we thought it was a dismal failure. It was not placing priorities where they needed to be. It is a budget that is clearly directed toward corporate elites in this country. It is not a budget that is directed toward meeting the needs that people have on a daily basis, whether it is health care, drug costs, housing, child care, support for aboriginal people, dealing with children's programs, and the list goes on and on, not to mention students.

Government Orders

How long have we stood in the House and talked about the terrible situation that students face where their debt load has increased and tuition has tripled in the last 15 years. Again this would have been an opportunity for the federal government to take some real concrete steps in saying that if we believe in our future generation, we are going to make sure that post-secondary education is accessible. Unfortunately, it is becoming less and less accessible because the federal government has moved away from supporting post-secondary education.

I have to say that from the point of view of my local community, from the point of view of a national perspective and even our international obligations, this budget gets a failing grade and that is why we are opposing it.

• (1735)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly heard a lot of ideology from the member. However, we are trying to speak to the pragmatic part of what Canadians are looking for.

I heard a lot of ideology preached today but I did not hear a lot of facts. The member spoke specifically about social housing and said that it was not in the budget. I was astounded to hear the member say that because incorporated within the context of the budget is \$800 million for social housing that were allocated in the 2006 budget to be carried over two years. All of those funds, every last cent, were put into a third party trust account to ensure that it would be spent in the way it was supposed to be.

Why did the member not support that part of affordable housing, which obviously was to be invested across this country: \$312 million in Ontario, for example, and millions in British Columbia?

I do not know whether the Liberal government in British Columbia has yet determined whether they should or should not be spending that money but those funds, for the last two budgets, have been allocated directly into that fund.

In terms of tax fairness, we can talk about a lot. In fact, there were measures within the budget that she and her party said they supported but are now voting against. However, speaking specifically to the point that she made about affordable housing, which is factually incorrect, it was in the 2006 budget and she can rest assured that it is there in 2007.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is thank God for the NDP that we were here to get at least that amount of money in a previous government budget and then to force the Conservatives to carry it over. I pointed out correctly that there was no new money in the federal budget to deal with the housing crisis across the country. I would correct the member on that point.

One of the things that slipped through in the budget that was of a lot of concern is that the Conservatives have fundamentally changed Canada's drug strategy. I am not talking about prescription drugs, but illicit drugs. They have basically changed the so-called four pillar approach, law enforcement, prevention, treatment and harm reduction, and have dropped harm reduction. It was buried in the budget. This should be a very alarming signal to a lot of the organizations across the country that have worked very hard on harm reduction:

things like needle exchanges and the safe injection site in my riding in the downtown east side.

This brings me back to my point that this was very much an ideologically driven budget. The Conservatives have ignored real evidence that is out there in terms of what works. Whether it is on a drug strategy, on a housing investment or on public transit, they have ignored the evidence out there and have basically produced a budget that is at the very core of their political and ideological agenda.

That is why we need to get up and tell the government that its budget is a failure, that it does not work for most of the people I represent. It might contain the odd thing here and there but overall the major points in people's lives, whether it is housing, child care, jobs, EI, dealing with the drug strategy or support for women, none of those things are in the budget.

• (1740)

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech of the member for Vancouver East. She mentioned various groups that have been, in my phrasing, left behind as a result of the budget. She mentioned students, artists, aboriginals and a few others but she made no mention of single seniors.

All that I get from the budget is a provision for pension splitting among senior couples but nothing whatsoever in the budget which provides for single seniors. I am wondering if the member opposite agrees with that and what her thought is about that.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I concur that the issue of seniors, particularly single seniors and particularly women who live below the poverty rate—I forget what the percentage rate is but it is very high—are another part of our community who were completely overlooked in the budget.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak in the House to what I think ordinary Canadians want to see in a budget and juxtapose that with what we actually get from the government.

The budget is the foundation. It is a critical social contract that any government has with its citizens. What we have seen in this budget is a contract that seems to have been broken.

I listened carefully to one of the government members who asked about supporting the budget because of affordable housing. I am glad my colleague from Vancouver set the record straight. If we had not been here in this place to ensure corporate tax cuts were not put at the front of the line ahead of affordable housing, many of our citizens would not have any supports at all for affordable housing.

When Conservatives say that we should have supported the budget, the last budget or this budget, because of the money for affordable housing, it would be laughable if it were not so serious. The fact is that the government has no interest in investing public dollars in things like affordable housing.

Government Orders

We need to recall that in the last budget at the last hour the government put money into trusts for things like affordable housing for aboriginal peoples and first nations. The government wanted to get a deal from us to support it on the budget if it would commit to keeping the money that was already committed and put it into the next year's budget. Of course we said no because the money was already there. It then put it ahead into the budget.

That is the real story on the government and affordable housing. It is just taking money from Bill C-48 and putting it in place and saying that it has actually done something. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is abandoning people on the issue of affordable housing and that affects all of us.

If we look at what is missing in the budget, it is long term care and home care for seniors. I have spent the last couple of months going door to door in seniors' residences in the downtown area here. It is appalling. We have seniors who are abandoned. They are not getting the care they need when they need it. They get one level of government giving a pittance of support and another level of government taking it away. They are tired of that. They are tired of government not being there for them.

Families are being squeezed. I had a gentleman come into my office just two weeks ago. He is feeling the squeeze on his income as he tries to help his mother. He needs to be there for her because no one else is. He does not begrudge supporting her but he is wondering where his government is, the government to which he pays taxes. He wants the services for the taxes that he pays. I want to be very clear. He does not want another tax cut. What he has been saying to me is that before we start into more tax cuts he wants to see home care, pharmaceutical care and support for his mother. He would like a nurse to see his mother, not for any luxurious kind of visit but for basic primary care. He is not getting that from his government and we are not getting it from the budget, which is why we cannot support it.

When we look at how the government is treating seniors, it is not good enough to say that they have a deduction here and a deduction there when the core services that they need in their community are not there for them now.

With all due respect to the government, before it comes to this place and passes out another tax cut, it should take an inventory of what is going on in the communities. Before it proposes another tax cut, it should take a look at the waiting lists for housing, the waiting lists for long term care and the waiting list for home care and tell my constituents, tell the seniors in my community that it is good enough that they get up to an hour a week. It also should not fob it off on the provinces because that is the politics of shame when it does that.

• (1745)

When we look at what is in it for seniors, the budget fails. When we look at housing, it fails. When we look at students, it is interesting. We need to look at the bookends of our society, those who helped build this country and now need our support. They were there for us when they helped put this country together and built our communities.

Let us look at the other bookend, the students. I paid \$1,200 for my tuition. If we were to ask the students in my constituency who

are attending Carleton University or the University of Ottawa how much they are paying for tuition, it would blow us away. Tuition is from \$5,000 to \$6,000.

What are we doing for young people to get post-secondary education, or training for jobs, or just a hand up to help them move along in terms of the next step in their lives, which is education? We are failing them. The budget contains nothing of any substance for them and that is not good enough for them. It is also not good enough for their parents who are being squeezed.

As we have mentioned in our party, the prosperity gap is ever widening. We are talking about people who are on the margins, who are falling off the table, and not only them. What is stunning is that we are seeing our middle class being squeezed so that they are now having to make very difficult choices and often, as members will appreciate in this so-called sandwich generation, are making choices on who to help, their senior parents or their sons or daughters who are trying to make it in university or post-secondary education. That is not right.

When we had a \$13 billion surplus without a debate about where that money would go, it was absolutely wrong. We could do better. We should do better and this budget does not do better.

I recall the former government and that party at the time asking where the debate was on where the surplus would go. They were high and they were mighty but where are those words now? They are gone. They have evaporated at the cost of those who are most vulnerable in our society. We can do better.

When we sit around the kitchen table and talk about what is important in our families, do we look at the hole in the roof of our home and say that we should go build a white picket fence? No. We deal with what is important. We deal with the hole in the roof. We have a hole in our roof and it is called the prosperity gap and that hole is getting ever bigger and wider. The government seems to think it is fine so it will put a toll on the road outside, hand us a nickel and say that it is fine. Well it is not fine. It is not good economics and it is not sound investment. It is very poor policy.

I will now turn to where this budget fails, not just for seniors and young people, but on the infrastructure of this country, I will just turn to our cities. It is very clear, from mayors of small towns, big towns and big cities that our government needs to do more. It needs to do more to build the infrastructure to make our cities livable and make them environmentally more sustainable.

We should not have to wait for a health advisory before we send our children out to play but that is what is happening. My colleague from Windsor told me horrific stories about kids not being able to go outside on some days because of the quality of the air. We could have done something about that. We could have had a transportation policy that would have helped all our kids and all our citizens in the long term but that is not in this budget.

Government Orders

Quite frankly, the fact that people can write off their bus passes, which we had to ensure the government fixed because it messed that up too, is not good enough because these buses are not going far enough. This city does not have a train because the government would not support our the light rail plan.

We need to see more substantive commitments and better commitments, which is why our party cannot support the government's budget.

• (1750)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised when the member says we have not done anything for education. Our party has spent more on education than any government has. Just this year we have proposed to increase the Canada social transfer by \$800 million per year beginning in 2008-09 to ensure that the provinces have the resources they need to maintain and strengthen Canada's colleges and universities, including better access. We also raised the minimum amount of the Canada education savings grant, which goes directly to help poorer families.

Another initiative of the government that certainly helps a lot of people is our national anti-drug strategy. As the member knows, drugs cause many problems among poorer families and many families in my province and on the streets. In fact, it is his party which suggests that is why there is so much homelessness: because we do have some huge problems with crystal meth and other illicit drugs. We have taken that under our control with an anti-drug strategy.

Some of the things that party has asked us for we have implemented in our budget, but we have done it with a strategy and a focus so that we are going to help the real people, the real people who will benefit the most from it. The money will not go just to governments, for example, just like our universal child care benefit goes directly to the child.

The government is addressing education and the drug strategy. I think the member has become carried away with rhetoric when he speaks about what we are not doing.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I was carried away with rhetoric when I talked about how much I paid in tuition. I am not sure what the member paid in tuition. Maybe she would have an opportunity to tell us and compare it with what students are paying right now. Did she pay more than \$1,200 a year? Perhaps, but the reality is that right now students are paying \$6,000 a year for tuition. That is a fact. That is not rhetoric. The member can ask any student.

The other issue the member brought up was the fact of passing this money on to people, "real people", as she called them. I am not sure what she meant by that, perhaps to distinguish them from other people, I suppose. As for the money that is being passed on for child care, my colleague from Toronto has pointed out that it is not real child care. In fact, what many people are waking up to now is that this money that was supposed to be there for child care is actually being taxed back.

Finally, if she wants to talk about a drug strategy, let us talk about why people turn to drugs. They do not turn to drugs because everything is going well in their lives. We have to take a look at the

social determinants of health. These people do not have a job. They do not have a place to live. They may not have the supports within their community. That is one of the indicators of health. That is one of the ways to fight drug abuse.

How about having some nurses and public health officials, real people, if I may quote her, to be there for them when they need that help? They are not in our communities. They are not in our schools. We need those public health nurses there. That requires real commitment from the government and that is not in this budget.

• (1755)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member for Ottawa Centre and I have similar ridings in that we both have large immigrant populations. He will know that Statistics Canada recently reported that the prosperity gap for immigrants is increasing in Canada. It is now over three times as likely that an immigrant will live in poverty in Canada.

One of the things this budget does is promise more money around the issue of international credential recognition, but what it does is put forward some money toward a referral agency. I find that a little insulting to the people who are struggling to have their credentials recognized and work at the professions that they were called to and have been trained for and have experience in. They have knocked on every door in this country to try to find work in their field and have been denied at every step along the way. They do not need a referral agency. They need some real help. I wonder if the member could comment on that issue.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have failed in this regard. We understood there was going to be a strategy that would be comprehensive. Sadly, as the member has pointed out, it is a referral service. The men and women who need this help need more than—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this budget of 700 pages should have said a lot, but what it does not say also speaks volumes.

I am going to address some remarks today to regional economic expansion, particularly for Ontario with regard to the FedNor program.

When I was mayor of the city of Thunder Bay and also president of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association during particularly difficult times in the 1990s, regional economic expansion programs such as FedNor were essentially in many cases the only economic activity for many communities during those difficult years and certainly the only source of support.

Government Orders

Recently, the province of Ontario, and I recognize the province for coming through, has allocated more resources through a program known as the heritage fund. Nonetheless, when we try to compare what that means province by province, territory by territory and regional program by regional program, we find that regional economic expansion is not mentioned in the budget. We can compare Ontario's \$60 million from its heritage fund versus a \$36 million funding program from FedNor, which has been reduced by \$5 million from what it was the year previously.

We know that these programs are essentially the catalyst for economic diversification and growth in many areas. Let us talk about what not restoring the budget cut means. Most of Ontario's municipalities are eligible for FedNor. There is a total of 446 municipalities in Ontario, of which roughly 420 would have populations of less than 250,000, so we are talking about a huge number of municipalities that are simply going to have to compete for relatively small amounts of money. With decision making now left in the minister's hands, it really emphasizes the need for a full time minister for this particular portfolio.

When people read that budget of close to 700 pages and do not see any mention of this whatsoever, they get a little nervous. We cannot blame anybody for feeling that way because people who understand regional economics know that underutilization of a resource is as bad as the underfunding that accompanies it.

FedNor itself is what one could describe as under-resourced. An appropriate response in the past budget would have been to restore the money that was cut and indeed ensure that there was more local authority so that we could see some of these larger projects in the half a million dollar range. This really is the time in the regions and the small communities of Canada for the government to not only get more involved but to restore the confidence and commitment that it used to have.

This of course is not a complaint about the field staff. We have excellent field staff across northern Ontario. Indeed, the federal definition of northern Ontario extends into the southern Ontario Muskokas, whereas provincially it is at the French River.

I am not complaining about the fact that as an MP I do not get invited to or notified of the announcements. It is the business community that is coming to me and saying that businesses cannot wait for 15 months or 18 months for notification of whether they have been successful or not or whether it is going ahead or not. These time delays have now become unconscionable. The budget should have addressed this.

No decisions means that business and non-governmental organizations are wallowing in an era of not knowing and that is very difficult. If there is one thing that I can impress on the government side today it is that the Conservatives must realize that in small communities a little actually goes a very long way, and that kind of support would be very helpful.

As I have been touring northern Ontario and talking to people, the business community says it does not need any more worries and uncertainty. With the budget not mentioning the regions, it means that these communities need to be reassured. It is time for us in government to recognize the needs of regions and to recognize that

governments really should not be excluding these major parts of our country.

• (1800)

Diversification is talked about throughout the budget, but if the tools are not there for small communities to utilize, how is government going to help these communities get through that transition?

When I was president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, I was part of the team that lobbied the federal government and the provincial government to ensure that gas taxes were utilized for communities large and small. In Ontario, we were successful in having the government allocate 2¢ per litre for public transit, a very significant contribution. Each municipality using it is very grateful for it.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities lobbied for a share of the gas tax to go into infrastructure or into those projects deemed worthwhile by communities. The second component of that was the GST rebate. The third part, of course, was infrastructure funding, and one of the concerns is that we do not see this in the budget.

Although there is reference to some continuation of this funding, what municipalities need and have been asking for is that it be permanent so they can plan long range knowing this funding is not going to end in three or four years. They have to be able to plan further ahead because many of their projects, such as their water systems and the revamping of waste treatment plants, are very capital intensive. These become very large commitments and are very demanding in terms of time.

My riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River extends from Lake Superior to the Manitoba boarder, which means driving 7.5 hours over two time zones. We have 27 communities. When people in my riding see that the previous allocation of \$298 million over three years had to address somewhere in the vicinity of 420 municipalities, we can see that there was a vast concern that there would not be enough to warrant supporting the municipalities with infrastructure deficits.

Let us address it in that way. The cost of applying for even that limited amount of money means that small communities that do not have the resources to pay for engineers and designers in the first place are essentially saying that if they had money they would do it but they do not have the money, and now they have been reduced to what is essentially a lottery system.

People who are applying want the federal government to apply a fair funding formula. There was a gap. I believe that almost all members here, whether they represent an urban or rural area, or a hybrid of those, understand that municipalities are applying because they have determined needs. They are not applying just for the fun of it. This means that we have to eliminate the lottery system and get into some sort of priority system, because for a municipality that applies in year one for funding and does not get it and still does not get it in year three, that does not help it repair the bridge it wants repaired. I am asking the minister to reconsider that.

Government Orders

Just as important for pockets of the country, although many of the urban people may have a difficult time understanding this, high speed broadband is something that all Canadians deserve in much the same way as we expect effective telephone service. We have now come into an era where it is almost indispensable for business, for health and for education. That need also is a glaring gap in the budget.

For all the good things in a surplus budget, there are some things that still need to be addressed. I ask the government to reconsider them.

• (1805)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent speech by my hon. colleague. I have a fairly simple question for him.

When the Conservative government came to power it made what I think was a massive financial blunder. It actually dropped the GST, a consumption tax, then raised the lowest tax and also lowered the basic personal exemption. Most economists would say that reducing a consumption tax is one of the most inefficient ways of stimulating the economy. A much better idea is to keep money in people's pockets.

Does my colleague not think a much more intelligent idea that the government should have adopted would have been to reduce the lowest tax rate from 15.5% to 15%, which is what we did, or lower it further and raise the basic personal exemption, rather than the blunder of decreasing the GST, which is a very costly and inefficient way of attempting to stimulate the economy?

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, one thing about the value added taxes around the world is that their goal is essentially to assist the lowest income levels. By reducing them so they do not actually help, or say a person who buys a Mercedes for \$100,000 ends up paying less tax than someone who buys a lower priced vehicle, then we are defeating the whole purpose of value added taxes such as the GST.

A number of people have come to my office and said that they thought the taxes had been lowered but theirs had gone up. The fact that taxes went up from 15% to 15.5% really shocked many people. Those are the people who walk to my office and probably do not even take a bus. They certainly do not drive there. They can see the difference quite tangibly.

For someone who has a lower income .5%, it is a great deal of money. We have to understand that these people really budget their money accordingly. For them, it is very difficult to try to understand what the effect of a large scale GST cut will mean when it affects them directly in a very personal way.

From an environmental standpoint, I also believe value added taxes such as the GST kept at its previous level would have been more helpful in addressing many of the concerns we have.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one aspect of the budget that concerns me greatly is the facilitation of the entry of temporary foreign workers into Canada. The government has sunk a lot of money in the budget into expediting that process, making it easier for temporary foreign workers to come to Canada to work, but there is no guarantee that Canadians will get first crack at the jobs available in Canada.

There is nothing, for instance, that ensures the mobility of Canadian workers to travel across the country to take up a job in another part of Canada. There is the whole problem of flawed labour market studies, which do not estimate the availability of Canadian workers properly and overinflate the need for foreign workers.

There is also the problem of temporary foreign workers often being some of the most exploited workers in our country. We have a long history of that. Employment and workplace standards are not well policed for temporary foreign workers. There is nothing in the budget to ensure that with increased numbers of foreign workers coming here those standards are going to be maintained.

I do not think anybody wants to see projects not being completed because there are no workers to do the job, but should Canadians not get first crack at those jobs and should there not be something in the budget to ensure that happens?

• (1810)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, the question is valid because over the course of time in meeting with representatives from national Canadian unions and labour groups trying to move skilled workers from province to province, they are finding different standards and having difficulties getting them transferred.

The question in terms of unskilled workers is as valid because there are probably enough people in the country who would willingly move to other places for employment should they get the type of assistance that should be addressed in the budget. By that I mean some kind of mobility allowance, retraining and assistance. If there is an obvious need and we have to go to the length of advertising in other countries when we know we have unemployment rates of 6% and 7% and sometimes higher in some of the regions, it is the regions that suffer—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the budget. It is very important for Canadians to look at the budget in a holistic sense. At the same time, with only 10 minutes, I will focus my comments around manufacturing and, in particular, the auto industry.

It is important for me to acknowledge that not everything is bad in the budget, but there are so many problems with it that it is not worthy of support and it is not what Canadians expected. We did not expect to see a government so quickly adopt its predecessor's tactics of withdrawing from any type of vision of what Canada can be and where we will go in the next century.

It is important to note on the manufacturing side that plenty of warning signs have been out there. Since November 2002, approximately 250,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in Canada. This is billions of dollars of annual tax revenue, not only from the companies, but also the workers. When workers lose their job in the manufacturing sector, the Canadian Labour Congress, was apt to point this out, they usually lose about 25% of their income when they try to find another job.

Government Orders

I know the government members have been attempting to concoct a type of strategy around the environment, one that placates some people and one that they feel they can sell to Canadians, but it is not working. The most recent was the Minister of the Environment who put out a doomsday scenario that manufacturing would lose. At the same time he has been a wilful part of the government not addressing the manufacturing sector.

It is important that I not only criticize, but that I offer solutions as well. That is what happened with the industry, science and technology committee. Committee members took a full year to study the issues under manufacturing. We understood that the industry was hemorrhaging losses, that workers were feeling more discontent with their future. They felt there was an opportunity that would be lost, and we witnessed job after job loss.

We expected the budget to reflect some of the recommendations that we unanimously supported. That meant we all had to compromise. It takes a lot of will, a lot of effort, but it shows the gravity of the seriousness in the manufacturing sector when all political parties, despite their ideologies, their backgrounds and their political manoeuvring, decide to come together and bring forward a unanimous report with over 22 recommendations.

Those recommendations were put forth to the government to act upon and not a one of them was recommended, not one, despite the unanimous support of the committee that tabled the document in a minority Parliament. What type of totalitarian government do we have that will not even listen to the democratic will of members of Parliament as opposed to lobbyists?

It is unfortunate. There was one half measure and it was a capital cost reduction allowance. It is a very good thing and it needs to be done, but it is for two years. I put in a specific amendment for five years, which would be reviewed for a potential further five years. What did the Conservatives do? They did not act on it. I do not understand that we have all the evidence in front of us and they only provided it for two years.

In particular, the auto industry is suffering quite significantly right now. In Windsor, Ontario my constituents go home every single night with a more uncertain future. DaimlerChrysler is looking to spin off the Chrysler division. Ford is not making renewed investment when the timetable shows that it should. General Motors, because of the budget and because of the government's decision to continue to pursue a deal with South Korea that will put the auto industry on the auction block, has put its investments on hold.

That is what has happened. It is unfortunate because good things are happening in our plants. Good workers are in those plants. Value added jobs are in our plants. Conservatives have ignored that. They have gone with the ideological point that it will give general corporate tax reductions, but that is not what is necessary.

We have seen incentives to some of these plants to try to keep them here, but ironically sometimes those incentives result in less jobs because there is no strategy. The most recent, the most egregious one was the fee bates that were introduced in the budget.

• (1815)

I will go through 10 reasons why these fee bates are very curious and problematic. We all want a greener community. We all want a

greener economy. We have been pushing for a green auto strategy for years now, one done with the CAW and other vested partner groups, including the automotive manufacturers. They have looked at our information. These issues are very important.

These are the fee bates policy flaws.

The first is it damages domestic automakers. There would be \$67 million of levies on domestic vehicles, which is 80% of all levies collected, and it would transfer \$47 million in benefits to Toyota, with 75% of the rebates to Toyota, almost half of all the fee bates go to the Yaris.

Almost all the fee bates we have right now will go to one particular model of a car made overseas. I do not know why any Canadian sitting at the dinner table right now wants to see their taxpaying money going to Seoul, Beijing and Korea. I do not know anybody who wants that, but that is what will happen. The Yaris, in particular, will really benefit. Happy to be Toyota, too bad to be anybody else.

The second is it damages the Canadian subcompact market. A thousand dollars per Yaris makes up almost half of all rebates. It undermines the ability of other dealers and manufacturers to sell equally beneficial subcompacts competitively.

What that means is, with a low-end vehicle like the Yaris and other subcompacts, there is little or less margin for profit, so the \$1,000 is a bigger economic incentive than if the vehicle is a higher price. We are actually putting some of our Canadian vehicles in a wider gap of problems to compete with that vehicle because it has the \$1,000 rebate. It is significant. They cannot make it up. In fact, I think Volvo is looking at disabling some of its safety equipment so it can get a little more fuel efficiency and qualify for the fee bates. That is not right. That is done without public policy. Why are we forcing people to choose between safety and fuel efficiency? Why not have a public policy that does both?

The third is it is a disincentive to Canadian green technology. The policy levies a \$1,000 to \$2,000 tax on Canadian made advanced technology engines, cylinder deactivation, yet it offers a \$1,000 rebate for an imported conventional gasoline Yaris vehicle without any significant advanced technology.

That is important because cylinder deactivation, which is a Canadian innovation, is something that reduces more greenhouse gas emissions because it gets to some of the higher polluter vehicles. Therefore, we are getting to the lower end hanging fruit, which we can get right away, and punishing Canadian technology. I do not understand that.

Government Orders

The fourth is it hurts suburban families. Levies of up to \$4,000 per vehicle are passed on to suburban/rural families purchasing these larger vehicles, which offer needed utility. We know there is a disincentive, for example, for those families that require those larger vehicles for their personal and other businesses as opposed to moving for a greener technology that would fix this.

The fifth is it will not impact segment choices. In terms of the market, the fee bates will not shift the actual public policy to producing and purchasing smaller vehicles.

The March report for vehicle production, manufacturing and selling is out today. Interestingly enough, after the introduction of the fee bates program, luxury SUVs are up 15.1% and large SUVs are up 8.6%. We have a policy that has not even moved in the direction it is supposed to move. There are all kinds of issues. I know the list has been interesting in terms of monitoring. Cars go up on the list on the website then they go off. It is unacceptable.

The New Democrats, and it is important that I conclude with a couple of points about this, have been asking for a green auto strategy, one that looks at procuring the jobs in our own communities. Investment is important and it can be value added. This is why we supported the capital cost reduction allowance for machinery and equipment for five years instead of the two years. Right now those companies have pretty well decided upon the two year window.

The fact is the oil and gas sector gets 100% for another eight years. Manufacturing, which is being obliterated by a high dollar and bad trade policies that the government is pursuing, only gets 50% for two years. The oil and gas sector is booming. Then the other manufacturing sectors, aerospace, textiles, get 100%. We are asking for good sound public policy, public policy that looks at trade issues, manufacturing issues and ensures that if we give incentives, they get to the workers' floor so our workers can compete fairly. They are only asking for that.

• (1820)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the incentives for vehicles. There was a story about an incentive for a vehicle that would not even have access to the proper fuel to take advantage of that.

Because the member comes from an auto constituency, could he comment on that?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing about the ethanol pursuit is there are only two stations where we can get E-85 to actually put into vehicles. It is amazing that we do not have the infrastructure to provide the facilities to get cleaner fuel.

Interestingly enough, the government has also let the oil and gas sector off the hook on standards. Canada does not have any standards. There are standards in the United States. On top of that, the U.S. is investing in the infrastructure, the fuelling stations, to get the cleaner technology and fuels. That is being done through a series of incentives. The U.S. is also making the oil and gas industry come to the table.

When we did our manufacturing study it was interesting. Canada's oil and gas sector in terms of its profits puts back less than 1% into research and development. That is less than 1% for research and

development from our most profitable industry. It is unacceptable. Canadians deserve better than that.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was amazed to hear the member's opening comments, because I had the pleasure of attending numerous meetings across the country with the member during our manufacturing study.

As the member mentioned correctly, recommendations were put forth by the committee to the Minister of Finance. Where the member is incorrect is that the Minister of Finance has actually taken the recommendations of the unanimous report that the member supported and out of the 22 recommendations, he has addressed most of them in the new budget.

I want to ask the member if he actually read the budget and took the time to look at the recommendations. It is unprecedented that a Minister of Finance has listened to a committee and virtually implemented most of the recommendations in a unanimous report.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I would differ with my colleague on the industry committee. If we look at the recommendations and compare them to the budget, we would find rhetoric around some of those issues, and there is no doubt about that.

Implementing some of those measures did not happen. I did not see anything about the South Korea trade deal. I did not see a whole series of things for which we advocated. The most obvious one is the capital cost reduction allowance. Why would the Conservatives move that from a five year recommendation to a two year recommendation? I do not understand that.

I do not understand how the oil and gas industry continues to get the best all the time, not just once, twice or three times, but all the time, while in manufacturing we are hemorrhaging job losses right now. We are not telling manufacturers that they can come forward with a plan for two, three, four, five years, protect the workers, protect the sector, protect the jobs now and we will be there with them.

It is more than just automotive. Tool and die, for example, is another group that requires some type of support system now because of unfair trade practices. The government did not touch that.

The most important thing we have to get our heads around is that we can do things in our country if we want to, but most important, we have to stop undermining ourselves by subscribing to international obligations which hurt our workers directly. The first thing we have to do is protect ourselves from injurious trade deals that have cost us so much already.

• (1825)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has done a lot of work to protect the jobs in his community. I would like him to talk about what we need to do in order to produce value added jobs and to protect the jobs that we have.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, we have to simply understand that this nation is more about taking our natural resources and handing them over to somebody else to get the value added jobs.

Whether it be softwood, oil, manufacturing through auto, aerospace and textile, there is something more in Canada than just shipping out our stuff for somebody else to do something with it. We can do it here. We have the people, the skills, the technology and the will. That is where the real jobs are. The prosperity gap will diminish if we have value added jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has 10 minutes of which three minutes are today and seven minutes are in the bank for next time.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak to this bill, and since I only have three minutes, I am going to get to the point.

The government introduced a budget that is an orgy of spending, three times the rate of inflation. The government is sprinkling little goodies here and there with one purpose which obviously is to win the next election.

In a time of surplus, there are great opportunities. I am going to offer the government some ideas that I hope it will consider adopting to improve our country and our citizens' well-being dramatically.

I would propose that the government adopt my private member's bill on the Canadian low income supplement. It would give \$2,000 to those Canadians who make less than \$20,000 a year. That would put real money in the hands of the most underprivileged in our society.

The budget failed to deal with the real fiscal imbalance, and that is the imbalance between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots. That was utterly ignored in the budget and was a huge blunder on the government's part.

The government has to decrease the lowest income tax rate on those who are the poorest.

The government has to increase investments in research and development and technology. When we were in government, Canada went from being 19th in the world in R and D to third in the world in research and development.

The government should introduce further tax credits, something called tax shifting. If we used tax shifting we would be able to shift the taxes in such a way that would convince Canadians and industry to use green technologies and thereby improve our environment.

The government needs to deal with the crisis in affordable housing. The way to do that is to use public-private partnerships. No single segment in society is going to be able to deal with this challenge that is coast to coast. P3s would work. Canadians are

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looking to the government for leadership and the federal government has a responsibility to act. So far it has failed.

The government needs to provide strategic investments in health care. Health care is truly the number one issue in the lives of Canadians and the government has failed to deal with this. It should open up a centre for best practices under the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The government needs to exert a leadership role with other partners on a national workforce strategy for health care workers. As we are getting older, so too are caregivers. This is a massive crisis that will not be resolved overnight.

The government needs to do a better job of investing in local infrastructure. It should reduce the federal taxes on gas prices.

These and other solutions that my colleagues have would dramatically improve the welfare of Canadians. I hope the government does the right thing and listens to us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. When we return to the study of Bill C-52, there will be seven minutes left in his speaking time.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)

[*English*]

NORTHERN STRATEGY

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start my speech by paying my respects to Pauloosie Paniloo and his family and friends. He was a member of the Canadian Rangers, a former MLA and he died on Friday on routine patrol in Nunavut.

I was prompted to raise my question on the government's lack of a northern strategy on Friday, March 23 in the House and it had no answer. Since that time Canada's government has continued to demonstrate that it does not have a strategy for the north.

My questions were simple. The previous government demonstrated an understanding of the north that resulted in infrastructure, economic development and land claims. It is fair to say that the north prospers today because of the work of the previous administration in its dealings and investments with the first nations community and with northern governments.

The Prime Minister promised the north three new icebreakers and a northern port. For some reason they have disappeared from the government's budget documents, so let me ask again. When will the government deliver on its only promise to the north for icebreakers, search and rescue craft north of 60 and a northern port? The people of the north are still waiting for proof that the government will deliver.

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Last summer there was a military exercise in the north. The Prime Minister was escaping from the AIDS conference in Toronto so he and the defence minister came north. As the *Ottawa Citizen* reported on March 19, the military report explained that the Prime Minister and defence minister disrupted the northern sovereignty operation by coming with only two days' notice and distracting the military personnel.

It is interesting to note that Operation Narwhal is currently under way. This exercise involves the military, law enforcement agencies and energy companies and is testing defence plans against a possible terrorist attack on Canada's northern oil and gas infrastructure. Maybe we could get an update on this exercise before the Prime Minister or a cabinet minister shows up again in the north for a tour and disrupts the exercise by diverting armed forces personnel away from the mission, much like what happened last summer during Operation Lancaster.

Planning for Operation Narwhal began in 2004 under the Liberal government, once again demonstrating an understanding of the north and a strategy working for its best interests.

Earlier this month armed forces personnel and northern rangers participated in an 8,000 kilometre patrol across Ellesmere Island. Perhaps this is the government's backup plan to the broken promises for icebreakers and a northern port to back up our sovereignty claims. The mission was successfully completed. I suggest that some northern history was etched out in a patrol of this magnitude. I congratulate the forces members and rangers.

We need to ensure that sovereignty patrols of this nature will be undertaken on a regular basis. Unfortunately there is no indication if that will be the case.

A meaningful report on a northern strategy in this House would address issues such as coastal and continental shelf mapping and sovereignty issues, such as where the United States is claiming oil and gas rich Canadian waters, something the government does not care to address. Why is that?

Furthermore, with many countries addressing concerns of global warming and meaningful follow-up for the International Polar Year, such as including new infrastructure and scientific research infrastructure that is so needed in northern Canada, one would think the government's northern strategy would address this issue, but that is not the case.

There are too many examples of a lack of action for the north. I wish the government would come forward with a northern strategy. I look forward to hearing from the parliamentary secretary on this strategy.

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, I am happy to speak in response to the question from the hon. member for Yukon.

From the outset, Canada's new government has recognized the importance of the north and its unique place in Canada. In fact, just last summer the right hon. Prime Minister identified three priorities for the north: to assert Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic; to work with our territorial partners to develop the region's natural resources

to create jobs and prosperity for northerners and all Canadians; and to work with northern communities to raise their standard of living. We are working hard to advance these priorities.

Budget 2007 strengthened the territorial formula financing to reflect the special circumstances and higher costs in the north, providing an additional \$115 million this year alone. Furthermore, the budget provided for \$25 million per year to each territory to help build the modern infrastructure that is fundamental to the future of the north, and \$23.2 million over seven years will go to Nunavut to strengthen financial management practices in that territory.

This is a good budget for the north and has been applauded by the northern premiers. Yukon Premier, Dennis Fentie, stated:

This budget gets us back to a principle based fiscal arrangement with the federal government, something for which we have been striving for some time now. That will be beneficial to us now and in the long term.

Northwest Territories Premier, Joe Handley, said, "That kind of increase is good news to us".

The launch of International Polar Year on March 1 was another strong indication of our commitment to the north. Involving more than 60 countries and thousands of scientists, it is the largest ever international program of coordinated scientific research and observation focused on the polar regions. Canada is very proud to be taking a leadership role in this initiative.

Our new government is very pleased to commit \$150 million toward a strong and innovative program in support of Canadian involvement and participation in this major international event. Forty-four research projects will benefit from this funding, projects that will focus on science for climate change impacts and adaptation and the health and well-being of northern communities.

The new knowledge that will be uncovered by Canadian and international scientists is expected to bring, not only benefits to Canadians in the north and across the country but economic and health benefits as well. A portion of this funding is also directed toward training and developing science and research relevant skills among northerners, particularly aboriginal youth, to build capacity in the north and to take on future challenges in northern research.

Dynamic northern science is indispensable to our commitment to extend national security to all our territories. International recognition of Canadian scientific expertise and leadership in Canada's sovereign north affirms the importance of the territories to Canada.

It is largely through resource development that we will be able to provide northerners with options for economic benefits, a basis for healthy, sustainable communities, and a broad set of resource based projects in the north, including diamond mining, oil and gas exploration and the proposed Mackenzie gas project, will contribute to increased economic growth over the next couple of years.

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Canada's new government is determined to make tangible, practical progress in enabling stable, prosperous communities in the north and an improved standard of living for all northerners. Through the provisions of budget 2007, initiatives such as International Polar Year and our support of resource development projects, we are confident that we are making that progress.

• (1835)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for congratulating us on our initiatives: the O'Brien report, of course, made the recommendations on the formula financing for our infrastructure program which, after us pushing and pushing, is carrying on; and the Polar Year initiative that was announced by Anne McLellan.

I will give the parliamentary secretary one more chance to answer the questions. First, what about a northern strategy and, second, what about the promise for the north of the northern icebreakers and the northern port? Has the government completely dropped them and can we get on with other things or will it be pursuing these two initiatives, one of which it promised?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, again I will state that the government is committed to the north and the sovereignty of the north, which is something that the previous government let go to the wayside for so many years with our military in a state of ill-repute and ill-repair due to its lack of funding. This is something the our government has taken head on.

However, we are very committed to improving opportunities for all northerners by ensuring that all governments have access to the resources they need to meet their responsibilities. Budget 2007 is a tangible demonstration of the government's understanding of the unique situation in the territories. Premier Okalik said:

The federal government is coming forward to assist us in building up capacity and systems in terms of financial management, and we appreciate that. We look forward to using it wisely....

However, another question needs to be asked today. I know the member opposite stated that he was happy we brought forward the O'Brien report and implemented it. I find it surprising that he did not vote for the budget then because this is something that he should have done. It was obviously good for his territory.

• (1840)

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to raise a subsequent question in the House of Commons with regard to the government's fee bate policy introduced into the budget program.

I appreciate that the parliamentary secretary has shown up again to at least debate this issue. We see a big problem ahead with regard to the government's actual procurement plan. Frankly, it is puzzling how it was introduced. It was done without consultation and appropriate discussion, to the degree that it has caused a significant market shift and an intervention that has cost Canadians jobs.

The end result, and make no mistake about this, is that we will actually witness Canadian money going to international cities that are building vehicles to compete against Canadian auto workers, and that is unacceptable. I do not think Canadians who are listening

tonight want to see their money going to Seoul, Beijing and to other places. What they want to see is their hard-earned tax dollars going into producing the types of conditions that win jobs for themselves.

The fee bate policy is so messed up that even domestic auto producers will examine disabling safety equipment to be eligible for this fee bate system. In my previous debate tonight I thought it was a different company, Volvo, but I retract that. It is actually Honda that has gone public and said that it will examine disabling safety equipment in order to be eligible for this fee bate system.

How have we come to the point where Honda will actually put a proposition in front of its engineers and its CEO and say that it will sacrifice Canadian safety to be eligible for the Conservative's \$1,000 rebate policy? That is how attractive it is for Honda, while at the same time it is disturbing for Canadians.

Let us look at the impact and the money that will go to the companies in fee bates for this type of method. Toyota alone will get \$47 million. Yaris will get \$34 million and it does not produce one vehicle in Canada. How about Ford? It is estimated that Ford will lose \$26 million, General Motors will lose \$18 million and DaimlerChrysler will lose \$10 million.

How is it that the government has concocted a policy on fee bates that will not even put the proper vehicles on the road?

I grant the government that it is early, it is only the first month, but sales of luxury SUVs are up over 15%. It will not get the type of result that we want which is to lower greenhouse gas emissions. There is other Canadian technology in there that we could actually have some investments and some solutions. It could be cylinder deactivation. For those who are not aware, that is when the engine reduces its capacity at different times which produces less greenhouse gas emissions. It can be just as efficient and effective in many other models. In fact, if it is in the high class vehicles that we have. In terms of weight, it is very effective.

I would say that the government has to put forth a full auto policy. It has the flip-flopping, floor-crossing minister, who was a Liberal and is now a Conservative, who promised an auto policy many times in this chamber and yet did not deliver. The Conservatives could stand up and walk down to him and ask him what happened to the auto policy. Maybe this it. Is this the actual Liberal plan? I do not know.

All I do know is that this is putting a damper on economic development. Specifically, General Motors has now put on hold its plant decisions in Canada. That is unacceptable. Canadians deserve better.

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Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the concerns of the member for Windsor West about Canada's auto industry and the ongoing free trade negotiations with South Korea.

The member would have us believe that Canada's auto sector is on life support when the facts clearly show otherwise. Canada's auto industry assemblers and parts makers are some of the most successful and competitive in the world.

Our industry employs over half a million Canadians. Automakers have 12 major assembly plants with the 13th coming on line in 2008. They produced 2.5 million cars and light trucks in 2006, or about 16% of all North American production. In fact, in 2006, Ontario outperformed Michigan for the third year in a row as the highest automotive producing region in all of North America, all this while maintaining high quality standards.

That said, a global restructuring is taking place within the North American auto industry. The Detroit based assemblers are making some tough but necessary decisions to stay competitive, as we have all heard about recent events in the industry. Our concern is for the people impacted by these business decisions. Workers affected are eligible for assistance through the HRSDC programs in addition to their severance packages.

With some companies restructuring, other companies within Canada's auto sector are expanding and creating new jobs. Toyota is building a new \$1.1 billion assembly plant in Woodstock, Ontario, which will come on line in the fall of 2008. Honda is investing \$154 million in a new engine plant in Aliston, Ontario, which also will come on line in 2008.

Despite a difficult period for the Detroit based automakers, Canadian branch assembly plants are winning product mandates. The new Chevy Camaro will be proudly built in Oshawa. The new Dodge Challenger, DaimlerChrysler awarded to its Brampton, Ontario facility. In Oakville, Ford is building two new successful crossover vehicles, the Edge and the Lincoln MKX. I understand Ford is going to have another new model starting in the next year. Our Canadian automakers are renowned for their quality. These mandates reaffirm that a job well done will be rewarded.

Canada's new government will continue to work to ensure that our auto sector remains strong. The auto industry is vital to our economy, as are the spin-off industries associated with this sector. Our constructive measures in budget 2006 to reduce corporate and personal taxes make Canada an even better place for auto investment. Our strategic economic plan in Advantage Canada will create a better business environment for all industries.

Budget 2007, widely considered the best budget for Canadian manufacturers in decades, continues to reduce taxes, accelerates capital cost allowance writeoffs, cuts red tape, invests in modern infrastructure, and is geared to develop a skilled and educated workforce. Canada's new government is setting the stage for economic growth, innovation and opportunity.

As for the member's concern about the impact of a free trade agreement with South Korea, it is our contention that such an agreement will have a limited impact on Canada's auto sector, and

the overall benefits outweigh the concerns. The implications of the proposed elimination of the tariff are relatively small when compared to the size of the automotive industry. With the tariff currently only being 6.1% and that would only be eliminated on roughly 8% of total Canadian vehicles sales, the impact is negligible. However, the proposed deal has the potential to deliver significant commercial benefits across a wide range of the Canadian economy, from agriculture to high tech services to investment.

Free trade agreements ensure that Canadian companies are competitive in key markets. The United States and other countries are aggressively negotiating free trade agreements, including with South Korea. Canada has a similar interest in actively negotiating improved market access for our products and services, including the auto industry.

There is no deal yet, but what I can tell the member for Windsor West is that this government will only agree to a free trade deal that delivers substantial benefit for Canada and all Canadians.

The member talked about the fee bates. I will get to that—

• (1845)

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

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that government officials would actually prepare something. The question I asked was specifically on fee bates. I would be happy to spend the time that I have right now to talk about the South Korea deal as well.

The South Korea deal, quite frankly, is very alarming. The United States is going through vetting process. Its members will vote on the issue. There is growing opposition to this deal, be it from John Edwards, be it from the automakers on both the American side and the Canadian side. We are not going to have that same right in Canada.

The government has shut down studies. We have had to drag the studies out of it. They are half-measured, half-concocted, not sufficient, old and outdated studies. The government will not give us the chance to have a vote in this chamber about the way things are going.

I ask the member who is from Oshawa, is it his personal opinion that we should have a vote in this place on the Korea trade deal?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, the member is a little bit back and forth on things, but I would like to address our environmental policy to help encourage fuel efficient cars. I am very surprised that this NDP member would be against the government policy put forward to encourage the purchase and utilization of environmentally-friendly cars for all Canadians.

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We have come forth with an ecoenergy program. As he said, I am from Oshawa and again, I am incredibly surprised that he would be against a policy that encourages technology from Oshawa, from Canada, cars like the Chevy Impala and Monte Carlo that have E85 technology developed right here.

He talked about fee bates. I think he needs to look at his own policy in the past and what the NDP is in favour of. Is the NDP not supportive of things like California standards? I remember debating in the House last year where the NDP was in support of a 25% reduction in fuel consumption that the industry said would bankrupt and would put—

• (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*Translation*]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise tonight particularly since we are questioning the government on two matters in adjournment proceedings pertaining to the fact that the policy for the manufacturing industry, whether the automobile industry or any other sector, is woefully inadequate.

Let us remember that, on March 28, the Bloc Québécois pointed out to the government for the umpteenth time that significant numbers of businesses were closing their doors. Mr. Ken Georgetti, President of the Canadian Labour Congress had this to say about the statements by the Minister of the Environment: "I am astounded to hear the Minister of the Environment describing the hypothetical loss of 250,000 good-paying jobs in the manufacturing, forestry and processing sectors as a looming crisis. Because three weeks ago, the same number of jobs lost did not warrant any government concern".

While the Minister of the Environment pronounces his apocalyptic forecast, in reality the apocalypse has already arrived, in the disappearance of manufacturing jobs across Canada.

There was a report by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology on this subject but the government, typically, decided to retain only certain parts of the report. There are provisions for accelerated depreciation. That is interesting. However, when we compare them to what is available for the tar sands, they do not provide the same kind of benefits. We should also examine credits for businesses that do not make large profits—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. Could I ask him to turn off the earpieces on his desk?

Mr. Paul Crête: Done. I am sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Thank you. You may continue.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, to go back to what I was saying, the government says that there is a policy for the manufacturing sector. That policy is based in part on the report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. However, another important part of the report has not been put forward. It was recommended that tax credits be provided for workforce training so that workers can be

ready for change in the company instead of having to take training when they lose their jobs. This is a proactive measure that would help us keep people employed.

The government could also make investment tax credits for research and development refundable. At present, especially in forestry and harder hit sectors, many companies are not earning huge profits but have managed to stand up to competition from emerging countries without too much government assistance. They have done so by eating into their profits, leaving themselves no flexibility for investment. If the government had accepted the recommendation to make investment tax credits refundable, these companies could position themselves in such a way that they could compete much better.

What can I say about the government's hesitation concerning older workers? Globalization can be good in some ways. It keeps the economy running. However, we have to accept that there will be losers, who are often older workers who cannot find new jobs. The evidence is irrefutable: every time a business closes, 20% of the employees cannot find other jobs.

The government has been going from committee to committee for a year and a half. The latest committee it set up was the Expert Panel on Older Workers. Apparently, they are waiting for opinions from various people. The panel has been asked to observe the situation on the ground, but it has refused to do so. I think that there is very little understanding of the reality on the ground for these sectors in terms of the manufacturing workforce. People think that Canada's overall economy is doing well, so they do not understand how some sectors can be experiencing difficulty.

The parliamentary secretary knows this. He participated in the debates with us. When will the government move forward with real action for the manufacturing sector in addition to the partial measures it picked from the report? I know and they know that these measures will not address the crisis, because there really is a crisis, which the ministers refused to recognize when they met with the president of the CLC.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for participating in the industry committee report. As he stated, it was a wonderful report. The Minister of Finance actually took the majority of the recommendations and put them into the budget. I would request that he take a look at the budget a little more carefully because we are incredibly concerned about plant closures. I believe it was Perrin Beatty who said that this is the best budget for Canadian manufacturers in recent history.

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Canadians elected their new government just over a year ago. At that time, we knew there were manufacturers across Canada facing serious challenges: high energy prices, an aging workforce, a high Canadian dollar relative to the U.S., and an economic slowdown for some of our major trading partners. Our government was not content to sit back and watch one of Canada's oldest and most important industrial sectors, one that employs over two million Canadians, disappear.

As my colleague heard through our month-long manufacturing study in committee, for manufacturers to succeed they need to increasingly rely upon their knowledge advantage. They need to be innovators. They have to be able to compete in a global economy. To be successful they have to operate in an environment that promotes innovation and investment.

They need access to a knowledgeable and highly skilled labour force. That is why when Canada's new government brought forth our first budget, we introduced 29 tax cuts in budget 2006. We eliminated capital tax. We reduced corporate and small business tax rates and we eliminated the corporate surtax. Then, last November, we announced our plan to rebuild a strong economy by creating the right conditions for Canadians and Canadian businesses to thrive. "Advantage Canada" is a strategic, long term economic plan to improve Canada's economic prosperity, both today and in the future, a plan to build an economy that will benefit manufacturers.

Our plan focuses on five key advantages that will help Canada compete globally: a tax advantage that will continue to reduce taxes for all Canadians and establish the lowest tax rate on new business investment in the G-7; a fiscal advantage that will eliminate Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation; an entrepreneurial advantage that will reduce unnecessary regulation and lower taxes to unlock business investment; a knowledge advantage designed to create the world's best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce; and an infrastructure advantage that invests in modern, world-class infrastructure to ensure the seamless flow of people, goods and services across the country and across our borders.

In budget 2007, we delivered directly to the needs of Canadian manufacturers.

The government introduced tax measures, including a temporary change to the capital cost allowance that will encourage manufacturers to invest and be more productive.

The government is working to identify opportunities to improve the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program.

The government will put in place the programs and initiatives needed to ensure that we have the best educated, most highly skilled workforce.

The government committed to reducing the paper burden in businesses and streamlining regulations.

The government invested in the infrastructure to make Canada a North American hub for manufacturing.

We committed to aligning research investments with the real-world challenges of commercialization.

Canada's new government is providing businesses and manufacturers with the right conditions to compete with the rest of the world. Canadian manufacturers are adapting to the global marketplace and they will succeed. They are confident that the government will be there for them.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, Canadian workers who have lost their jobs and then found another usually find that they are earning 25% less, or about \$10,000 less per person. That means \$2.5 billion less in our economy per year.

Manufacturing sector jobs are being transformed into warehousing sector jobs. As a result, there are fewer economic spinoffs for our regional economies. Up to this point, the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology has given an excellent report. However, the government has not done everything it must do. It took some of the committee recommendations that had a fiscal impact, but it did not do everything that was recommended. The committee's recommendations on accelerated capital cost allowance were much broader than what the government included in the budget. In conclusion, can we look forward to a real action plan—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, we are taking action when the previous Liberal government, for 13 years, did nothing.

The government recognizes that Canada's manufacturing sector faces challenges. Since we have taken office, we have not let manufacturers tackle those challenges alone. The new Government of Canada listened to manufacturers and we acted.

Our strategic economic plan, "Advantage Canada", goes to the heart of addressing manufacturers' concerns. We introduced budget 2007, which I believe is the most manufacturing-friendly budget ever produced. Budget 2007 not only responds to the key tax concerns of manufacturers, it also invests in innovation, infrastructure and new technology. It lays the foundation for streamlining regulations by ensuring that we have the best educated, highest skilled and most flexible workforce.

Our latest announcement, the strategic aerospace and defence initiative, shows our commitment to promote excellence in the industrial sector. We will continue to work with the manufacturing sector. We will continue to deliver and we will continue to act when the previous government did none of that.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*English*]

(The House adjourned at 7 p.m.)

Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.
m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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