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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Monday, October 22, 2007**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 22, 2007

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1105)

[*English*]

### NATIONAL PEACEKEEPERS' DAY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-287, An Act respecting a National Peacekeepers' Day, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

**The Speaker:** There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.)** moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in at report stage.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Speaker:** The division on the motion stands deferred until Wednesday, October 24, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

That therefore concludes private members' business for the moment.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

**The Speaker:** Is it agreed that the sitting be suspended until 12 o'clock?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:05 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

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## SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

● (1200)

[*English*]

### RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from October 19 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join the debate in the response to the Speech from the Throne.

I commend our leader on the position he has taken in not voting down the government on the throne speech. I think it is wise, because there really was nothing in the speech overall. It was pretty much innocuous. If we were to change 25 words it could be a past Liberal Speech from the Throne.

For the most part, throne speeches try to be positive. They try to set out a bit of a template. This one sort of did it from about 35,000 feet. Nonetheless, I think where we are going to run into trouble is where we drill down into the specific issues, where we look at the details of some of the actions and some of the legislation being put forward by the government.

It is always contended that the devil is in the details and I think that is what we are going to find. As long as this Parliament lasts, as long as the session goes forward, I think what we will find is that the people on this side will stand and fight on an issue by issue basis. That has been our contention, to make Parliament work and to make it work for Canadians, but when we see that the better needs and the best needs of Canadians are being compromised, that is when we will call the government to task.

*The Address*

There are certainly a number of issues like this in the throne speech. When I look at the statement that the government is going to review aspects of the EI system, I personally am greatly concerned. I think a number of Canadians somewhat suspect actions taken by the government in the way it has addressed employment insurance. As the government brings this forward, we are certainly going to try to represent what is best in regard to the needs of workers.

I should state from the outset that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Davenport.

Let us think back to the last time that a Conservative government had control of EI. We can look back to the late 1980s. We know that the EI fund of that time had been exhausted. It was from there, from the Auditor General's report, when we did have a stand-alone EI system, that once that program had been decimated through the late 1980s because of high unemployment rates and the draw on that fund at the time, the Auditor General said we had to take that program and put it back into the general accounts. That is what was done.

We know that through the mid-1990s the unemployment rate came down. More Canadians got back to work. There was less of a draw on the EI fund. There were changes made to the unemployment insurance act back in the mid-1990s. Over time, the premium rates paid by workers and employees went down. The economy took hold and grew. As a country we began to prosper and more money was paid into the fund.

I shared some time with my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst on an all party committee in the last Parliament. We put forward some recommendations on changes to EI. Some very worthwhile things came out of those consultations and that committee. Certainly the dropping of the divisor rule and going to the best 14 weeks are things that I think better serve the workers in this country.

We saw the response of the Conservatives at that time. They wanted no part of that. They wanted an in-out, stand-alone system, like an insurance policy. Canadians have come to expect more from that system. A great piece of EI legislation came forward in the last session. As a matter of fact, it was put forward by my colleague from Sydney—Victoria. It would extend sick benefits to those who are undergoing cancer treatment or perhaps are debilitated from heart and stroke illnesses. These are devastating illnesses to experience. They sometimes yield catastrophic outcomes for a family.

● (1205)

I thought the legislation made sense, but we saw that the government had no use for it. The government saw no purpose in it and voted against it, which was very disappointing. I am sure it was disappointing not just to the other three parties in this House, but to working Canadians, because all they are trying to do is provide for their families.

I think it is telling about the Conservative government as well when we read through the throne speech but do not see the words “student”, “university” or “post-secondary”. Those words are nowhere to be found in the Speech from the Throne. Our young students can draw no kind of hope or optimism from this throne speech.

Certainly we saw the government show a total disregard for the students of this country when it decimated and gutted the student employment program last year. It was the opposition parties in the House that fought to have at least a bit more money put back into that program. Community groups from coast to coast supported that program and had offered summer employment opportunities to students for many years. It was a great program, well served, and was subscribed to by many businesses and not for profit groups from coast to coast. Yet it was decimated by the Conservative government.

This showed a total lack of caring and understanding by the government about the needs of students in this country and a lack of understanding of the needs of not for profit groups in this country. Giving extra money to students is necessary to help them pay their way through university, but for many of these students this program is their first opportunity for a summer job to build skills and to start developing a resumé. I do not think there is anything better that we can give our youth. That was torn away from them by the government last spring.

While on the topic of universities, I note that I come from the province of Nova Scotia, which has a great reputation for having some of the top post-secondary institutions in this country, such as St. Francis Xavier, St. Mary's and Dalhousie. The post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia are at the forefront of a lot of research. These post-secondary institutions have pretty much been pillaged by the Conservative government. That is what concerns me about the throne speech.

The government is changing the way it supports these institutions in transfers from the federal government to provincial governments. It did put in a bit more money, and I commend the government for doing so, but when it changes the system from an equity based system to a per capita based system, it is the small Atlantic provinces that are going to be hurt. In this change alone, Nova Scotia will receive \$28 million less under the new system that was adopted by the Conservative government. Over the 10 year term of this change, Nova Scotians will receive \$65 million. The province of Alberta will receive \$3.5 billion. The minister's own province is doing okay, but where is the equity? Where is the fairness? Why should Nova Scotia be left behind? That is the unfairness that I see. That is pitting one region against another. We have seen this time and again from the government. There is a true unfairness there.

I can assure the government that we on this side of the House, on an issue by issue basis when that legislation comes forward, will stand and defend the rights of Nova Scotians. We will defend fairness. We will make sure that whatever the Conservatives bring forward will be scrutinized. If it is going to hurt Nova Scotians and if it is going to hurt Canadians, we will stand here and we will defeat it.

● (1210)

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to my colleague across the House. Throughout the time that our new government has been in office, many things have occurred but on this side of the House and we get the job done.

However, there has been a problem in the Senate. Would the member comment on whether or not he supports Senate reform?

*The Address*

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, I guess this is what we see from the government. I take my 10 minutes here in the House and I talk about EI reform and ask what the government is going to do for students, but the member throws a little bit of smoke over it and asks about that big, bad Senate. The government says that the Senate is tying everything up.

I could say that the Senate reflects the government. The government put nothing in the Speech from the Throne for students or for post-secondary schooling. There is no hope at all for students in this country and then the member tries to gloss over it with a question about the Senate. I am embarrassed to even respond to that question.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member talks about the cuts to employment insurance and how bad it is and how it hurts workers. When the Liberals were in government for 13 years, they had a \$50 billion surplus and still did not do anything.

I say that the Liberals did nothing because my colleague was with me on the human resources committee. We voted to make changes to employment insurance but his own party voted against the recommendations of the committee. I congratulate the member for voting for the changes but some of his own colleagues who were on the committee recommended changes to employment insurance but when it came time to vote in the House, they voted against their own recommendations.

This is pitiful when there is a surplus of \$50 billion. Do they not think it is about time to stop cutting EI and taking money from working people? The money was in the general revenue fund and they used it to pay down the debt.

The member is right when he talks about the throne speech. I am aware that in the throne speech the government wants to look at how it can manage the EI fund instead of giving benefits to the workers. The member's own party will vote for the throne speech which will not help working people.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, when the change in the legislation comes forward and if the government wants to alter the EI system there may be aspects of it that the Liberal Party has advocated for quite some time, which is that additional moneys should be put into training and the approach to training should be different.

We best serve Canadians when we do that on an issue by issue basis, which is why I support our leader for taking the tact that he did. I do not see the wisdom in the NDP's position that they were going to vote against the throne speech two weeks before the speech was tabled.

When those pieces of legislation come forward, I would hope that I can stand shoulder to shoulder with my colleague because we are very similar on a number of issues that pertain to the Employment Insurance Act. Hopefully, together can ensure this system is not decimated by the government.

• (1215)

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned the Canada summer students job program. We fought for it in the House, largely by the Liberal

opposition but also, to some extent, the other parties, and changes were made, but they were not significant.

We heard from the government that big corporations received all the money previously. It turns out that this past summer it was Conservative ridings that received most of the big money grants.

Could my colleague tell us of a few organizations that did not get money in the end that should have received money?

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact as we speak my staff is doing a survey in the riding to identify who was successful and who was not. Those details do not come out from the government. It is not willing to share those types of statistics.

The other group that was jeopardized here—

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

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is an ancient Chinese proverb that states, “we are cursed to live in interesting times”, and these are certainly interesting times. The Speech from the Throne is a general statement of the government's objectives. These speeches are often remembered more for what they do not address as opposed to the issues they actual raise.

Notwithstanding all of this bluster, what of the content in the Speech from the Throne? What about the issues of importance to Canadians? We hear a great deal of chatter in the speech with respect to our national sovereignty and yet in practice the government action leaves a great deal to be desired.

For example, where is the government in regard to the recent outrageous proposal from the United States administration with respect to airline passenger lists? What could be more important to our sovereignty than protecting the privacy and personal rights of our nation's citizens? We hear no challenge from the government to the Bush administration's demand that Canadian airlines provide names, dates of birth, gender, travel itinerary and track information for passengers originating in Canada even though they do not even land in the United States.

If the Prime Minister wants to protect our sovereignty, I suggest he start by refusing to provide this information to the Bush administration. This is clearly an issue of sovereignty and the rights of Canadians need to be protected by their own government. Speaking of sovereignty, we need only to look at the issue of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples to see the issue of the actual level of commitment to the basic rights of our first nations peoples.

While I commend the government for some of the statements made in the throne speech with respect to aboriginal issues, there is so much more of substance that needs to be done.

We all remember the Kelowna accord. It was a landmark agreement between the previous Liberal government, provincial leaders and first nations peoples.

*The Address*

When the members of the New Democratic Party joined with the Conservative Party to defeat the Liberal government in 2005, the fate of this historic accord was sealed along, I might add, with so many other progressive initiatives. It was a tragedy that the NDP would so easily cast its soul on the altar of political expediency but that is a debate for another day.

The Prime Minister did indeed withdraw from the Kelowna accord and effectively ended an historic opportunity to deal fairly with first nations peoples.

This past September, the United Nations General Assembly voted on whether to adopt the United declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Only four countries voted against the declaration and Canada was one of them.

The Conservative government reversed the previous Liberal government's commitment and voted against the measure. We need only listen to the words of Mr. Gary Highland, the national director of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation to know why. He speaks of the role of his country's prime minister, John Howard, a good friend of our Prime Minister.

He said:

It's common knowledge in Australia that Howard was responsible or had a major influence in changing the Canadian government's position.

Where is the leadership from Canada's government when foreign heads of government direct our government on how to vote at the United Nations?

I have met with various labour leaders in recent months to hear their increasing concerns about the need to protect manufacturing jobs in this country, among them, Gus Goncalves and Maria Pinto of the Canadian Auto Workers at the Bombardier Aerospace plant in Downsview, Ontario, who know that these jobs are threatened.

Manufacturing jobs in Canada are being lost at an alarming rate and urgent action needs to be taken. However, the message of these labour leaders and that of millions of Canadians is falling upon the deaf ears of the government. We had hoped there would be a real commitment in the throne speech to address this issue but again there were only platitudes and lack of substance.

Our environment is under siege. Climate change and greenhouse gases are real issues to be addressed, not political headaches to be shuffled aside as the government continually does.

It is truly disheartening that Canada, under the Conservative government, will be the only major signing nation to the Kyoto accord that is to withdraw from the commitment we made. The government needs to implement our Kyoto commitments and not spend so much energy finding ways to avoid them.

● (1220)

What about our role as a peacekeeping nation, one that the world looks to for leadership? We need to take action where action is so desperately needed. What about Darfur? Why does the government not take a role in helping to alleviate the suffering of so many millions of people in this region of the world? This is the most pressing humanitarian crisis facing the world community and yet the government continues its policy of inaction.

I commend the government's decision to bestow honorary citizenship upon Aung San Suu Kyi whose courage, perseverance and commitment to freedom is beyond exemplary. However, Canada should also be taking substantive steps to hold the military leadership in Burma to account for the terrible abuses taking place in that country.

Where in the speech is the commitment to students who are increasingly leaving school with enormous student debt? The previous Liberal government was putting in place the help they needed but the present government has done nothing of substance to assist Canada's students.

Many of our country's senior citizens are finding it increasingly more difficult to manage and yet there is no real help for them either. Where is the help for these great Canadians who have built our nation?

Families across the country continue to struggle. What about the national child care program that the previous Liberal government was implementing? Again, nothing.

In essence, we are speaking about the basic human rights of all Canadians, whether they are travelling abroad, are first nations peoples, older Canadians, students, parents and the list goes on.

I would note, speaking of human rights, that the government made reference to several anniversaries to be celebrated this year in Canada. While those noted in the throne speech are of significance, what about the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Why was there no mention of one of Canada's greatest achievements? Would this be inconvenient for the government?

Those are but a few of the issues that the Speech from the Throne simply fails to deliver upon. There is no passion for the values of Canadians in this speech and no vision of what Canadians want to aspire to. It is really the remonstrations of managers when what we need is leaders.

I am reminded of a comment by the former British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. He was asked by a young member of the British Parliament how he could put more fire into his speech. Churchill replied, "What you should have done is put the speech into the fire".

I have spoken today on many issues of importance to Canadians. We can only hope in the months to come that these real concerns of Canadians will be addressed by the government.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member quoted different parts of the speech and I want to quote one part of the speech and ask his opinion. It reads:

To ensure that our institutions reflect our shared commitment to democracy, our Government will continue its agenda of democratic reform by reintroducing important pieces of legislation from the last session, including direct consultations with voters on the selection of Senators and limitations on their tenure.

Does the member have the commitment to democracy that we have on this side and is he willing to making changes to the Senate that are much needed and overdue?

*The Address*

•(1225)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, yes I am. This party is committed to democratic reform, democracy in our institution and respect for our institution, which I find is so lacking on the government side.

One thing that concerns me is that the Prime Minister, when he was a member of the Reform Party, talked about giving a greater role to members of Parliament and yet his total caucus is silent on all issues. They cannot speak unless they get authorization from the Prime Minister's Office. His ministers cannot even have press conferences unless they first have everything vetted and get a personal stamp of approval by the PMO. I find this is totally outrageous. It belittles the work and the responsibility of ministers of the crown. It also belittles the work of members of Parliament who are here to represent their constituencies.

We have seen so many examples of members of Parliament who have been tossed out by the government when they do speak their mind. This is totally outrageous.

Having a vote of confidence on every issue and clause that goes before this House and the committee is totally outrageous. It is an affront to Parliament to say to members of Parliament and to this House that we cannot amend a bill from the government because that would be a vote of confidence and it will go before the electorate. That is an affront to this Parliament and it is totally unjust. It speaks of a Prime Minister who speaks of democracy but who is a control freak and who is totally opposed to democracy and our democratic institutions.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member incorrectly noted that the NDP voted with the Conservatives and we could have somehow mythologically kept his party in power. The reality is we did not even have enough votes. The independent members actually voted against the Liberal government. Maybe, like many Liberals, the member does not know how to count or he wants to continue to mislead the public on something. I will leave that for him to decide.

The member's discussion about manufacturing was rather interesting given the previous government's promise after promise to me over several years for an auto policy which was never delivered. Interestingly enough, the then minister of industry, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, flip-flopped and crossed the floor to the Conservatives. He did not bring the auto policy that we so desperately need. What he actually brought were the South Korea trade negotiations that are continuing to this day. Why is the member's party supporting that? Why is it that there is no real significant change?

The member noted the situation with Canadian air travellers having to disclose personal information when travelling across the United States, but it was his party while in government, Jean Chrétien and the member for LaSalle—Émard who did nothing when Canadians were put on the NSEERS and U.S. visit list, fingerprinted and photographed at the Canadian-American border when crossing into or exiting the United States. Why does the Liberal Party support the fingerprinting of Canadian citizens by the United States?

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, there is a reason that the NDP is very low in the polls, which is because Canadians in general know

the NDP's record. On one hand, the NDP members constantly say that they stand up for working families. Yet when there is an opportunity to work collaboratively, especially in the last minority government, they are the first ones to attack the Liberal government. In fact, the New Democratic Party in this House has spent more time attacking the opposition than it has the government. So much for an effective opposition.

Let us look at the NDP agenda and the things it talks about, such as increasing the minimum wage to \$10. Let us look at two provincial governments where the NDP is in power. Saskatchewan and Manitoba have lower minimum wages than Ontario. The NDP talks big but once it gets into power, it does the exact opposite.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to open the debate on today's theme from the throne speech: strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions.

•(1230)

[*Translation*]

We have a great, united country whose foundation is a solid federation and a living democracy. In fact, federalism and democracy have gone hand and hand throughout Canada's history.

[*English*]

Our country's history is one of people joining together to achieve great dreams thought impossible by the pessimists, but it is also a history of people who, through accommodation and respect, build practical, workable approaches allowing remarkable progress to unfold.

The project of Confederation was about bringing together the different regions into a strong and united country based on democratic practices and the rule of law. Sir John A. Macdonald, George-Étienne Cartier and the Fathers of Confederation, through strong leadership united Canadians in a federal union which would deliver a future of security and prosperity for the country as a whole. Their vision was strong and enduring, a firm foundation on which successive generations have built.

Our government is continuing this nation building project today with our commitments for strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions. Strong leadership and a better Canada: that is our objective.

I would like to spend my time today discussing the progress we have already made in this area and highlighting our plans for this new session of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Our government made a commitment to practise open federalism, and it is taking steps to ensure that our country is prosperous and united.

Our approach is not new, but it is based on the very principles underlying Confederation.

*The Address*

The union was based on a simple concept: the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments. The objective was not to have a weak, passive federal government, but a government that would respect the provinces' areas of jurisdiction.

[English]

Provincial governments are closer to their citizens and are well positioned to determine local needs and aspirations. In contrast, the federal government is well placed to protect the national interest in pursuit of the common good of the country as a whole. As the project of our Confederation first became committed to paper in the Quebec Resolutions of 1864, this approach was clear:

In the Federation of the British North American Provinces, the system of Government best adapted under existing circumstances to protect the diversified interest of the several Provinces, and secure efficiency, harmony and permanency in the working of the Union, would be a general Government, charged with matters of a common interest to the whole country; and Local Governments...charged with the control of local matters in their respective sections.

[Translation]

The steps we have taken recently and the measures we plan to take to create a federalism of openness will produce unprecedented efficiency, harmony and stability in the union, as the Fathers of Confederation envisioned many years ago.

Our federalism of openness means respecting provincial areas of jurisdiction, and that, in turn, means two things. First, a federal government that shows leadership in its areas of jurisdiction. Second, a federal government that unites the country by introducing fair, respectful intergovernmental policies.

[English]

We have shown strong leadership in areas of federal jurisdiction, such as strengthening our economy by cutting taxes and helping families, in the process paying down billions on the debt and achieving the lowest national unemployment rate since I was a child; in international trade with the resolution of the softwood lumber dispute; in defence with our leadership in international aid efforts in Afghanistan; and in public safety and security with our agenda for making communities safer by tackling crime.

In the new session this leadership will continue with measures to strengthen Canada's economic union through internal free trade among the provinces; a commitment to action in protecting Canada's sovereignty, particularly in the Arctic; continued pursuit of a safer Canada beginning with the comprehensive criminal justice reforms in our Bill C-2, the tackling violent crime act.

[Translation]

We have treated the provincial and territorial governments with respect, which has strengthened national unity. To restore the fiscal balance within the Canadian federation, we have increased the main federal transfers and introduced a new stable, reliable, fair funding formula. We have helped build a better Canada with our historic recognition that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada.

[English]

Our 2007 budget contained an unprecedented long term commitment to rebuild Canada's infrastructure, amounting to a total of \$33 billion over the next seven years, the largest federal investment in Canadian infrastructure in over half a century.

•(1235)

[Translation]

During this session, we will introduce a bill to place formal limits on the use of the federal spending power for new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. This bill will formalize the commitments our government made in the 2006 and 2007 budgets, because it will specify the limits on federal power.

In keeping with how we see open federalism, our bill will also allow the provinces and territories to opt out of new shared-cost programs with reasonable compensation if they offer compatible programs. In addition to recognizing the provinces' and territories' ability to provide programs in their specific areas of responsibility, our bill will enable Canadians, wherever they live, to receive services comparable to those available under national programs.

[English]

Our diversity as a country serves as a source both of strength and innovation. Through our actions in open federalism, including equitable and predictable funding and clarified roles and responsibilities in our federation, we are offering a principles based approach on which all orders of government can continue to work into the future.

The vision of Macdonald and Cartier of a country united from east to west, of new Canadians and old, French and English, country and city, together dreaming great dreams and building a brighter future is alive and well and has a place deep in the heart of our government in 2007.

However, our Confederation must be more than the sum of its parts. The federal government must act as a leader in keeping the country strong and united and as a model for democratic values. To perform this leadership role, the democratic underpinnings of our government must be solid in order to continue to meet the expectations of the Canadians we serve. Our initiatives in the area of democratic reform demonstrate our government's leadership in this area. Nowhere is this more evident than our efforts to modernize our central democratic institution, a federal Parliament where the representation of both popular and provincial interests are united within the federal legislative process.

[Translation]

Since Confederation, Canada's Parliament has served the democratic interests of Canadians well, but the government must take action to ensure that this institution, which is the cornerstone of our representative democracy, remains strong, vibrant and adapted to the needs of Canadians in the 21st century.



*The Address**[English]*

Our bicameral Parliament includes two houses, the lower house here which is comprised of elected representatives of the citizens of this great country originally founded on the fundamental principle of representation by population, and the upper house which was designed to represent the regions of the country to act as a chamber of sober second thought.

However, in the contemporary era, the Senate has been unable to credibly fulfill its role as an effective representative of the regions in the federal legislative process due to fundamental concerns with legitimacy and effectiveness of that appointed and unaccountable chamber. As for the other chamber, this one, the distribution of seats in the House of Commons has shifted too far away from the principle of representation by population, resulting in the unfair under-representation of the fast growing provinces.

Our government has already taken measures to address this situation as we promised during the last election with Bill C-56 introduced in the last session to enhance the principle of representation by population in the House of Commons and give fast growing provinces the representation that their population merits, and by Bills S-4 and C-43 introduced in the last session to begin the long overdue project of Senate reform.

I would like to spend a few moments discussing Senate reform. It is a priority of our government that is urgently needed to modernize our federal Parliament. We put forward an agenda for the Senate reforms that is practical and achievable. As stated in the Speech from the Throne, we will continue to pursue this agenda with the reintroduction of two important bills.

The Senate tenure bill proposed a uniform fixed term for senators of eight years. Rather than leave the length of tenure as long as 45 years, as it is currently, our bill proposed that senators be appointed to a fixed term of eight years. This is a change that would bring renewal and relevance to the Senate. This change would improve the effectiveness of the Senate. It would ensure that senators' terms were long enough for them to gain the expertise and independence necessary to act as a chamber of sober second thought, but at the same time it would ensure that the terms would not be so long as to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the Senate as a modern institution in what we seek to declare to be a democratic country.

Unfortunately, the current unelected unaccountable Liberal senators spent over a year delaying this legislation before they finally took a decision to not take a decision. This action alone, or inaction more accurately, demonstrates clearly that the Senate must change. Its current form does not function well on this issue, or at all.

As I stated, our government intends to reintroduce the Senate term limits bill this session. I hope that the summer recess gave opposition senators some time for that sober second thought in relation to their position of inaction on this bill where they have refused to exercise their constitutional obligation to vote on the bill.

Our second Senate reform, Bill C-43, offered a means for democratizing the Senate by providing Canadians an opportunity to choose and advise who they want representing them in the Senate. It would provide for the first time an opportunity for voters across this country to have a democratic say in who sits in their Senate. This

should hardly be a difficult principle to embrace in a 21st century western democracy. It would provide greater legitimacy and credibility to the work of the Senate as a democratic institution.

I was extremely pleased to attend the swearing in of Senator Bert Brown last week. He of course was popularly elected by the people of his province. I hope that we can look forward to the day when the Senate appointment consultations bill becomes law and all senators arrive in Ottawa with a democratic mandate.

As the Prime Minister has indicated, when the Senate consultations bill is reintroduced, we will be sending it to committee before second reading so that collaboration can begin on this important step toward a democratic Senate.

There are some who have suggested that governing parties of the past could maintain the status quo in the Senate out of self-interest, that we could benefit from the patronage appointments to be made and stack the chamber with partisans who would serve for decades. Our government believes that the Senate should be a democratically elected body that represents Canadians. So far, we have taken concrete steps toward that vision and they are steps that are achievable in the short term. What is more, surveys show that our agenda for term limits in a democratized Senate is strongly supported by Canadians. Surely in a democracy this above all should be a key indicator of what constitutes a good democratic reform.

● (1240)

The Senate must change. If it cannot be changed, it should be abolished. In its current illegitimate form the Senate does nothing to enhance our democracy, even as we aim at the same time to promote democratic values abroad.

*[Translation]*

I would now like to address a second element of the democratic reform program that we will continue to implement during this new session of Parliament: strengthening the electoral system.

A strong democracy requires both modern democratic institutions and an electoral process with integrity that inspires confidence among voters.

*[English]*

We have already introduced a number of measures that were passed in the last session to improve elections, which were broadly supported.

● (1245)

*[Translation]*

For example, Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act—the first legislative measure we introduced—fulfilled our campaign commitment to clean up political funding. We levelled the playing field by banning donations from companies and unions, as well as large and secret donations, so that ordinary Canadians can contribute to the political process knowing that their donations will really count.

*The Address**[English]*

Bill C-4 was the first bill passed in the last session. We acted quickly to ensure that the party registration rules would not sunset and that those registration rules would remain in effect at all times.

With Bill C-16, setting dates for elections, we have established a four year electoral cycle, preventing snap elections from being called solely for the partisan advantage of the governing party.

As a result, after this House provides a mandate to govern when it approves the throne speech on Wednesday, we can look forward to the next election, now set in law to take place October 19, 2009.

In Bill C-31, we implemented wide-ranging recommendations of the procedure and House affairs committee for improving the electoral process, including important measures for reducing the opportunity for voter fraud, such as a voter identification procedure for federal elections.

In addition to these bills, which are now law, we introduced additional election reforms that did not have an opportunity to pass before we prorogued.

Building on our political financing reforms in the Federal Accountability Act, Bill C-54, our new bill to clean up campaign financing, proposed bringing accountability to political loans by eliminating loans as a means for circumventing contribution limits and establishing a transparent reporting regime for campaign finance.

Building on a number of measures for improving voter accessibility, Bill C-55, our expanded voting opportunities bill, proposed additional advanced polling days to enhance opportunities and encourage higher voter turnout.

*[Translation]*

During the second session of Parliament, our government will continue to strengthen the electoral process.

As stated in the Speech from the Throne, we will introduce measures that will enable us to confirm the identity of voters by requiring them to uncover their faces before voting. Like our other reforms, this concrete measure will improve the electoral process for all Canadians.

Public concerns raised about this issue during the September 17 byelections made it clear that we must act.

During meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in September, all parties approved the decision to prioritize resolving this issue.

Our government will act quickly to resolve this issue, and I hope that I can count on the support of all members of Parliament to give Canadians the strong, fair electoral process they expect.

*[English]*

There is so much that makes Canada great. We are mindful of the valuable legacy bestowed upon us by the visionary leadership of Sir John A. Macdonald, George-Étienne Cartier and the Fathers of Confederation when they rendered the blueprint for what has proven to be the best country in the world. But it is our strong foundations

that enable us to continue building a better Canada that is a leader in the world.

Those foundations are our federal state and our democratic spirit, but we also know, as did those Fathers of Confederation, that as the world modernizes, so must Canada. That is in fact the spirit of Confederation. It is that spirit that leads us to seek ways to strengthen our democracy and improve accountability to Canadians. We must be a democracy worthy of that name in a 21st century world.

Our government has already put forward a full agenda to fortify and modernize our federation and democracy, and we will continue to do so this session. We invite all parties in the House to join us as we build a stronger Canada with a brighter future for the generations that will follow.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member's speech and I took notes on everything he said, more or less.

The member spoke a lot about principle, and we hear that a lot from the government. We are always hearing those members saying principle this or principle that. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that looking for Conservative principle is like playing a game of Where's Waldo?

Where is the principle in the flash reversal on income trusts? Where is the principle in the decision by the Prime Minister to make everything a non-confidence vote, when the fact is that when he was in opposition he said there were too many non-confidence votes?

The Conservatives promised 125,000 private sector child care spaces. A month ago the government said that unfortunately this will not be possible. Where is the principle?

Those members campaigned as fiscal Conservatives. Where is the principle in campaigning as fiscal Conservatives and then tabling the biggest spending budget in the history of Canada?

The Conservatives called for the independence of MPs. Where is the principle when they shut the door on the MP from Nova Scotia and disbanded his riding executive over the weekend?

The Conservatives have said that the plan was always to get out of Afghanistan in 2009. The defence critic brought up the fact that there were internal documents showing the government had no intention of leaving until 2011 at the earliest. Where is the principle in that? The Prime Minister is now saying in his throne speech that it looks like the government will try for 2011.

The Conservatives talk about fixed election dates. Where is the principle when they are always manoeuvring and trying to trigger an election? Where is the principle?

*The Address*

●(1250)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak about principle because we on this side of the House do believe in principle. Our most important principle is doing what we said we would do, and that is what we have been doing since we were elected on clear priorities. We spelled them out and we have delivered on them.

My friend asked: why confidence votes? It is about accountability, a concept perhaps foreign to the other side where those members are all about power. In our view it is very simple. We tell Canadians what we are going to do. We stand behind what we say, and then we deliver on it. The mandate we received from Canadians counts for something. If the member disagrees with that mandate, if he wishes to present another vision, he is free to do that.

Our tackling violent crime agenda is something core. We spoke to Canadians about it and they supported it. The Liberal Party said it supported it, but when it comes to practice the behaviour of those members is entirely different than their words. Those bills were held up without being passed for a total of 1,456 days, and yet those members said this was an agenda they could support. Those were the delays; that was the obstruction.

That is why we have bundled our agenda into one bill, a confidence bill, a bill where Canadians will finally get the agenda they want, a bill that tackles violent crime that will make their communities safer. We hope that for once the actions of the Liberals will match their words and that they will support this bill.

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I regularly hear from my constituents who are ashamed of the Conservative government's representation of Canada in the world, subverting peace to fighting in Afghanistan, refusing to meet our point seven commitment to millennium development goals, and of course, shrugging off the Kyoto objectives. It is on this last point that I would like to ask a question.

Why is it that the Conservative government refuses to bring back a piece of legislation that all parties have worked on, that by all accounts from leading experts would help us meet our goals and would help Canada transition to a green economy?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I welcome that question and all the aspects of it. First, on the issue of Afghanistan, we are very proud of what we have been able to do for the people of Afghanistan through our intervention, our support and our development assistance.

My friend says that there is insufficient development assistance. Guess what, Afghanistan is the largest recipient of Canadian development assistance and the results are paying off. That is why in a poll that was released last week we saw that an overwhelming majority of Afghans felt that their lives were better today than they were before Canadian troops were there, making them safer. The Afghans want those troops there, they believe that they are making their lives better, and that they are safer.

This is why we see millions of children in school who were not there before. We see women enjoying rights that they never had before. I know that others may not want to be willing to make the sacrifice necessary to protect people in troubled areas of the world,

to protect women's rights, to protect children. Canada is proud to take on the leadership role today that we have taken in the past.

I am particularly surprised when we have members of the Liberal Party raising questions on that, when they talk about principle. They were the ones who took the decision to send those troops into Afghanistan, who took the decision to send those troops into the troubled southern portions of Afghanistan, and they are the ones today who are abandoning those troops and demanding withdrawal. I believe that principle says when a decision is made, we stand behind the decision. We are proud to do that.

On the question of the environment, this is another excellent contrast of the previous Liberal government that spoke a lot and did nothing and allowed greenhouse gases to rise massively. Our government is delivering with a program, an agenda of tackling greenhouse gas emissions and delivering actual, real reductions in greenhouse gases, as well as taking action to clean up our water, our air, address pollution and protect endangered spaces.

I could on and on, but Canadians are happy to finally have a government that is taking action.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech on democratic reform. The new Conservative government has been very committed to democratic reform in the last session and will continue to be in the next session. The minister indicated the positive aspects of democratic reform. My question for the minister is, if we do not get support from the opposition parties, what is the downside to Canada and to Canadians if democratic reforms are not passed by this House of Commons?

●(1255)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Burlington for his question. He is indeed a remarkable new member in this House of Commons who has been serving very well. I know the constituents of Burlington are pleased that they finally have a voice that stands up and advances their agenda to improve their lives in a very constructive way.

I know as well that the people of Burlington do care about the quality of our democracy and something that troubles them, as I think it does trouble all Canadians, is the state of affairs in our Senate.

We have been trying very hard to get constructive changes to the Senate, but an entrenched, unaccountable, unelected Liberal majority continues to protect their privileges. I can understand it because it is consistent with their behaviour in the past. It is about privileges. It is about entitlements. It is about a culture that has taken hold of a portion of that institution and certainly of that party.

Canadians have had enough of that. That is part of what the last election was about. It was about restoring accountability and having a government that did not work for the benefit of those who had the entitlements within, but rather of having a Parliament and a government that worked in the interests of Canadians. That is what we are seeking to do.

*The Address*

Unfortunately, if we continue to see, as we saw with Bill S-4, a Senate which is unwilling to consider any change, however modest, however simple, one that would not even affect them personally when we talk about term limits being reduced to eight years, everybody who was there would be grandfathered. It would only affect new appointments. Yet, they are so resistant to any element of democratic change that might change the character of entitlements they have.

If we find ourselves so frustrated and that institution proves itself so unwilling to modernize and change in a way that it has not for a century and a half, then we will be faced I think with the unfortunate alternative that all that is left on the table is abolition. Canadians want change in the Senate. They have spoken loud and clear that the Senate must change and our government is making our best efforts to bring about that change.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question. The member talked about electoral reform. He has had some requests from the public for proportional representation. What is his party doing on that front?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, our government undertook an extensive consultation process through the first half of this year. I believe the report was released last month summarizing those consultations that were representative of the entire country.

What we found is that Canadians did want to see some changes. They did want to see political parties more engaged, but they did not want to see a fundamental change in our political system and a move to proportional representation. That came through loud and clear in that study.

Not surprisingly, we just had a referendum in Ontario on the very same principle and in that referendum I think close to two-thirds of Ontarians spoke loud and clear. It was heartening to me to see that the actual results in a referendum were consistent with those from the study.

**Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to the topic of the Speech from the Throne.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking.

We said that we would listen with care to the Speech from the Throne and we did. Certainly Canadians expect speeches like this to be full of promises and this one certainly did not disappoint. However, governing is not about making speeches or even promises. It is rather about what governments do.

One of the police forces north of Toronto says it well on the side of its cruisers. It has written the words “Deeds Speak”, and they certainly do speak when it comes to the Conservative government: the Atlantic accord, Kyoto, Kelowna, income trusts, tax increases, lost jobs, exported jobs, court challenges, literacy programs, stacking the judiciary, reckless spending, disappointment, broken promises. Indeed these deeds do speak.

The Prime Minister has said that MPs in the House have to, as he eloquently put it, fish or cut bait. He said: vote in support of the throne speech or Canada would get an election; support all the legislative initiatives that would be coming, whether we agreed with them or not, or Canada would get an election; and let his minority

government function as a majority, even when the people of Canada did not grant him a majority, or Canada would get an election.

As a result, some people have called the Prime Minister a bully. Bullies like taking advantage. They look for situations they can dominate, one-sided battles.

The Prime Minister's brain trust may be telling him right now that he can afford to bully us. The Prime Minister's advisers say that the opposition is weak, that we do not have as much money as the Conservatives do, that our leader is not as experienced, that we are not as organized and that we even have some MPs who are too independent.

If the truth be told, there may be something to that, and trust me, we are working on it. However, at the end of the day, it does not matter. Canadians did not send us here to play games of brinkmanship or hurl dares. In fact, too much of what goes on in this chamber is considered by most people watching it to be a national joke.

What does matter is that all voices be heard, that all citizens be represented and not just the Conservative demographic.

Someone needs to stand up more often in this chamber and speak for the two million income trust investors who lost tens of billions of dollars in savings after the government broke a solemn promise.

Someone needs to challenge the people from the maritime provinces after the government ripped up the Atlantic accord.

Somebody must lead the way for those Canadians angry and upset that after yet another two years we have done nothing about climate change.

Somebody has to give more hope to our first nations people and the disadvantaged that the fight for equality and progress will in fact continue.

Somebody needs to give voice to those families who have seen income taxes and mortgage rates increase at the same time, who know record government spending means they will never see a tax decrease as long as the government is in place.

Somebody needs to get up and fight for all those workers who are losing their jobs as the dollars soars. Export sales are shattered and our finance minister smirks.

Millions of Canadians are not impressed with speeches and promises, and neither am I. Millions of citizens want fairness and justice and hope. They want their Canada back.

Maybe on this side of the House we are not ready. We may not have enough money. We might not be as organized as those guys, but I we have never been more determined. They may be richer over there. They may have more pollsters. They may have a longer campaign plane, more square feet in their headquarters and a bigger election machine. However, as Winston Churchill said, “It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog”.

*The Address*

● (1300)

The governing party has spent many months and many millions of dollars organizing for an election. It has been tearing down its political opponents daily instead of governing. It has reached new levels of negative messaging in the country and, unfortunately, it has confused the public service with the naked quest for continued power since it seeks a majority government at all costs.

The Prime Minister's fish or cut bait dare is an obvious attempt to goad other parties into entering an election on the Prime Minister's terms, by seeking to nullify the role of opposition members of Parliament who represent, after all, a majority of Canadians. The Prime Minister is hoping he will get that election he so badly wants.

I would like quote Jim Travers from the *Toronto Star* who said quite eloquently:

[The Prime Minister's] "fish or cut bait" ultimatum is one test of Parliament's growing irrelevance. Those no-name representatives of the people are essentially being told to stand-down from their elected task. Under threat of an imminent campaign, public policies tightly scripted by an inner circle that only occasionally intersects with ministers or the civil service are to be approved without amendment or improvement.

Let me admit something, I would love to give the Prime Minister an election. I certainly do not fear the voters in my riding. I think they would enjoy the chance of having a clear voice right now between our vision of the future, our quest for social and economic justice and that of a programmed and muted automaton Conservative candidate.

Fortunately, I am not the leader. Wisely, the leader has picked his moment rather than allow the bully to call the shots. He has chosen to fight on issues Canadians are passionate about rather than the thin and tasteless gruel of a throne speech written by the milquetoasts in the PMO.

Fortunately, the leader of the Liberal Party has clarity and vision and above all, the wisdom to understand there is no point having an election when the governing party has already spent millions trying to precipitate it. That is not to say there will not be a vote soon. We know there will be and the results of it will shock a number of hon. members opposite who will be lining up for cardboard boxes. However, it will not be this week.

We will not be pushed. We will not be prodded. We will not be goaded. We will not be intimidated. We will be resolute and we will get the results Canadians want, like those brave people in my riding, who were not cowed by the Prime Minister when I was thrown out of his party, who stood with me. Or those brave people today in the riding of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, who are standing beside that brave member who stuck up for his constituents and suffered the results at the hands of the Prime Minister.

We will all fight for those who grieve for the environment. We will fight for those who cannot abide to see our government steal from investors. We will fight for the families whose taxes have risen, for the first nations that have been ignored, for the manufacturers and exporters and retailers that are shedding jobs and sales because of the government, for homeowners worried about what rising mortgage rates are going to do to the value of their homes in the real estate market, for the people of Atlantic Canada who have been slapped once again by the Prime Minister and for all those who hoped the

new government would give them hope and promise and change, but who have seen more arrogance and narrow focus, exclusion and incompetence than any of us feared.

Our leader was right. There will be no election this week, no giving in to the bully. Instead, soon, we will feel the winds of change, the force of millions of people who the government does not stand up for, does not represent, does not respect. Then they will be blown back and the country will be restored.

● (1305)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the speech of the hon. member for Halton is very hard to swallow. First, the Leader of the Opposition makes constituency outreach as part of his new task. When he was a member of the Conservative Party, he told his executive that it was not allowed to communicate with other riding associations in the area.

The member talked about negative advertising. He put out in my riding a ten percenter that was complete lies, calling me a liar. I would be happy to table it in the House. He is so much off mark on what he had to say because he says one thing and does completely the other. If he wants an election, he can call a byelection. I can quote him saying that if people cross the floor, there should be a byelection. He has crossed the floor. He should have a byelection if he wants an election. We would be happy to face him in Halton.

The member commented on a number of things. He claims he likes to answer questions directly. My direct question for him is this. We are proposing changes to the Senate to make it more democratic. Is he in favour of a more democratic Senate, yes or no?

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Mr. Speaker, the reason I went to his riding to have a town hall meeting was because he was afraid to. It was very worthwhile listening to so many of the hon. member's constituents, who did not have the opportunity to pose questions to their own member.

They told me that when they tried to contact the member for Burlington, he had no answers for them. He would not tell income trust investors why the government had reversed its position. Because I represent half of the city of Burlington, I was left with no option but to try to ensure that the other half of the city was well represented. Unfortunately, Conservative members of Parliament are prevented from having effective representation. I had no choice; they compelled me.

● (1310)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will try to get this into a debate over some issues of substance as opposed to personalities. One of the things I am interested in is manufacturing.

*The Address*

The member talked about issues related to manufacturing and his concerns about that. I expressed similar concerns to the previous administration when I was promised an auto policy. It did not deliver on that. The current government is continuing down that path, which gives me great concern.

Also, with what is being debated right now, the only economic lever will be a corporate tax reduction, which has not historically led to improvement in manufacturing. It has not created more jobs. I know the member's leader has been racing the Prime Minister in terms of how many more corporate tax cuts can actually happen. Ironically, in ridings like mine we are witnessing plants going to Mexico and those companies are getting a tax cut at a time when they are relocating Canadian jobs and throwing people out on the streets.

In terms of the Liberal position right now, is it just for corporate tax cuts? Is that all the Liberals have in the repertoire dealing with manufacturing? If they have something else, I would like to hear it.

**Hon. Garth Turner:** Mr. Speaker, that is a substantive issue. The answer is, yes, we do and he will hear about it in due course.

The problem right now with manufacturing job losses is that it is not a proposal for the Conservative Party to cut corporate taxes in the future. That has nothing to do with the losses we see today. The losses today are because of Canada's competitiveness gap and we are losing jobs to jurisdictions that have a more competitive environment. That is why they are getting the jobs. There is no question about it.

One of the problems we face today is a dollar at parity. A dollar at parity has a lot to do with the economic policies of our country. We have seen government spending rise to a level that we have never seen in the nation before, and the Minister of Finance has seen that situation develop. High government spending has always been inflationary, which is something the Conservatives pointed out in past times of Liberal governments.

Inflationary spending breeds higher interest rates. Higher interest rates attracts capital from around the world. As capital inflows to our country, because we have petro reserves, we see our currency rise in value. We are considered to be a petro currency country.

The combination of high government spending, a recurrence of inflation and oil reserves in Canada have driven our dollar higher. That has erased the competitive advantage a lot of our manufacturers have and our job losses in large part are a result of that. I fear they have only just started and we have to reverse this trend.

I would be very pleased to work with the hon. member opposite to find ways to restore our competitiveness instead of eroding it as the Conservatives have done.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share this time with my colleague.

First off, let me say that disappointment is the word that comes to mind. Every year and a half or two years, government presents Canadians with a throne speech. If nothing else, that throne speech is supposed to be visionary. It is not intended to be just an agenda for an election that might occur in the weeks or months following a

throne speech. It should be a document that lays out for Canadians where the government of the day intends to take the country because, in spite of the great inertia in regard to the elements needed for change in our society or in any society, governments have a huge role to play when it comes to making changes for the betterment of its citizens.

This throne speech lacked any vision whatsoever. It is very unfortunate and very sad that the government missed an opportunity to lay before Canadians its real vision, instead leaving many Canadians, including myself, to wonder what the hidden agenda is. I will list a few of the many things that were missing. There certainly were a lot of words, but no vision, no reference to substance and no context were attached to them. It was simply the mention of many words.

Where was the real substance on climate change?

Where was the real substance and the real plan on Canada's mission in Afghanistan?

Where was the vision when it comes to post-secondary education and the need to support research and development and the scientific community in this country?

Really, where was the mention of a vision for our first nations, for aboriginal Canadians, many of whom have come to suspect that really and truly they are not on the agenda of the government?

What about poverty?

What about municipalities?

I would like to quote the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, who said:

By simply re-branding existing infrastructure programs, the Government fails to invest the additional resources needed to meet the challenges it acknowledges in the Speech from the Throne.

It is okay to acknowledge challenges, as the president of the FCM says, but it is another thing to have a vision and to have a specific set of ideas to put any vision into effect.

My northern Ontario riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung is blessed with some 55 communities. There are roughly 24 first nations and the rest are small and large townships, villages, small cities and towns. When I meet with mayors and chiefs, they ask me to bring the message forward that the federal government needs to continue to be involved with local government at the municipal level and with our first nations. Their message for the federal government is that it needs to improve its participation, to up the ante and to recognize the challenges faced at the local level in our communities when it comes to dealing with infrastructure, poverty and local economies.

*The Address*

In the case of northern Ontario, we are really struggling, with a forestry sector that, like manufacturing, generally is being hit very hard. Added to the manufacturing woes in forestry, of course, there are the specific problems facing Canada because of the very terrible softwood lumber deal that this country has with the U.S., a deal, by the way, in which we threw away years of progress in the courts and before various trade panels, years of progress that we were about to reap the benefits of had the deal that was accepted by the government not been accepted. That deal, by the way, was rejected by the previous government in the late fall of 2005, and within a few days of taking office the current Prime Minister adopted it, rejecting our deal, and called it his own. Quite frankly, it is a deal that has not done anything. If anything, it has hurt our forestry sector.

What about child care? I agree that if families are able to and decide to keep their children at home from birth right through to first year of kindergarten it is perfectly fine. In my case, a couple of my children went to child care and a couple of them stayed home with one of their parents.

• (1315)

I think it is important that there be a real choice and an infrastructure of child care in this country that allows families who choose to participate fully in the workforce to have access to a network of child care centres and early learning facilities across this country, a network that is consistent and properly funded, with workers who are properly paid, a network, indeed, that allows our families to help build our local economies and the country.

The program that the government put in place with its so-called \$100 a month really does not do it, I do not believe, and statistics will demonstrate it. That program has not created a single new day care space. One hundred dollars a month taxable puts barely \$50, \$60 or \$70 a month in the hands of families to provide day care. In most locations, that would provide barely a couple of days of day care.

To move on, I mentioned forestry but there is also manufacturing in general. Yes, there are certain things happening in the world that are difficult for any government to deal with, but it is the government's responsibility to respond. Where are some specifics on the capital cost allowance measures that can help our companies take advantage of the situation as it exists now to upgrade their technology so that indeed as the next cycle comes along they can be ahead of that cycle? There are other things the government can do to make sure our manufacturing sector does not go further into decline.

It is well and good to have strong economies in Alberta and perhaps in St. John's, Newfoundland and other specific locations across the country. That is fine. It makes the overall numbers look good, but there are pockets and regions, and I point to many communities in my riding and throughout northern Ontario, that are definitely suffering. They need the opportunity to participate fully in the national economy.

I will speak a little about northern Ontario. I mentioned that there are a great number of first nations there and a great number of communities that depend on forestry. It is very sad for me to relate to this chamber that just this past Friday the Weyerhaeuser plant in Wawa shut down for an "indefinite" period. There does not appear to be any real prospect of a reopening in the near or mid term.

I do not want to create any false hope for the workers in this plant. One hundred and thirty jobs have been lost. The workers are being told, sadly, that they should make arrangements for their lives and for their families. I wish them well. I will be there at the first opportunity in the next week or so to do what I can to help. Along with the provincial member, we will work with the community, the workers and whoever else will come to the table to make sure that the consequences of that closure can be minimized.

Let me speak a little about our first nations. The leaders of the communities in my riding have worked very hard. They are excellent leaders. They have worked hard to make sure the communities can do the best they can in the current situation, but they fail to see in this government any real exhibition of a willingness to see them as true partners even though they are their own level of government. They are not municipalities. They have a relationship with the Government of Canada and it is important that we recognize that.

The current government cancelled the Kelowna accord adopted by the premiers, the territories and provinces, the aboriginal leadership and the Government of Canada in the fall of 2005. There was every hope that the expenditures to flow from that agreement, in excess of \$5 billion, would do a great amount of good work in terms of housing and education, in social services and for supports in terms of health. For example, diabetes rates are far too high in our first nations communities.

There are a lot of things we can do better. It is time that we learned the lessons from the past. There is no past government that can pat itself on the back entirely and say that it did a great job. We all have lessons to learn. It is the responsibility of the government to build on those lessons and move forward. Sadly, we are not seeing that. What I hear instead is this: how quickly can we have a change in government so that we can have a change in attitude and a change in approach?

• (1320)

Let me talk about poverty. Last week for a short while I was able to attend and participate in the rally on poverty that was held out front here. The fact that any child in this country lives in poverty is sad. This will not be eliminated overnight, but as is noted in the Liberal amendment to the throne speech, which will be voted on tonight, we call upon the government to end its "18 months of inaction" on poverty. We need to make poverty history. We must build on the good work of past Liberal governments on such initiatives as the Canada child tax benefit, affordable housing, literacy, the supporting communities partnership initiative, and the working income tax benefit.

The work was being done. Progress was being made. We call upon the government to turn that corner and recognize that something needs to be done in all the areas I have outlined.

Mr. Speaker, I see that you are indicating the end of my time. Thank you for your indulgence.

*The Address*

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with attention to the comments from the speaker opposite, the Liberal member of Parliament. As he well knows, one of his colleagues in the other place, Liberal Senator Dan Hays, before he retired, had some pretty remarkable words to say in respect to Senate reform. He said that the need for reform in the Senate is a “long-standing sore point in our national politics”. He said that the first thing parliamentarians need to do is legislate fixed term limits for senators.

Given that subsequent to this the Liberal dominated Senate virtually killed our Conservative bill in respect to this, and given that the member made no comment in respect to Senate reform, which was a part of the throne speech, I would like to know where the member and his colleagues in this place stand in regard to the crucial need for Senate reform vis-à-vis Dan Hays' comments.

•(1325)

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, that question is important to the member, but it is certainly not important to a lot of my constituents, who are dealing with job losses, the need for child care and the need for our first nations to have good water and housing. There is a broad range of concerns.

However, if the hon. member wants to ask about Senate reform, it is certainly his right. I will do my best to answer him. I did not hear the remarks that he alludes to.

The Prime Minister has made something of a career out of bashing the Senate. In my view, it is always possible to improve any institution of government. We have worked together over the decades to improve the work of this place and the same can apply in the Senate.

The kind of Senate reform that the Prime Minister and his party talk about is a sort of a throwing the baby out with the bathwater approach. Until the member, his colleagues and the Prime Minister have some agreement from the provinces, which are partners with the Government of Canada in the Senate, and until can say they have the provinces on side, I do not think his question is even relevant. It is like asking about proportional representation now that Ontario is the third province that has rejected it. Why talk about proportional representation when the voters are not ready for it?

I do not think the voters, the public, are ready for the kind of reform that the member talks about.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's debate and presentation. He is a former chair of the industry committee. I would argue, all partisanship aside, that he did a very good job. I have been in the House of Commons for five years and we actually have had consensus building on that committee. He has departed to another committee, but certainly his work in the previous committee as well as the current one has been very positive.

The hon. member noted that the capital cost reduction allowance issue is very important. In fact, the industry committee tabled 22 recommendations in a common report supported by all parties, including a capital cost reduction allowance for equipment. The finance minister instead did a two year window, but I actually tabled a five year window, plus a renewal period after an evaluation,

because industries like mine in Windsor, for example, where there is the tool, die and mold making industry, need to have the third, fourth and fifth year to make those investments in terms of the time rolled out.

I would like to ask my colleague why he believes it is important to move on this. For example, I believe this is much more effective than a general corporate tax cut, because once again, I have industries leaving my constituency that are going to get taxpayer funds to set up somewhere else, whereas actually getting equipment in on the ground floor will protect Canadian workers and their jobs and provide the livelihood that we all want.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's remarks about our work together on the industry committee in the last Parliament. Indeed, we worked together very well and he was an excellent member of that committee.

For the viewers, the capital cost allowance allows a company to write off over a period of time its capital investment in equipment as an expense, a little bit each year. That allows that company to plan for replacing equipment. If the capital cost allowance write-off period is too long, it hampers that industry relative to another.

With the rapid change in technology in our society and in the world, we need to give companies a better ability to respond rapidly. Therefore, an accelerated rate of capital cost allowances can help industry, especially when it comes to climate change technology, auto technology, mining technology and forestry technology. We need to give our industries a leg up when it comes to preparing for the future. It requires a mix of corporate initiatives but that is a very important one.

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my time with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

I am proud to stand in solidarity with my NDP colleagues and millions of Canadians who oppose the Conservative government's wrong-headed direction. The throne speech should be an articulation of the government's fundamental principles and yet in this document the government has reached a new level of cynical doublespeak. While claiming to be concerned about poverty, homelessness, climate change and rising costs in post-secondary education, the government has outlined steps that will make the problems worse.

The government has turned its back on communities. Our local governments are left with heavy lifting, forced to face today's complex challenges on their own while a federal seat sits vacant.

I would like to start by talking specifically about Victoria. There is a growing consensus in my community that all levels of government should focus on housing. As of this April, 953 families and 406 seniors were on the wait list for social housing. The city of Victoria's homelessness task force report released last week speaks to the urgency of acting now. Even the Victoria Downtown Business Association is asking the federal government to allocate some of the surplus to housing.



*The Address*

I also consistently hear about Victoria's need for affordable, quality child care. Last week the Prime Minister gave a misleading answer in response to my question. Contrary to his assertion, his failed policies have not created one child care space, in my riding at least. On the contrary, day care centres are closing and desperate parents are on mile-long wait lists. The Union of B.C. Municipalities has called for a national child care system. The business community has lamented the domino effect of federal child care cuts on its province's workforce.

To address these and other crucial issues, I have long advocated for the federal government to adopt a community focused approach. This means having the federal government act as a collaborative partner with the provinces to help municipalities implement their own local solutions. What a community approach would not do is impose unnecessary policy barriers that prevent communities from solving their local problems, like the Conservatives' resistance to the harm reduction approach and other strategies identified in communities.

For example, despite best efforts, the Conservatives still have not found their way to supplying the \$150,000 in capital funding that are needed for Victoria's access health centre. This is an innovative project that provides one stop access to services needed by homeless people. It would prevent illness and save health care dollars. However, the Conservatives' shortsighted, narrow view of the federal role stands in the way of communities moving forward.

A couple of weeks ago I hosted a prebudget town hall in my riding and the messages I collected to bring back to Ottawa are unequivocal. They are to invest in our citizens, communities, housing, child care, learning and training, the environment and to build a green economy, but Victoria has been let down by a government that chooses to prioritize tax cuts over investments in our collective well-being.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

The surplus and tax cuts will be important issues in this session of Parliament. The Minister of Finance says that he does not want to leave a debt for our children. I would say that the Conservative government is in the process of racking up an enormous debt that our children will have a hard time repaying. We must not forget that this massive surplus came about because of the major cuts to social programs by the Liberals in the 1990s. The national housing program was cut; tuition costs and student debt have tripled in 10 years; child poverty is worse than when Parliament promised to eradicate it; our municipalities are struggling with a \$60 billion infrastructure deficit. Furthermore, the federal government refuses to commit to making our economy respectful of the environment, in order to address the imminent dangers of climate change.

[*English*]

The majority of Canadian families have stagnating or falling incomes and are forced to work longer hours and spend less time with their children. They need better transit and home care, more affordable housing and child care, and better protection from toxic products on the market but the government does not believe in social policy. In fact, it reduces everything to economic terms and

perpetuates the myth that profits from deregulated markets will trickle down. The trickle seems to be stuck.

[*Translation*]

There is much talk about the tax burden, but what about the burden on low- and middle-income families who no longer have access to affordable housing or child care? What about the burden on people who are on long waiting lists for major surgery? What about the people struggling to repay staggering student debts? What about the burden on women who earn on average 71¢ for every dollar earned by a man? There was nothing about pay equity in the throne speech. And what about the burden on the environment?

I think that as long as these burdens continue to enlarge the hole in the social and environmental fabric, the answer for how to use the surplus will be clear.

• (1335)

[*English*]

As the NDP's literacy advocate, I have been appalled at the disinterest of the government to the needs of adult learners. A lack of functional literacy impedes an individual's ability to lead a full life and secure a better job. It also impedes Canada's ability to stay competitive. Leading economists have joined the chorus of voices critical of the government's shortsightedness on adult literacy which costs the economy tens of billions of dollars every year.

The NDP has been calling for a comprehensive, pan-Canadian strategy on literacy and lifelong learning. Tax cuts do not educate anyone, another reason that I oppose the government's direction.

In addition to tax cuts, the Conservatives are pursuing their quest to gut the capacity of the federal government through a radical agenda of privatization. The government is intent on selling out the public interest to deliver the greatest possible profit to a small minority, regardless of the cost to the rest.

From following through on the ridiculous Liberal scheme to sell federal buildings and lease them back, to the proliferation of public-private partnerships, the name of the game is spending public money for private profit.

On a similar but much broader front, the Conservatives are implementing the Liberals so-called security and prosperity partnership. Behind closed doors and away from the eyes of citizens and their elected representatives in Parliament, the government is hollowing out our country as it pursues its agenda of deep integration with U.S. corporate interests.

I take this opportunity to call on the government to bring the SPP agenda to the public scrutiny of Parliament.

*The Address*

Because the Conservative agenda does not reflect Victoria's priorities, I oppose the Speech from the Throne. Because these policies will incrementally convert Canada into a neo-Conservative country that we will not recognize, I stand opposed to the government's direction. It would be unconscionable not to.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when I said that it was a shame that during National Poverty Week there was nothing in the throne speech about poverty, the government suggested that there was a lot on page 10. I did not find very much there. I wonder if the member thinks there was a lot of anti-poverty initiatives in the throne speech?

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne, the government made a reference to parents' concerns about rising costs in education and made references to poverty but offered no plan at all or no steps that would help us reduce this prosperity gap.

It seems that when the government acknowledges that there is a prosperity gap it still keeps going in the wrong direction.

As the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said with reference to the increasing gap municipalities are facing in dealing with the challenges that the former Liberal government and the present government have downloaded to them, the government may have recognized the challenges but provided no additional resources to address them.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite may want to note that there has been considerable economic advances and success in this country, which everybody is gaining from. Admittedly, much needs to be done on the poverty side and our government is serious about this issue too.

In our throne speech we talk in terms of some of the steps to improve the lives of Canadian aboriginal people. I offer to the House the final settlement in respect of the Indian residential schools and the upcoming apology in respect to that. I am grateful that our government is taking care of those needs and addressing some of those issues in our country.

The throne speech mentioned strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions. I would hope the member would agree that unless we have strength in our country and in our institutions some of these other things can take a beating. We need to ensure that we are on top in the modern era with our democratic institutions.

I have a question for the member who is from British Columbia. In the last session, the Conservative government introduced a democratic representation bill, Bill C-56, which would have amended the formula for the allocation of seats in the House and would have ensured representation by population, particularly for the growing population in the province of British Columbia.

Could the hon. member assure the House that she as an individual and her New Democratic colleagues would support the legislation when it is reintroduced in the House? I heard no mention in her speech and I would be very interested in getting a response on that now.

• (1340)

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Mr. Speaker, the member forgot to mention that his government cancelled the Kelowna accord. If the

Conservatives recognize the prosperity gap, the throne speech did not suggest any ways for addressing it. Not only that, but it confirmed a cut of the GST by 1% and corporate tax cuts. These cuts will only continue to shrink the government's ability to invest in measures that would address the prosperity gap.

With respect to the member's question on democratic reform, my first answer would be to reference a member who sits in the Prime Minister's cabinet but does not actually sit in the House. If there is anything that betrays the government's real agenda and shows it is not interested in democratic reform, it would be the appointment of that individual to a position of responsibility in cabinet when he is not an elected member. It is difficult to take the Conservatives proposals of democratic reform very seriously at this point.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to speak in the House on behalf of my constituents on Hamilton Mountain.

Over the last few weeks, I have had the opportunity to be back in Hamilton and to listen to the concerns that are top of mind for families in our community. Without a doubt, the single biggest issue is Canada's growing prosperity gap.

Seniors and working families are increasingly finding it difficult just to make ends meet. At a time when more wealth is being created in this country than at any other time in our history, people in Hamilton are working longer and harder, not to get ahead, but simply to keep up. In fact, average Canadians today are squeezing 200 more hours of work out of each year than they did just nine years ago.

While a few people at the top are enjoying the benefits of the current economy, everyone else is not. Sure, we have seen the windfall salaries and extraordinary bonuses of CEOs, but wages for everyone else are essentially stagnant or falling. The middle class in Canada is falling behind. That is what we have been calling the prosperity gap, and nowhere is that issue more relevant than in Hamilton.

Our manufacturing sector is in crisis, but the government's agenda for this Parliament did not even mention it. There was no mention of an industrial strategy for either the automotive or manufacturing sectors. There was no mention of wage and pension protection for workers affected by commercial bankruptcies. There was no mention of using the \$3.3 billion EI surplus to retrain displaced workers. There was no mention of beefing up the Investment Canada Act to protect key industries from foreign takeovers.

With a \$14 billion surplus, it simply did not need to be that way. There is a better choice and I will continue to advocate for those alternatives until working families on the mountain get the positive change they deserve.

I know that my time here today is limited, but let me just speak to four such alternatives that represent missed opportunities in the throne speech. They relate to seniors, youth, our city and the environment.

*The Address*

In the summer I had the privilege of organizing and hosting an environmental forum for businesses on Hamilton Mountain. The panellists included representatives from Green Venture and TABIA in an interactive discussion on saving both money and the environment through energy conservation.

Business leaders understood the benefits immediately. Whether they represented the retail, manufacturing or service sectors, they understood that far from having to choose between helping the environment and helping their bottom line, energy conservation will achieve both. In fact research has proven that ignoring climate change will ultimately damage economic growth.

Why then is the Prime Minister not seizing all opportunities to link economic growth with reductions in greenhouse gas emissions? Here is but one small example of how that could be done.

At the urging of the NDP, the Canadian government has put into effect a ban on incandescent light bulbs effective in 2010, but as Hamilton business leaders learned during the environmental forum, almost none of the alternative CFL or LED bulbs are actually being manufactured in Canada.

Here the government is creating a huge market for new products without recognizing and supporting the equally huge domestic manufacturing opportunity that its policy has created. Instead of importing almost all of the more energy efficient light bulbs from China, why are we not supporting Canadian manufacturing and Canadian jobs by encouraging the production of the alternative light bulbs in Canada?

It would be good for the economy, good for jobs and good for the environment, but apparently such a win-win situation is still not good enough for our Prime Minister. Go figure. That kind of inaction speaks volumes about the disconnect between the government's directions and the priorities of the Canadian people.

Let us look at seniors next. The Conservative government is quick to talk the talk when it comes to seniors, but it is loath to walk the talk.

The government supported my seniors charter which created a road map to ensuring that seniors can retire with the dignity and respect they deserve. Indeed it was passed in the House of Commons by a vote of 231 to 52. Instead of implementing the charter's priorities to enhance the quality of life for seniors, government inaction has made it increasingly difficult for seniors to make ends meet.

One of the reasons, of course, is tied to what is happening in the economy. Every time a plant closes its doors in Hamilton, the pension and benefits of its workers are threatened. It is time for the government to acknowledge that pensions are deferred wages. They are not bonuses paid to workers at the end of their working lives. They are part of an agreed upon compensation package for hours worked.

•(1345)

That is why, upon being elected, I was proud to introduce Bill C-270, the workers first bill, in the House of Commons as my very first legislative initiative. Once it becomes law, this bill will ensure that workers' wages, pensions and benefits receive superpriority in

case of commercial bankruptcy. If we really want to ensure that seniors can retire with dignity and respect, then we must ensure that they have an adequate retirement income.

Because so many jobs do not have adequate or indeed any benefits, it is essential that we finally act on universal drug coverage. Not only can millions of Canadians not find a family doctor, but the cost of prescription drugs continues to skyrocket to points where people simply cannot pay for the medications that are prescribed. Out of pocket spending on prescription drugs is now more than 70% higher than it was in 1992. Canadian households are spending \$3 billion a year on prescription drugs. We must ensure that people can get the drugs they need based on the advice of their doctors, not on the advice of their accountants.

Speaking of health care, we must protect public medicare. This is Canada's hallmark social program. In Hamilton the health care sector is now the largest employer. Just a few years ago no one would have believed that about steel town. One of the best ways to protect our medical system is to ensure that we have an economy that generates the kind of revenues needed to allow our system to flourish. Minimum wage jobs do not do that. We need the decent paying jobs that our industrial sector provided for our hospitals, for our community centres and therefore, for our seniors.

That brings me to the needs of our cities. Working families in Hamilton pay a lot of money in taxes and the more their jobs pay, the more they pay in taxes. But it is not fair that the lion's share of those tax dollars goes to the federal and provincial governments. In spite of calls from Hamilton citizens, the big city mayors, the chamber of commerce and many others, the federal government refuses to recognize that Canada is the world's second most urban country with 80% of our population living in cities.

With an estimated infrastructure deficit of over \$100 billion, our cities are in dire straits. Our federal government is rolling in cash but it is refusing to invest in our cities. Investments in infrastructure and housing would create jobs. Investments in public transit would create jobs. Investments in environmental initiatives like the cleanup of Randle Reef would create jobs. The list goes on and on. Our city desperately needs this kind of investment, but property taxpayers can no longer shoulder the burden alone. It is time for the federal government to pick up its fair share and with a \$14 billion surplus, do not tell us it cannot be done.

That brings me to the last issue I want to raise on the throne speech, and that is the issue of youth. When the government set out its agenda for this session of Parliament, it mentioned youth exactly three times. Appallingly, all three were in the context of tackling crime.

*The Address*

I was proud to support bills in the House which imposed mandatory minimum penalties for firearms crimes, raised the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years, and placed the onus on those accused of firearms offences to prove why they should receive bail, but I would never describe these initiatives as an agenda for Canada's youth. To stereotype all youth as criminals is to abdicate our responsibility to the vast majority of teens whose parents are working hard to afford them every opportunity to become law-abiding contributing members of our society.

An agenda for youth needs to be an agenda of hope. It needs to include sports, recreation, education, training, and opportunities for employment. Instead of helping our students to excel in today's knowledge based economy, the government is refusing to deal with unaffordable tuition fees and unreasonable interest rates on student loans that have become major roadblocks to post-secondary education. We need to restore needs based grants, lower tuition fees and overhaul the Canada student loans program to make it more flexible, fair and responsive. We need to invest in apprenticeship programs. We need to raise the minimum wage.

Students are not asking for a free ride. They are simply asking for fairness and a chance to succeed.

In fact, that is what all working families have been asking from the government. They are asking for some basic fairness, but this throne speech misses the mark. I have a mandate to represent the goals of my community in this House and since those aspirations are not reflected in the throne speech, I will be forced to oppose it on Wednesday.

● (1350)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my comment will be on infrastructure and my question will be on human rights.

The government is putting in new infrastructure programs and replacing all the old ones. I want to go on record as saying it is absolutely essential that in the new program the municipalities get at least the same percentage they are getting now. It is very important that municipalities get infrastructure money. I am sure the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Association of Yukon Communities and all municipalities in the country would agree.

Regarding human rights, the throne speech said that the government was a champion of human rights. Does the member find it surprising that there was nothing on the largest human rights tragedy in the world right now, Darfur; that there was not one dollar for the court challenges program so people who otherwise could not afford it could fight for their rights and freedoms; and finally, that the government is still not supporting aboriginal human rights at the UN?

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, I actually agree with my hon. opponent that indeed the government throne speech is silent on Darfur. It is silent on court challenges. It does not do anything to move toward the implementation of the Kelowna accord. One issue that the member did not mention is that the throne speech is absolutely silent on issues affecting women.

While I share those same sentiments and concerns about the direction of the throne speech, I would like to know why the member opposite feels compelled to support the throne speech when in fact it

has these very serious deficiencies. One wonders, if we are elected to represent our constituents in the House and to stand up for principles, why the member having so eloquently pointed out its deficiencies would then go ahead and vote for the throne speech.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the seniors charter of rights, something which, for a number of years, the NDP has pushed to have passed in the House of Commons. We have not seen real action on that.

I would like the hon. member to talk about how we can improve those elements which will actually assist seniors not only in terms of income supports but more important, in terms of their quality of life. I would like her to explain why that charter is so important, not only in terms of its being passed as a figurative motion in the House of Commons but more important, in terms of real action for seniors who are living in poverty today.

● (1355)

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising the issue about the seniors charter and I want to thank him also because it was his leg work that created the basis upon which the seniors charter was built.

The member is right. The charter passed in this very House of Commons. We made a collective commitment to seniors across the country that we would guarantee them the right to retire with dignity and respect. The charter called for a minimum standard of income security. As I pointed out in my speech, income security just is not there for today's seniors. That income security will lead to our being able to talk about other issues related to quality of life, whether they be health care issues, issues of lifelong learning, a whole basket of issues that have not been raised in the House, except in our caucus and through the debate we have initiated in the House. We have been advocating on behalf of seniors.

The government's agenda for this Parliament is completely silent on that. The official opposition party is voting for that silence. I am appalled that members of the House are so complicit in giving up on standing up for our seniors.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague on her excellent speech.

In terms of failure to live up to the expectations that were created in the last Parliament, I stood here with the member when the Prime Minister agreed to send the clean air act to committee so that we as a group could consider the important issue of climate change and put it in perspective.

In the throne speech he has come back and said that only the positions that the Conservative Party agreed to in the committee are going to be the ones that the government supports. What kind of action toward this institution did the Prime Minister make with that declaration? I ask the hon. member, has the Prime Minister completely lost the point of government and representation that is so fundamental to our system?

*Statements by Members*

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, of course I would concur with my colleague that the Prime Minister has indeed lost his way, if he had ever been on the right way toward dealing with the climate change crisis.

I find it absolutely ironic that earlier in the debate, a member from the government caucus had asked about how we reform our democratic institutions. It seems to me one of the best ways to deal with democracy in the country is to act on the will of Parliament. Bill C-30 was that kind of opportunity. All parties had collaborated. We had a comprehensive bill that would tackle climate change in a meaningful way and the government decided to let that bill fall by the wayside and to introduce a watered down version that has all the right words but will not do anything to address this very serious problem that is top of mind for most Canadians.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, over the past weekend, members of four bands on Vancouver Island ratified a historic treaty. The Toquaht, Uchucklesaht, Ucluelet and Kyuquot joined the Huu-ay-aht in voting for an overwhelming endorsement, making this the second treaty approved under the B.C. treaty process.

Inasmuch as four of the five bands are situated in my riding of Nanaimo—Alberni, I take great pleasure in offering congratulations to the chiefs, counsellors and the treaty ratification committees. Perhaps Tom Happynook of the Huu-ay-aht said it best, “As of today, I am proud to be a Huu-ay-aht. I am proud to be a Maa-Nulth. I am proud to be a British Columbian and I'm proud to be a Canadian”.

Congratulations are also due to Premier Gordon Campbell and our own Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. This historic agreement will now be presented in the B.C. legislature and eventually here in the Canadian Parliament for ratification.

This treaty offers great potential to launch a whole new future for these first nations. It is hoped that the spirit of collaboration and goodwill that has infused the treaty process will spearhead a whole new chapter for all of British Columbia.

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### POLISH CANADIANS

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the discourse of Canada's political history, the roles played by our first nations, and the French and the British components regularly overshadow the important roles played by Canadians of other origins.

In fact, for over a century we viewed our country as bicultural. It was not until Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau that for the first time we formally acknowledged that Canada was in fact a multicultural nation. For this reason, it is important and proper that we acknowledge and pay tribute to those communities that helped to build Canada's foundations.

To underscore this point, this year marks the 140th anniversary of the election of the first Polish Canadian, Alexandre Édouard Kierzkowski, to Canada's first House of Commons in 1867. Kierzkowski was a Polish officer who came to Canada in 1842. In the year of Canada's Confederation, he was elected the Liberal member of Parliament for Saint-Hyacinthe.

For 140 years Polish Canadians have contributed in building our great multicultural nation and, as such, they should be considered one of Canada's founding peoples.

\* \* \*

● (1400)

[Translation]

### MONIQUE SOURDIF

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute today to Monique Sourdif, a resident of Laval and recipient of the Quebec “Hommage aux Aînés” award. The award recognizes the contribution of an individual to improving the well-being, quality of life, participation and role of seniors in Quebec society.

Her commitment is incontestable. For more than 25 years, she was involved in the Canadian Cancer Society, bringing support to cancer patients and their loved ones.

For more than 10 years, she worked to promote the participation and integration of seniors within organizations and private residences, and was involved in the “celebrating seniors” committee in Laval.

She helped initiate intergenerational days and, in the same spirit, founded the Maison des grands-parents. She was an administrator at the Laval FADOQ for a few years and was a co-founder of the Table de Concertation des Aînés in Laval.

Monique is an exceptional woman, and a wonderful mother and grandmother, but most of all, she is my friend. I am proud to see her honoured in this way. No one is more deserving. Bravo!

\* \* \*

[English]

### MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to speak with my brothers and sisters in the CAW calling for a federal task force on manufacturing.

In the last five years more than 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this country. These are real jobs, where Canadians were able to provide for their families, that are gone. They have disappeared and the government has not been fighting back to maintain those jobs. Hence, we need a task force.

On top of this, we have seen a government continue down a wrong path of not putting in sectoral strategies. Instead, what it is doing is large corporate tax cuts that would actually reward companies when they move to Mexico, Alabama and other places.

*Statements by Members*

Today we are calling for a fight for our jobs and, most importantly, to put actual workers back on the workshop floor so they are actually able to support their families.

\* \* \*

**CANCER**

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I stand in the House to pay tribute to some real Canadian heroes.

In January of this year, a U of A doctor published findings that DCA, a commonly used drug, had shown real potential in the fight against cancer. When Peace River resident Terry Babiy learned that pharmaceutical companies would not fund the necessary \$800,000 human trials due to the limited profit potential, he and the local community stepped into action.

Believing that they could raise \$250,000 to contribute to the effort, the local radio stations, businesses and citizens held countless fundraisers of every imaginable form. To date, their efforts have yielded over \$260,000 and an announcement that clinical trials will commence was made in recent weeks.

I commend the people of Peace Country for giving so generously for such a worthwhile cause. Their generosity is an example for communities across this great nation. I am proud to represent these hard-working and compassionate people, and even more proud to congratulate them on this success.

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**HOMELESSNESS**

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week was the second annual homelessness week in Greater Vancouver. Vancouverites overwhelmingly identified homelessness as their number one social challenge as do many other Canadian cities.

The last Liberal government had committed \$1.4 billion to a partnership with municipalities, provinces, non-profit and private sectors to provide shelters, single occupancy units, and temporary living for those Canadians who have no shelter. We had developed a cities plan with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

These were all swept away by the new Conservative government. Its 2004 platform along with the 2006 and 2007 budgets never mentioned homelessness nor housing. Instead, it cut the Liberal homelessness fund, restoring it much later as the rebranded homelessness national strategy with greatly decreased funding.

Now the Speech from the Throne mentions the word “homelessness” in passing: no plan, no funds. Are we to believe that after three years the government has developed a social conscience or is it just more of that smoke and mirrors trick that it does so well?

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**CANADIAN CARDIOVASCULAR SOCIETY**

**Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask the House to join me in congratulating the Canadian Cardiovascular Society as it celebrates its 60th year.

Since 1947 the Canadian Cardiovascular Society has provided outstanding leadership to members of the cardiovascular medical community and helped them deliver quality health care to Canadians.

This includes the development of the angina classification system used worldwide, the creation of the pan-Canadian access to care benchmarks, and the development of recommendations for the diagnosis and treatment of heart failure.

These examples demonstrate the remarkable work of Canada's cardiovascular physicians and scientists through the Canadian Cardiovascular Society. The society is also a key member of the Canadian heart health plan developed by this government.

It will undoubtedly remain an organization of great value to our country. Congratulations to the Canadian Cardiovascular Society. We look forward to the next 60 years.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**OHTLI AWARD**

**Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Ms. Louise Guinois, a resident of Saint-Isidore, was honoured on September 13 by the Consul General of Mexico for her voluntary work with Mexican seasonal workers in Quebec.

Founder of Fraternité québécoise mexicana and organizer of community events for Latin American workers, Louise Guinois has been given the Ohtli Award by Mexico's Secretariat of Foreign Relations for her dedication to Mexican communities in Quebec, especially the one in her riding.

Ms. Guinois' concern for the well-being of migrant worker is a testament to her great humanity and represents a model of civic values for all citizens of Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

Our congratulations to Ms. Guinois.

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**SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, by presenting the Speech from the Throne in prime time, our government affirmed its desire to dialogue with Canadians.

The stated priorities demonstrate the coherence of the government and its desire to take up the challenges faced.

*Statements by Members*

These priorities are as follows: strengthen Canada's sovereignty and our place in the world; strengthen the federation and our democratic institutions; provide effective economic leadership for a prosperous future; tackle crime and strengthen the security of Canadians. Not to mention the major issue of implementing effective policies to improve the environment and Canadians' health.

With regard to the environment, our government has announced allocations of more than \$9.3 billion to projects, five times the \$1.6 billion spent by the Liberals.

We did not just make promises; we have taken real action.

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**RELÈVE DU NORD SCHOOL**

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on October 13, I had the opportunity to see a show put on by the Relève du Nord school in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche.

It was great to see the talent of those taking part, and I would like to acknowledge the remarkable performances of all those who, despite their stage fright, participated in this show.

I was also quite pleased to have been able to attend this event and discover our hidden local talents. I would like to congratulate the participants and choir members who took part in the show: Kera Long, Sophie Bélanger, Caroline Joyce Mallais, Stéphanie Albert, Megan Ouellette, Danielle St-Onge, Marie Eve Belzile, Savannah Paradis, Steffany Paradis, Sylvie Martin, Serge Nadeau, Cédric Charest and Zoé Michaud.

I would also like to thank Nadine Caouette Foster, the chair, Barbara Michaud, and their entire team for organizing this show and showing their dedication to the arts, culture and youth.

\* \* \*

[English]

**GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under previous Liberal governments Canada's place on Transparency International's annual clean government index was in a downward spiral. After ranking fifth in 2001, by 2005 Canada dropped to fourteenth. It seemed that reports of corruption during the Liberal sponsorship scandal had taken its toll on Canada's reputation around the world as an honest, clean country that could serve as an example to the world.

However, the Conservative Party made a commitment to Canadians in the last election campaign: give us a mandate to govern and we will clean up Ottawa.

After passing the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history, the Federal Accountability Act, and other measures to strengthen accountability in government, we did just that.

This year I am proud to say that under the leadership of this Prime Minister Canada has reversed the trend and is now ninth in the world on the clean government index.

However, we are not yet satisfied. We will continue to take action and make our institutions more democratic and accountable to ensure Canada is a leader on the world stage when it comes to transparency, openness and accountability in government.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**CHRISTOPHER WORDEN**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, over the Thanksgiving weekend the people of the community of Hay River awoke to a terrible event when a respected RCMP officer was shot and died in the line of duty.

Constable Christopher Worden had built a fine reputation in his time in the north. He was raising a family in the north and participated fully in his northern home. Such a senseless act will remain with northerners for a very long time.

Constable Worden represents so many other Canadian men and women who have taken up policing with the RCMP in the north. We are grateful for the professional, caring and sensitive work that the members provide in our far-flung communities. Like Constable Worden, their efforts go beyond police work and that makes them an integral part of the life of the people they serve.

There is little anonymity in our northern life. We know our police officers and respect them. The tragedy of the shooting of Constable Worden has touched us all. We mourn together with his family and friends in the community of Hay River. A memorial for Constable Worden will be held in Hay River this Saturday.

\* \* \*

**VISITOR VISAS**

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's refusal to institute a system of visitor visa bonds is hurting Canadians with family members living abroad who want to visit Canada.

Every week I hear from constituents whose close relatives and friends are denied entry to Canada for important events like weddings and funerals. Some applicants have been rejected multiple times without any proper reason. Other applicants who were granted entry under previous governments are now seeing their applications denied.

This government's lack of compassion is causing great distress to Canadians and their families in times of need.

I call on the government to immediately institute a system of visitor visa bonds and end the unfair treatment of these Canadians and their loved ones abroad.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS**

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on October 19, a vigil was held in 21 cities in Quebec to raise awareness of poverty and homelessness.

As part of this event, the “Pompon minute” prize, symbolized by an old patched blanket, was awarded to the Prime Minister of Canada by the organizations and people taking part in the vigil, to make him aware of the deplorable conditions in which the poor are living.

This group is on the Hill today, in the hopes of drawing the Prime Minister's attention to the issues of homelessness and social housing. Its members hope that the Prime Minister will be so concerned about the dire circumstances many people are living in that he will take real steps to improve their living conditions.

We hope that this government will stop rationalizing the funding earmarked for social housing and the fight against homelessness and will work to facilitate access to increased funding.

\* \* \*

[English]

**BMO NESBITT MARATHON**

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to share with members news of the BMO Nesbitt Prince Edward Island marathon which took place October 13 and 14.

Over the past number of years, the marathon has been a much-anticipated tradition in Prince Edward Island and has grown tremendously to its present state of a weekend-long event with seven races, including a full marathon, a half marathon, a 10k walk, a kids run and a corporate relay.

More than 1,000 people participated in this year's marathon weekend. Race participants hailed from across Canada and the United States, and as far away as Nigeria and Japan. I should point out also that our very own member of Parliament, the member for Cardigan, completed the half-marathon walk. Not only was the marathon weekend great fun for all who attended, but it also helped to promote physical activity and healthy living.

I ask members to please join with me in offering our congratulations to race organizer Myrtle Jenkins Smith and her capable team of organizers and volunteers, and all the runners and walkers as well. It was truly a great event.

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**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, getting tough on crime is not a part of the Liberal agenda. It was not a priority when the Liberals were government and now, as opposition, it is even less of a concern.

This past weekend the Liberal leader outlined his vision for an alternative plan for Canada. One key element was missing, their fighting crime agenda. While this is no surprise, what is surprising is the fact that the Liberals are now trying to say that they actually care

about fighting crime. In fact, for the past four months, the Liberals have been missing in action on the justice files. Now, only when there is talk of an election and the cameras are rolling, do the Liberals say that they are interested in getting tough on crime.

The tackling violent crime bill is a priority for this government because community safety is a major concern for Canadians. Two-thirds of Canadians support the government's approach to criminal justice issues, including mandatory minimum penalties for serious crime.

While the Liberals are idle on the subject of justice, this government has and will continue to deliver what Canadians want.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

[Translation]

**MSGR. BERTRAND BLANCHET**

**Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, on September 19, on his 75th birthday, the archbishop of Rimouski, Msgr. Bertrand Blanchet, retired.

Msgr. Blanchet has always been deeply committed to his community and the land it occupies, and in 1975 he did his PhD in forestry sciences. He has never hesitated to take a stand on regional issues and has made people, their progress and their development his top priority.

Msgr. Blanchet develops the region as well as the consciousness. He is a committed man who uses his wisdom and humanity to help people cope with today's challenges without ever imposing his own views.

He is an inspiration. The archbishop of Rimouski helps us represent the Quebec we love. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to this compassionate man of the cloth who has kept his feet firmly on the ground in eastern Quebec where he has truly left his mark.

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**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[Translation]

**PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on the weekend we learned that all references to accountability have been removed from the Public Works procurement handbook. This department is responsible for procurement to the tune of \$13 billion and the minister is shirking his responsibilities.

How can Michael Fortier sign contracts if he does not want take responsibility for them?



*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, these changes meet the needs and requests of the Auditor General for contracts where responsibilities are shared between departments. Obviously Public Works is responsible for the contracting process. In the meantime, the departments are responsible for the needs and the details of individual needs. After years of scandals and problems, this government is determined to ensure the highest level of accountability possible in contracts.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have cloaked themselves in a false rhetoric of responsibility, but their actions betray them. The changes made to Public Works policies create an environment that is conducive to waste.

What is Michael Fortier there for if not to protect Canadian taxpayers?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, as I was saying, these changes meet the needs and requests of the Auditor General and the studies conducted by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

What we are doing is making absolutely clear that the public works department is responsible for the integrity of the process of contracting. At the same time, individual departments are responsible for their needs and for the specs. On those individual contracts, the Auditor General and others have demanded that the process be clarified so we can ensure that we have greater accountability than we had in the past under that government. That is exactly what this government is doing.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we already knew that Michael Fortier was unaccountable to this House. Now we learn that by removing accountability from the public works supply manual, he is also unaccountable to his own department and to Canadian taxpayers.

This is really preposterous. When will the Prime Minister stand up and stop this abdication of ministerial responsibility? Where does the buck stop?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what is preposterous are the statements of the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, who clearly does not understand the policy.

It is important, as the Auditor General has said, that when there is shared responsibility for contracting between public works and other departments that the lines of that responsibility be clear and distinguished between each so we can in fact hold the government accountable. That is precisely what we are doing.

**Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the word “accountability” is deleted how can someone be accountable?

The government has broken its promise on everything from income trusts to the Atlantic accord. Now it has broken its promise on their centrepiece promise, accountability. It has been revealed that all references to accountability have been deleted from the public works manuals, that they will continue to prepare and award \$13

billion in contracts, but that the minister and his department will be absolved of all responsibility.

How can the Prime Minister justify this breach of trust? I would ask his minister, but he is not even a member of the House.

**Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has managed to get it exactly wrong. What we are doing is increasing accountability. We are listening to the Auditor General. We are doing what Canadians want us to do, which is to have clear lines of accountability and responsibility between departments.

We are the government that appointed a procurement ombudsman. We are the government that created the code of conduct for procurement. We are the government that passed the Federal Accountability Act.

We have no lessons to learn on accountability of procurement from Liberals. We are the government that is getting the job done for Canadians.

**Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, by deleting the word “accountability” from its mandate, it is clear the government has no interest in living up to its promises, especially on accountability.

Billions of dollars are spent by public works each year. Billions of dollars are now spent without any checks, any guidelines or any measures to keep them honest. There is nothing to keep it accountable.

Public works is responsible for safeguarding the integrity of all public contracts. The government has rendered that responsibility a joke.

Whose idea was it to make the department of accountability unaccountable? Was it the Prime Minister or was it the individual he appointed to the Senate?

**Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has raised the issue of keeping promises and accountability. The government is keeping its word to Canadian taxpayers and getting value for everything that we purchase.

We are cutting taxes for Canadians. We are paying down our debt. We are standing up for farmers. We are standing up for families.

When it comes to respecting taxpayer dollars, from the beginning to the end, this government understands the needs of taxpayers and the needs of families. We are getting the job done.

As the Prime Minister has said on this file, we are listening to the Auditor General, we are respecting tax dollars and we are following the appropriate line. If my hon. colleague does not understand that, I am not surprised.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**CHARTER OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has recognized the Quebec nation. Even so, thousands of Quebec workers who fall under the federal Labour Code, such as bank employees and telecommunications and port workers, are not covered under Bill 101 and therefore do not have to work in French, the language of work in Quebec.

Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that recognizing the Quebec nation means recognizing French, the language of work in Quebec, in all workplaces, including those that fall under federal jurisdiction?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc and its leader have clearly run out of issues to justify their presence in Ottawa. They have been in the House of Commons for 17 years, and not once have they raised this issue.

Frankly, this is a paradox. Since coming to power, Canada's new government has respected Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. Now the Bloc is using a provincial law to encroach on areas under federal jurisdiction. How ironic.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister has not been here for long, but she has already run out of ideas and out of answers. She does not understand.

I mentioned the federal Labour Code, which falls under the responsibility of this government. Maybe that is not the case on some other planet, but it is here. Nevertheless, take minimum wage for example. The federal Labour Code states that the minimum wage for federally regulated workers is the same as minimum wage in each of the provinces.

If that is how the federal Labour Code works for minimum wage, then why not for language of work? Federal laws are Ottawa's responsibility. The minister should understand that.

• (1425)

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one thing that I understand and that all Quebecers understand is that the Bloc has run out of issues here in Ottawa.

That being said, the results of the latest provincial elections make it clear that Quebecers believe in federalism and in our policy of open federalism. Moreover, at the risk of opening old wounds for the Bloc leader, Canada is the country here. Our role is to promote this country's two official languages.

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, about 10% of Quebec workers are governed by the Canada Labour Code and thus are not subject to Bill 101, which makes French the language of work.

Can the Prime Minister explain why those working in Quebec in banking, broadcasting, telecommunications, airports, and air, marine and interprovincial transportation do not have the right to work in French as do other workers?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions**

**of Quebec, CPC):** Neither the Canada Labour Code nor the Quebec Code deal with the issue of language. It is our responsibility to deal with labour standards. It is in this context that the Canada Labour Code covers workers under our jurisdiction in Quebec.

However, I went into some banks on the weekend. There are no banks in Jonquière that provide people with service in English. We were served in our own language, in French.

The Bloc Québécois is trying to start arguments. That is the only reason they try to ride along, in this House, trying to pick fights with all of us.

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, recognizing the Quebec nation definitely means something. Logically, it should be accompanied by recognition for its common language, French.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his continued refusal to recognize that Bill 101 must apply to all Quebec workers, including those governed by the Canada Labour Code, is another indication that the motion on the nation adopted by the House of Commons means nothing to him and is inconsequential?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I also had the opportunity to meet with our partners at banks and in areas under our jurisdiction in particular. At our meetings, I asked them in which language they offer their services in Quebec. The partners we consulted told us that in Quebec, in Quebec's regions, the language of service is French. When their headquarters do business with Canada as a whole or other countries, both official languages come into play.

\* \* \*

[English]

**GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech last week, we learned that the government will delay action on the environment by watering down the clean air and climate change act. Now it is very clear that it will also delay action on the justice bills. The government is going in the wrong direction.

Will the Prime Minister agree with the NDP's proposal to split the omnibus justice bill and to move forward on those items of legislation to where they were in the House before we broke, those items that could rapidly be made into law today?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, everybody knows that the attempt to split the bill is simply a delaying tactic. These bills have been before the various House committees for months, I think for a total of nine hundred and some days.

*Oral Questions*

I would say to the leader of the NDP and to any other leader who wants to facilitate passage of the bills, that this government would certainly be willing to agree to the passage at all three readings today.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, why do we not just start with the impaired driving bill?

One of the easiest things the government could do to respond to the 17 year campaign of Mothers Against Drunk Driving would be to take that bill, which has already passed this House and, by motion, send it directly today to the Senate where it could be adopted. In fact, had it not been for the action of the government, it would already be law and we would be taking action on drunk driving today.

Will the Prime Minister accept our suggestion or will he continue to pontificate?

• (1430)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I could not outdo the leader of the NDP in that regard and I would not even try.

Let me just say once again that the leader of the NDP wants to advance one bill so that he can in fact delay the other bill. These bills are together so they can no longer be buried in committee and delayed. Members of Parliament should pass all of them.

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**ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the cone of silence has descended on the Conservative government and Canadians are paying the price. Reports today expose that this government is deliberately blocking access to information requests to prevent embarrassing information from becoming public.

The Conservative government has broken its promise of transparency and accountability. What is it trying to hide from Canadians?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Information Commissioner, an independent officer of this Parliament, has said that the response to access to information requests has improved under our government. Nine institutions got better grades from the Information Commissioner over the previous year, three moving from an F under the previous Liberal government to an A under our government.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, day after day, the Conservatives continue to prove that they are not to be trusted. Since it took power, this government has neglected, delayed and censored access to information requests. What is more, it is the Prime Minister's own Privy Council that has blocked this information. This is totally unacceptable.

Why is the Prime Minister afraid of transparency? What is he hiding?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the statistics show is that the number of requests have

grown significantly over the past year and it is because we have now included more institutions available to access to information, such as the Wheat Board. The members opposite do not want the Wheat Board to disclose its expenses. Our government wants openness in that respect.

In respect of other government funded foundations, the opposition did not want them. We are including them. That means that there is more work but we are getting the job done as the Information Commissioner has indicated.

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**ELECTIONS CANADA**

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Aaron Hynes is an assistant to the environment minister. He is also the defeated Conservative candidate for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. He has been named by Elections Canada as a participant in the scheme to launder ad money to local campaigns in breach of election spending limits.

Was Mr. Hynes hired by the minister due to his willingness to shuffle thousands of dollars in and out of his campaign and hide advertising expenses for the Conservative Party? Did the minister approve of this scheme as Conservative campaign chair for Ontario?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is a decent man and, being a decent man, I know he will want to make that kind of allegation outside of this chamber where he will face the consequences for doing so. All of our activities are in accordance with the law.

We are certainly very pleased to have someone like the individual he mentioned on our staff.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Hynes is not the only Conservative government employee connected with this scandal who was hired by the Minister of the Environment.

When the minister was shepherding the accountability bill through Parliament, his press secretary was Patrick Robert, who was also named during the investigation into this systematic violation of the Canada Elections Act.

Could the minister confirm whether he decided to hire Mr. Robert because Mr. Robert agreed to engage in “in and out” money scams during the last election in Gatineau?

[*English*]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I feel like it is last week again. The questions have not changed. I thought they would for a while, but the answers are the same. We have followed the law in every case.

I expect now that the next questions we will get will be something about not making a patronage appointment, then outrage about telling people about the throne speech, and finally, they will be very upset that we wish people a Happy New Year.

*Oral Questions*

● (1435)

[Translation]

**UNESCO**

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, a letter from Quebec's minister of international relations to the leader of the Bloc Québécois indicates that, in the event of disagreement between the two governments, Quebec cannot make its opinion known to the public. The letter says, and I quote:

The Government of Canada will provide the Government of Quebec with an explanatory note regarding its decision.

Will the minister admit that Quebec's only gain since being granted a seat at UNESCO is that, from now on, Quebec will be given a little note explaining the federal government's unilateral decisions? Is this Quebec's so-called historical gain?

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that this is the first government to recognize the important role that Quebec and Quebecers play in our international relationships and in our global scheme. We have enabled Quebec to make representation at the United Nations and UNESCO because these things are important to all Canadians and we know these are things that Quebecers take a special interest in.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, what a banal response.

On August 30, 2007, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages informed the International Centre of Films for Children and Young People that it would no longer be receiving federal government subsidies. Yet that centre, also known as CIFEJ, is a UNESCO associated organization.

How can the minister justify pushing a UNESCO organization out of Quebec, by cutting its funding, while her government pretends to facilitate Quebec's access to UNESCO?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, CIFEJ was funded under special ministerial authority. However, it was never subject to any formal application process, any specific Treasury Board authority or the slightest financial accountability.

Our government takes very seriously its obligation to use public funds responsibly. That being said, we support the recounting of Canada's history through the National Film Board, Telefilm Canada and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

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**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on the weekend the Minister of the Environment said that Canada would not officially withdraw from the Kyoto protocol. However, the government said in the Speech from the Throne that it does not intend to implement a plan for Canada to comply with the Kyoto targets. In the Speech from the Throne, the Conservative government again repudiated Canada's signature at the bottom of the Kyoto protocol.

Will the Minister of the Environment have the courage to be honest and tell the international community that he no longer believes in the Kyoto protocol?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada and Canadians will continue to work very hard together with the United Nations and all international organizations and engage in new efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, in the past 10 years the previous government did absolutely nothing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For 10 long years we have seen the Bloc Québécois do absolutely nothing here in Ottawa.

The Conservative team is getting things done for our environment and for Canada.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this government's environmental policy is a lie. Quebec's environment minister, Line Beauchamp, is worried about possible retaliation against Quebec companies as a result of the Conservative government giving up on the Kyoto protocol.

Does the Prime Minister realize that by giving up on the Kyoto protocol he may be penalizing Quebec companies who, in good faith, have already made efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and achieve the Kyoto protocol targets?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are taking real action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This government has granted \$350 million to the Government of Quebec. For the first time, the Government of Canada is working together with the Government of Quebec to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That has never happened since the Bloc arrived here in Ottawa.

This government is pushing the provinces and the private sector to achieve absolute reduction of greenhouse gases. We are also working very hard with other countries on a real plan for the future.

\* \* \*

● (1440)

[English]

**GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS**

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last year, Robert Cooling was appointed to the Moncton board of referees for employment Insurance. What was his qualification? He was the official agent for the defeated Conservative candidate in Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

Would the minister confirm, or will he hide behind the skirt of the government House leader, whether Mr. Cooling was appointed because of his willingness to shovel thousands of dollars in and out of the national campaign to help with advertising expenses for a local riding?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is getting tedious and I apologize for being tedious but of course all our campaign financing activities are legal. They follow the intent of the law. In fact, they are quite similar to the practices of other political parties in this country. However, most important, the appointments this government makes are all qualified.

I know there are some appointments that we did not make that have upset opposition members and they like to ask questions about that, but no, we do not engage in patronage appointments that are not really qualified.

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

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**ELECTIONS CANADA**

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when will the Prime Minister answer for the Conservative Party's in and out financing scheme that broke the Elections Act? Three investigations and still no word from the Prime Minister.

In the riding of Malpeque, \$8,000 was ill-gotten by this in and out scheme. Was my opponent, George Noble, informed by the Prime Minister's inner circle of this scheme to abuse election spending? Malpeque constituents do not take kindly to this intentional, illegal scheme by the national Conservative Party.

Will the Prime Minister at least stand in his place and apologize to Canadians for this illegal spending?

**The Speaker:** I could not hear the first part of the question the hon. member asked. I am not sure that the question concerns the administrative responsibility of the government but, as I say, I could not hear the first part. In the circumstances, we will move on.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada and the Conservatives are having a serious dispute over a Conservative scheme to circumvent spending rules in the last election. For example, the Conservative candidate in my northern Ontario riding flipped nearly \$20,000 in and out of his campaign account to participate in this scheme and was apparently rewarded with a plumb job in the labour minister's office.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the appointment of this candidate was his reward for breaking election spending rules?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member could not be more wrong on every count. Our campaign financing activities are entirely legal. We follow the letter and the spirit of the law and we will continue to do that in the future. The difference is there is one party in the House that dipped into the public taxpayers' money to fund its campaign activities. It even paid part of it back, but what it forgot to pay back was the \$40 million left on the table.

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, how can we get an honest answer from the government House leader when the person writing his lines for question period is Mike Donison,

whose last job was as the chief architect of the Conservative Party's money laundering scam?

When will the government House leader do the right thing and ask his senior policy adviser, Mike Donison, to step aside while Elections Canada completes its investigation into the scam that he organized?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know those members like to engage in smear when people do entirely legal activities. I invite the member to make the same kinds of comments outside the House.

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**SECURITY CERTIFICATES**

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the Supreme Court confirmed the use of security certificates and recognized that one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a government is to ensure the security of its citizens.

The court did, however, ask the government to bring forward legislation to strengthen this important public safety tool. Can the Minister of Public Safety update the House on when the legislation will be introduced?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court did uphold the principles of the security certificate process. It recommended something which we now have followed, and we will be tabling that legislation today at three o'clock.

[*Translation*]

The Supreme Court recommended two things and we have incorporated them in our bill: to provide a special advocate for the persons accused and to have regular appeal processes in place.

\* \* \*

● (1445)

**FINANCE**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, our intrepid Minister of Finance is set for a repeat of last year, when he asked banks to reduce ATM fees and was met with a resounding refusal.

Now, his focus is on the retail sector. It is hard to make an argument for the benefits of a free market when it is clear that consumers are getting swindled.

Aside from his missionary work, when will the Minister of Finance start to act like a responsible parliamentarian, to put an end to this mistreatment and help Canadian consumers?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the issue the hon. member raises, that of the increased value of the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar and resulting pricing policies in Canada, is very important to Canadian consumers. That is why I have raised the issue on behalf of the government publicly. I have spoken to many of the retailers directly in the course of the past month.

We are encouraging the retailers to reflect as quickly as possible the increased purchasing value of the Canadian dollar, for the sake of Canadian consumers and, quite frankly for the sake of Canadian retailers as well, so that they will have the business volumes they would like to have.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have seen this movie before. Last year the minister asked the banking sector to reflect as quickly as possible and nothing has happened. The minister's idea of action is to go begging and then provide his own excuse when nothing occurs.

The Conservatives are posturing a lot these days about their strong desire to govern. Here is a chance to do just that. Instead of whining, why not act like parliamentarians on behalf of Canadian consumers, do the right thing and offer the public something other than the sophomoric excuses for inaction that have just been served up by the minister?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member believes in price controls. We do not. That is not the type of interference in the market that we are interested in doing.

With respect to ATM fees, I might remind the member, and he might not be aware of it since he was not here at that time, that we now have better arrangements for ATM fees for seniors in Canada and better arrangements for students in Canada. We have a network being developed by the credit unions in Canada involving about 2,000 ATM machines that do not have any surcharge at all. This is all good for Canadian consumers.

\* \* \*

**PRIVACY**

**Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on Friday I asked the government about its relationship with the Conservative CIMS database. The hon. House leader said that it was a political party database divorced from government MPs, but I have here the authorization form signed by Conservative MPs installing this database in their offices.

My question is simple. Why is a political party database sitting on the taxpayer funded computers of members of Parliament?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was very puzzled when I got this question on party databases last week so I did some research and I found the following:

This software enables both candidates and elected officials in their respective roles to properly and easily manage their campaign and constituency offices... members of the House of Commons are using this application for their day-to-day business. Since 1997, [it]...has been the software of choice for every election and by-election

in both federal and provincial elections. This package enables elected officials to track issues and correspondence in their constituencies, as well as donations, membership and voter intention.

Do members know what this is? It is not CIMS. It is ElectSYS, the Liberal Party of Canada software application.

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. Obviously the popularity of the hon. member for Halton has risen dramatically over the summer, but we have to be able to hear the question. Despite the enthusiasm for him standing in the House, we have to be able to hear what he says. The hon. member for Halton now has the floor.

**Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I hope Canadians will notice that the hon. House leader did not answer that important question. He has now quoted a Conservative blogger whose credibility is extremely compromised.

My question remains: does the hon. House leader believe it is an ethical practice to have a Conservative Party database sitting on the computers of his MPs? Yes or no, ethical or not?

• (1450)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was actually quoting from the website of The AIT Corp.: "Giving you the edge through superior campaign and constituency management" and "Client base...Federal Liberal Party of Canada".

It says that one can do "Issue tracking" and "Use the case layer to link files with issues" and also "Search wizards to help...retrieve the information by issue, case status, open date and assignment" and in fact "voter intention and vote participation". Then there is my favourite privacy issue: it says that one can even "track birthdays" and "send congratulatory notes".

I guess it is time for the member to go to the byelection with or without his database.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has refused to be accountable about the breach of privacy by the PMO and MPs. We now know that Conservative MPs were instructed to use government resources to collect private information without the consent of constituents.

We know the information was collected for the Conservatives' centralized data bank. Can the Prime Minister simply tell us whether this information is used by the Conservative Party for fundraising?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can keep quoting from the AIT system, which is what the Liberal Party of Canada used.

Let us remember that this “software enables both candidates and elected officials in their respective roles to properly and easily manage their campaign and constituency offices”. The Liberals are tracking casework in multiple layers and tracking birthdates.

I would like to know from the hon. member if she uses it.

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

**The Speaker:** Order. We are wasting time. Hon. members have a lot of questions they want to ask, I know, but as the House leader knows, generally in question period questions are from the opposition to the government and not the other way around.

The hon. member for Kitchener Centre has the floor now for her supplementary question.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would say that the hon. House leader has just demonstrated that our software indeed does not collect private information.

Every day Canadians turn to their members of Parliament and are looking for help to access disability, veterans and immigration programs. The information is private. People come looking for help. They are not trying to get on the Conservative Party database.

If the information is not being collected for political purposes, can the Prime Minister tell us why two members of Parliament had their databases immediately disconnected when they ceased to be members of the Conservative Party but still continue to be members of this House?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when I got these questions last week I was puzzled. I was puzzled because I was thinking of what our party uses, not what the Liberal Party uses. That party boasted on this company's website that, “This software enables both candidates and elected officials in their respective roles to properly and easily manage their campaign and constituency offices”.

Under the administrative side, which is the constituency side, there is talk about linking the issues with the voter intention and with their birthdays and sending those birthday cards. I do not know who is—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### METALLURGY INDUSTRY

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry approved Rio Tinto's offer for the acquisition of Alcan, without any conditions. However, Alcan union members in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean went to the minister to ask him to demand guarantees concerning the current level of employment.

Why did the minister refuse to demand a commitment from Rio Tinto regarding a minimum number of jobs for my region and for Quebec?

#### Oral Questions

● (1455)

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question, but we do not see eye to eye. I only approve a request when the foreign investor has proven that the transaction will mean a clear advantage for Canada. Rio Tinto promised certain things, such as setting up its head office in Montreal and investing in real estate—\$2 billion, to be exact—in the Saguenay region. The acquisition will bring about benefits for Canada.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government did not demand anything beyond what the company was already offering. However, the workers in the regions affected by the acquisition wanted the company to guarantee a certain level of processing right here.

Why did the government not use this sale as an opportunity to demand that Rio Tinto process right here the aluminum produced in the Mauricie, Beauharnois—Salaberry and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean regions?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Bloc member is not correct. The discussions that took place between Investment Canada and Rio Tinto were among the most extensive that had ever been held in this area.

I sign off on applications only when the foreign investor demonstrates that there is a net benefit to Canada. In the context of this transaction, the undertakings were specifically secured. Montreal will be the headquarters of the one of the world's largest mining companies, the largest aluminum company in the world.

There will be commitments to Canadian representation on the board of directors, representation of Canadians in senior management in the company and, as I pointed out, capital investments of close to \$4 billion, including \$2 billion in the Saguenay region of Quebec.

\* \* \*

#### FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans authorized a different and very dangerous gear type for two large herring seiners in the gulf region. The minister should know that for fishermen it is a serious issue. Fishermen cannot catch their quota in the gulf now. Everybody in the region opposes this type of destruction in the gulf region.

Why would the minister put more pressure on herring and other stocks in the gulf? Will the minister do the right thing here today and put an end to this very dangerous gear in the gulf?

**Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me say to the hon. member that these are not new licences and these are not new quotas. In fact, the management plan I am using, which allows this, is the same management plan brought in by the Liberals.

*Oral Questions***DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the last election the Conservative Party committed to strengthening our federation and modernizing our democratic institutions. In government we delivered on that commitment. So far we have passed the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history, the Federal Accountability Act, as well as legislation to establish fixed dates for general elections and legislation to improve the integrity of the electoral process.

While we have accomplished a lot, there is still much more to be done. Can the Minister for Democratic Reform please inform the House about his plan for further strengthening our federation through democratic reform?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government reversed the trend under the Liberals and delivered accountable, open and transparent government.

Once a leader in the world, under the Liberals Canada fell to 14th place on the annual clean government index issued by Transparency International. Under our Conservative government, the world is taking note that we are clean and accountable. In one short year, we have climbed back up in the rankings by five places to ninth in the world.

There is one thing I forgot to add in my previous answer to the House. If anyone in the media is looking for the AIT Corp. website, people will find it at [theaitcorp.com](http://theaitcorp.com), "Giving you the edge through superior campaign and constituency management tools", the official website database of the Liberal Party.

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**DRUGS AND PHARMACEUTICALS**

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, middle-class Canadians are paying way too much for prescription drugs.

We just had another report commissioned by Industry Canada, something that the government was forced to release, which shows that the government is not helping doctors make affordable choices for their patients. Doctors who could be prescribing generic drugs just do not know about them.

Will the health minister show some leadership, help close the prosperity gap and ensure that families do not pay any more for prescription drugs than they need to?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on this particular topic, the hon. member is quite correct that Canadians should not be paying more than they need to pay. It goes to reason this is why this government has increased its transfer payments to the provinces and territories to the tune of \$2 billion last year alone. We are working with the provinces and territories on a national pharmaceutical strategy.

I know the hon. member's party has a policy platform in this area. That is fine, but the NDP has not told us how it would pay for all of this. From our perspective, we are working with the traditional deliverers of this service to ensure that Canadians are covered better.

● (1500)

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it seems we get a lot of tough talk and no action. Perhaps that minister is sitting too close to the finance minister.

I have a suggestion for him. Here is an easy way to solve this problem. When a generic version of a drug is ready for the market, just tell the doctors. Let them compare the costs. Get the information into the hands of physicians. That way doctors will be able to check the drug prices before they prescribe.

Will the minister do that? Why will the government not act on something so sensible, such a cost effective solution that would make drugs more affordable and help Canadians become more healthy for all—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health.

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, not only have we increased transfer payments, but we are in fact working with the provinces and territories to establish best practices in areas including how to deliver better information to patients.

May I say to the hon. member, one can never be too close to the finance minister.

\* \* \*

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries is dead wrong to authorize a vessel 125 feet long, with 5,000 horsepower, towing a net five football fields wide and a quarter of a mile long. The minister knows full well the devastation caused by these trawlers, which destroy everything in their path. In fact, the minister has authorized a killing machine.

Again, I ask the minister, will he do the right thing here in the House for the gulf region and bring an end to this killing machine in the gulf region?

**Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member that this boat and any other seiners who are fishing in the area are fishing their own quotas and not one herring above their quotas. They have a certain amount to catch.

It is prime product that will provide many hundreds of jobs in the New Brunswick area, an area that has been devastated because of the policies of the members opposite.

If they only have a certain amount to catch, whether they catch it in a dory or in the *Queen Mary*, it does not make any difference.

\* \* \*

**RETAIL INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians work hard to support themselves and their families. When they purchase goods, they deserve to pay a fair price.



While a number of retailers are reducing their prices, recent reports indicate Canadian prices for some goods are considerably higher compared to U.S. prices.

While the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc have been virtually silent on this issue, the finance minister is standing up for consumers.

I understand the minister will be meeting with the retail industry representatives tomorrow. Can he inform the House as to what he is hoping to achieve?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burlington for the very timely question.

There is clearly room to reduce prices in Canada, given the increased purchasing power of the Canadian dollar. This is important, not only for Canadian consumers, but it is also important for Canadian retailers so that they can maintain their sales volume.

I have encouraged retailers to reduce their prices as soon as possible. Many already have. More are doing so. This is valuable for Canadian consumers. I encourage Canadian consumers to shop around so that the market will work well.

\* \* \*

#### PRESENCE IN GALLERY

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Daniel Igali, gold medal winner in men's freestyle wrestling at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

#### POINTS OF ORDER

##### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do believe you erred in not allowing the question. The question went directly to the issue of ensuring that Canadian laws are abided by and I believe there is no more important law than having prime ministerial assurances that the very spending requirements in an election are in fact met.

Over the past number of days there have been questions by many members in this House about the in and out scheme of the Conservative Party. We have not had a response from the Prime Minister to that question. It goes right to the heart of democracy itself. I believe you should have allowed the question.

**The Speaker:** I am more than happy to review the question that was asked, but from what the hon. member just said, it sounded to me very questionable whether the question was in order if it dealt with the election expenditures of a party. It has to deal with the administrative responsibility of the government. The government is not responsible for administering the rules relating to election expenses; Elections Canada is. It is an independent agency that does not report to the House through the government. It reports to the House through the Speaker.

It is difficult for the hon. member to ask questions about Elections Canada to the government, unless it is government policy as coming

#### Routine Proceedings

up in a change in the law respecting Elections Canada. His question appeared to have nothing to do with it.

As I said, I could not hear the first part of the question because of the tumult in the House. Maybe there was something in there that rendered it in order, but the part I heard in my view was out of order.

I will review the hon. member's question again. If I find it in order I will advise him accordingly and he will be able to ask it another day.

Are there any other points of order or are we finished with that?

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1505)

[English]

### IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (certificate and special advocate) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

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

\* \* \*

### PHOSPHORUS CONTROL ACT

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-464, An Act to limit the use of phosphorus in dishwasher detergent.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as members may know from reading the newspapers this summer, there is a significant blue-green algae problem in the province of Quebec. While this problem is not caused solely by phosphates in detergents and especially dishwasher detergents, it is time that we moved on this to bring the level down to 0.5% by weight.

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

\* \* \*

### PETITIONS

#### INTERNATIONAL AID

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. My first petition is on behalf of constituents in my riding. The petitioners strongly support the government's decision to ban Hamas and to cut it off from foreign aid from this government.

The petitioners call on the government to stand strong behind the decision to cut off Hamas, a terrorist group in Gaza, from Canadian tax dollars.

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from some of my constituents and calls on the government to be a strong voice in defence of the civil rights and liberties of the Coptic Christians in Egypt who have come under increasing persecution from radical elements in that country.

*Routine Proceedings*

We stand four-square behind the Coptic Christians and their desire to have freedom of religion.

**The Speaker:** It appears the Speaker went too quickly and missed the hon. House leader for the official opposition when he rose on motions. I am therefore going back to motions to permit the hon. member for Wascana to propose a motion.

• (1510)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think this should take long.

In order for the House to make at least some progress on anti-crime legislation today in a responsible way, I wonder if you could see if there is unanimous consent in the House for the following motion, that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Wascana have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would ask at this time that you seek unanimous consent for this House to adopt a motion to approve Bill C-2, the tackling violent crime act, at all stages so it may move forward to the Senate.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** Maybe there could be more consultation between the House leaders in advance and we would be able to settle this in the usual way rather than by moving these motions on the floor, if I could make a humble suggestion.

[*Translation*]

## SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions to present.

The first concerns the summer jobs program. This program is not good for rural regions, tourism or any association or employer that depends on hiring students in the summer to keep running smoothly and ensure its activities are consistent with previous years.

Consequently, the petitioners request that Parliament restore eligibility criteria similar to those of the summer career placement program so that more employers are eligible for more funding to hire students in the summer.

[*English*]

## AUTISM

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have another petition to present.

The petitioners request Parliament to call upon the government to amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include IBI and ABA therapy as a medically necessary treatment for children with autism, and that all provinces be required to fund this essential treatment for autism and contribute to the creation of an academic chair at a university in each province to teach IBI and ABA treatments at the undergraduate and doctoral levels so Canadian professionals will no longer be forced to leave the country to receive academic training in this field and so that Canada will be able to develop the capacity to provide every Canadian with autism with the best IBI and ABA treatment available

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have another petition signed by thousands of people. The petitioners ask for proper staffing in the local Service Canada office so that a claimant can have the choice to either file a paper or an electronic claim and that the claimant can receive support from properly informed staff at Service Canada, because of the mandatory waiting period, to allow workers to claim for a loss commencing on day one of their claim.

[*Translation*]

## KYOTO PROTOCOL

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to this House a petition signed by approximately 50 people from my riding, calling for the Kyoto accord to be respected. These petitioners want to save Kyoto and demand that this House step in to ensure that this accord be respected.

[*English*]

## INCOME TRUSTS

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present an income trust broken promise petition on behalf of Mr. Ronald King from Toronto, Ontario, who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud is a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he had promised never to tax income trusts, but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority government to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise, and to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

*The Address*

● (1515)

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions today. One has hundreds of names on it from people in Montreal. The other has numerous names on it from people in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The petitioners call upon the government to continue to work on combatting the horrendous crime of trafficking of persons.

## FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure today that I stand in the House to present a petition from 438 people in my riding.

The petitioners are displaying their displeasure with the long gun registry and the fact that the vast majority of violent crimes are committed by unregistered or illegal firearms, that the long gun registry has cost Canadian taxpayers more than \$1 billion and that the long gun registry usually targets law-abiding citizens, farmers, sport shooters and hunters. The petitioners would like to see this banned.

I have another petition signed by 93 people in my riding, and it is exactly the same petition.

The third petition has 1,418 names on it, for a total of 1,949 names. All these petitioners want to see part of the long gun registry revamped.

This is just a small example of the feeling in my riding.

\* \* \*

## 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.

\* \* \*

## PRIVILEGE

## ALLEGED IMPEDIMENT IN THE DISCHARGE OF A MEMBER'S DUTIES

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I apologize for having to make this intervention, but I want to provide the Chair with some new information with regard to the matter of the privilege issue raised on Thursday about some shadow persons in a riding taking on responsibilities for a member of Parliament. The allegation is that members' privileges were being breached.

On Friday the government House leader tabled a document from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration about the various ways in which MPs would be serviced.

I want to correct something that I stated in the intervention I made. I had indicated that in a case I had the week before we came back that we had written to the minister's office for assistance on an urgent matter relating to a terminally ill family member and that no

response was forthcoming. We then contacted directly the minister's representative with whom we normally would deal. We were told verbally that they would no longer responding to inquiries of opposition members of Parliament for ministerial assistance or permits.

In my intervention I indicated that I would be prepared to provide the names of the people involved, including the gentleman in the minister's office, and I have to withdraw that statement. The employee within the minister's office has withdrawn his permission to reveal his name because he is afraid to lose his job. Therefore, I will be unable to do that. I did not want the House to rely on that.

Other than that information, I would be prepared to provide all other details related to that case should the matter be referred to procedure and House affairs.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for his intervention.

## SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

● (1520)

[Translation]

## RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House today to outline the steps the Government of Canada intends to take to strengthen the federation and our democratic institutions.

One hundred and forty years ago, the people of Canada created a country by joining together into a federation. Our ancestors joined forces and united their destinies to build a nation which now enjoys a privileged place on the world scene. Today, Canada is home to more than 31 million citizens.

Our government wants to play its part and provide the leadership needed to strengthen this bond. It wants to work together with the provinces and territories to strengthen our democratic institutions and promote our collective heritage, of which our two official languages are a part.

I would like to take this opportunity to refresh our memory of our history and our heritage. Then, I will address a number of our government's achievements with respect to linguistic duality and the Francophonie. Finally, I will share with the hon. members our vision for the future.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Canada is a country that values pluralism and where English and French share official language status.

Language rights are set out in our constitutional documents and in the Official Languages Act. These rights were enhanced in 1988 and in 2005.

*The Address*

I would also like to remind the members that part VII of the Act was introduced by a Conservative government. This part of the Act sets out the responsibilities of Quebec institutions with respect to official language minority communities. We also supported the 2005 amendments, unlike the members of the Bloc Québécois, who claim to be protecting the interests of francophones in Canada, but who are conspicuously absent when it is time to act for francophones outside of Quebec.

Both French and English are intrinsic to our identity not because of our legislation but because of the hard work and perseverance of those who came before us.

At the Banquet de la francophonie last March, the Prime Minister said, quite rightly, that “The first people to call themselves “Canadians” were French settlers who built their first community initially on the banks of the St. Lawrence on our Atlantic coast, and then across the country”. He added that well before official language laws were passed, communities built institutions—churches, schools, universities, hospitals, businesses and media—to ensure their own vitality.

People mobilized to ensure that their official language communities would not only survive, but thrive in minority settings.

Our government recognizes the importance of promoting both official languages and Canada's linguistic duality. Our achievements and our commitment to this ideal, as expressed in the Speech from the Throne, are proof of that.

I would like to mention some of our government's achievements over the past year.

Since our government came to power, open federalism has been our watchword, and our achievements reflect that approach.

That is why I am happy to have quickly signed bilateral education agreements with each province and territory, totalling \$1 billion over four years. I also reached major agreements on minority-language services, totalling nearly \$64 million over four years.

Thanks to these agreements, minority communities are able to put in place programs tailored to their own particular reality.

[*English*]

In addition, the Department of Canadian Heritage devotes \$80 million a year to second language education programs. Thanks to this funding, more than 2.5 million young Canadians can learn their second official language. Everyone agrees that bilingualism is an advantage for individual Canadians and an asset for our country. However, it is also true that to bring francophones and anglophones closer together, both language communities must get to know and appreciate each other.

[*Translation*]

Our young people are the key to bringing the language communities together. Thanks in part to assistance from the Department of Canadian Heritage, more than half of the students across the country today are learning French or English as a second language. This support from the Government of Canada has helped make today's youth the most bilingual in Canadian history.

In budget 2007, we also announced an additional \$30 million over two years to promote greater use of the minority language in the everyday lives of Canadians, especially young people, who live in minority communities. Yet the Liberals and the NDP opposed that budget. They voted against a budget that increased funding for official languages.

We also want to create opportunities for young Canadians to enjoy linguistic and cultural experiences in their second language, outside the classroom. It is our hope that all young Canadians will have the opportunity to appreciate the French language and culture and understand how they enrich our country.

Our government is taking concerted action. Early this month, in fact, my colleague, the Minister of Health, announced \$4.5 million in funding to promote access to health care services in minority francophone and anglophone communities.

In addition, we have begun implementing a strategic plan on francophone immigration to provinces other than Quebec, in partnership with Canada's francophone and Acadian communities.

These are just a few of the positive measures we have taken.

• (1525)

[*English*]

As I said earlier, and as the Speech from the Throne shows, our approach takes into account the role of other levels of government. One of our government's main objectives is to strengthen our federation and work more and better with each level of government respecting the jurisdiction of each.

[*Translation*]

I can assure you that when all the provinces are around the table, things start happening. In addition to agreements on education and services in the minority language, we made several significant investments together with the provinces and territories to establish, expand or renovate the infrastructure in francophone communities in various regions of Canada.

We announced the launch of pilot projects for enriched services in French for preschool children. We all know how important it is for children, from a very young age, to be immersed in their language and their culture. This research will help us better understand the main factors that influence young people's behaviour and language retention.

In Halifax, a month ago I also met with all Canadian ministers responsible for francophone affairs. This federal-provincial-territorial conference is an excellent forum for ensuring that the very diverse objectives of and challenges faced by francophones throughout the country are taken into consideration when developing our programs and policies.

We are proud and pleased to be working with the Quebec government to ensure that 2008, which marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City, is a great year for all Quebecers and Canadians.

There are many facets to Canada's linguistic duality and francophonie. The official language minority communities make up one facet. Quebec as a whole is another.

Quebec is the cradle of French civilization in North America, the stage where the first chapters of Canada's history played out and a leader in promoting French today. Quebec is a key partner of the Government of Canada. We are working together to promote French across the country and in Quebec.

The grand celebrations of Quebec City's 400th anniversary is a job we will share with our colleagues from Quebec. And it will be our great pleasure. Our government is giving more than \$110 million and providing its full support toward infrastructure and artistic and cultural programming in preparation of this celebration. This is a file that is particularly dear to me.

The Government of Canada is proud to be a partner in these celebrations that mark a significant chapter of our history. I hope we can make Quebec City's 400th anniversary a celebration for all Canadians to remember.

What is more, the next Summit of la Francophonie will be held in Quebec City in 2008. It is no coincidence that heads of state and francophone governments are turning to Canada to hold their discussions. Canada is a beacon of support for the distribution and promotion of the French language. That is why we will invest some \$2.5 million to ensure that francophones from every region in Canada will be represented in the activities surrounding the summit. These achievements provide a solid foundation on which we will continue to build.

Allow me to come back to the Speech from the Throne to close my presentation. As we said in that speech, our government supports Canada's linguistic duality. It will renew its commitment to official languages in Canada by developing a strategy for the next phase of the action plan for official languages.

• (1530)

[English]

The evaluation is well underway. We are in the process of reviewing all projects in the federal strategy on official languages. This will enable us to give fresh momentum to the government's official language initiatives.

What is needed in some cases is to consolidate but also, undoubtedly, to adjust, modernize, build on key partnerships and awaken the interests of Canadians.

[Translation]

The government's new approach will take into account reports from parliamentary committees, reports from the Official Languages Commissioner and results from community assemblies, such as the summit of francophone and Acadian communities.

I also want to continue the dialogue I have been having since I became minister—

[English]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I am sorry but the hon. minister's time has expired. I will go to questions and comments.

### *The Address*

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister says she cares about and respects the official languages. Yet it is this same government—calling itself Canada's new Government—that eliminated the court challenges program.

The minister says she is willing to listen to what Canadians have to say, out of respect for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. That committee visited every province in Canada to conduct a study. I personally chaired that committee. There was not a single meeting in Canada in which someone did not ask the government to bring back the court challenges program.

Indeed, that program helped communities, for instance, in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, specifically regarding schools. Other examples are the Collège Boréal case in Sudbury and the Montfort Hospital case right here in Ottawa. The program really helped minority francophone communities in certain regions, as well as minority anglophone communities in Quebec.

If the government has so much respect for official languages, why did the throne speech not include a promise to restore the court challenges program? Although there is no mention of it in the throne speech, is the minister willing to bring back that program?

**Hon. Josée Verner:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that there is a case before the courts at this time. I will therefore refrain from commenting.

That being said, our government has every intention of promoting linguistic duality. The government made this announcement in the Speech from the Throne. Unfortunately, before even reading it, the NDP had already decided not to support the throne speech.

If the hon. member would like to contribute to the development and vitality of our official language minority communities, he should reconsider his position and support the Speech from the Throne, since it specifically targets this government's strategic plan for linguistic duality.

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the minister on her excellent speech and on the number of initiatives she is undertaking to promote linguistic duality in Quebec.

As she said, in the Speech from the Throne, the government clearly stated that it would support communities. Linguistic duality is obviously a part of Canada's cultural identity. In the Speech from the Throne, the government made a commitment to continuing with the Action Plan for Official Languages. I would like to congratulate the minister on this initiative.

Francophone communities across the country have had a very favourable reaction to the Speech from the Throne.

*The Address*

I have a question for the minister. In the 2007 budget, an additional \$30 million was set aside for promoting linguistic duality. Could the minister tell us how this amount will be spent and explain how it is helping our francophone and anglophone communities across the country?

**Hon. Josée Verner:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

As we know, support for bilingualism is reaching record levels. Our young people are the most bilingual, as the studies show.

Using the \$30 million announced, our government wants to help these groups, particularly young people, for example, by creating spaces where they can live their culture and speak their language. We also want to make exchanges possible across the country, for both anglophone and francophone youth. This is one thing our government plans on pursuing to continue promoting linguistic duality in our country.

• (1535)

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my intention today is not to repeat verbatim all the initiatives and goals mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. Rather, I want to focus on the proposed limits on the federal spending power, which take on a special meaning in Quebec.

The spending power, which is not mentioned anywhere in the Canadian Constitution, has been haunting federal-provincial relations for generations. As for us, ever since we were elected, we have made it clear that we want to restrict the use of the spending power, based on the criteria in the social union framework agreement, and in the 2006 and 2007 budgets.

The Speech from the Throne said:

Our Government believes that the constitutional jurisdiction of each order of government should be respected. To this end, guided by our federalism of openness, our government will introduce legislation to place formal limits on the use of the federal spending power for new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. This legislation will allow provinces and territories to opt out with reasonable compensation if they offer compatible programs [with the national objectives].

Therefore, our will to restrict the spending power is the direct result of a concern that has been strongly expressed by all Quebec governments from Duplessis to Charest.

I should also point out that respecting the constitutional jurisdictions of each order of government has been a fundamental principle of the Conservative Party since its creation.

However, as we have seen, the root cause of the problem, of this abuse of the federal spending power, will always be the fiscal imbalance. In other words, if the federal government did not have disproportionate revenues compared to those of the provinces, it would probably be less inclined and, more importantly, less able to get involved in areas other than exclusive federal jurisdictions.

This is precisely why we wanted to restore fiscal balance within the federation, as early as in the 2006 budget.

First, we restored fiscal balance with Canadian taxpayers, thanks to tax cuts totalling \$26 billion. Then, we reiterated our support to long term and predictable funding for health care. We also made

new, major investments in infrastructure. Moreover, we provided funding, to the tune of \$3.3 billion, to the provinces and territories to alleviate short term pressures in the post-secondary education, affordable housing and public transit sectors. We also put in place measures to increase the federal government's fiscal accountability and budgetary transparency and we clarified the governments' roles and responsibilities by targeting spending in areas that clearly come under federal jurisdiction, such as defence and security.

Budget 2007 also included a renewed and strengthened equalization program, a renewed and strengthened territorial formula financing program, a new approach to long-term funding support for post-secondary education, a new approach to long-term funding support for training, a new long-term plan for infrastructure, and a new approach to allocating unplanned federal surpluses.

I think it is appropriate to point out that before a major problem can be resolved, it has to be acknowledged. The previous government thought otherwise, and the Bloc has shown, as it has done countless times before, that it can raise major issues but cannot do a whole lot about them.

We are very pleased that provincial governments, especially the Government of Quebec, have welcomed the measures we have taken to ensure fiscal balance. However, I should point out that this initiative was not a unilateral concession to the Government of Quebec. It was not a political favour.

• (1540)

We wanted to ensure fiscal balance and limit federal spending power because we believe that this will improve the federal system.

We all know why Quebec's governments—of all political stripes—have always been more concerned about fiscal imbalance and federal spending power than other provincial governments. It is because, since Confederation, Quebec's governments have been responsible for protecting and developing a society with unique historical, cultural and social characteristics within this country.

Recognizing the distinct nature of Quebec society has repeatedly created difficulties during recent and not-so-recent federal-provincial negotiations.

At the Prime Minister's urging, Canada's Parliament recently made a historic decision to recognize that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada. To my mind, that is the crowning glory of our policy of open federalism toward Quebec.

That being said, clear recognition of Quebec's uniqueness must not result in abdication of our responsibilities to the entire Canadian federation. We want to strengthen the country's economic unity by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each government. Over the coming months, we will follow up on this commitment set out in the Speech from the Throne, just as we are doing with the federal spending power.

*The Address*

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister has often said that this government would be open and that it would support the economic development of airports in Canada, particularly those in rural areas. He is well aware of the situation in northwestern New Brunswick. It is almost identical to the situation in Saint-Hubert, Quebec. There were problems there also—

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** In Trois-Rivières.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** In Trois-Rivières. The minister is correcting me and I thank him. In that case, he was aware that help was needed for the economic development of the rural regions.

What does the minister have to say about the Speech from the Throne? Will the government take this direction, or will this fall on deaf ears and will absolutely nothing be done to help the rural communities of Canada that are going through rather difficult economic times right now?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** Mr. Speaker, my honourable colleague raises a good question. He knows that we, on our side, will always live up to our commitments. The member raises the very pertinent issue of small airports throughout the country, not just in his riding and his province, but elsewhere in the country.

Obviously, the throne speech will not be supported by my colleague because, at the outset, he said he would oppose it. However, I can reassure him. As mentioned in the throne speech, we will soon unveil our Building Canada Plan, and hopefully at that time we will give him what he wants.

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the minister.

Is the minister aware that, in Quebec, the vast majority of people, men and women alike, view the recognition of the Quebec nation and the so-called openness towards Quebec as bogus, as a smoke screen designed to lull them?

In that regard, he has stated that his government corrected the fiscal imbalance. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of people in Quebec are convinced that that is absolutely untrue; that is not the reality. Correcting the fiscal imbalance also means eliminating the federal spending power in Quebec's fields of jurisdiction.

Does the minister realize that the vast majority of Quebecers are sharp, clear-headed people who are very critical of such speeches?

• (1545)

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** Mr. Speaker, whether it is in the Quebec National Assembly or the Parliament of Canada, I am always surprised to hear a sovereigntist rise and give a lecture on Canadian federalism. He is trying to discredit us by making it sound as though we are misleading the public. It is quite the opposite. The men and women here, obviously with the exception of the sovereigntists at the National Assembly, are people who are fully prepared to work for the well-being of the community and to reform Canadian federalism.

Neither my colleague from Westmount—Ville-Marie nor I can count on the support of the sovereigntist Bloc Québécois to help Canada and Canadian federalism move forward. That is not in its mandate.

The Bloc should tell the truth: it wants to eliminate the federal spending power because it is sovereigntist and wants to have everything in Quebec. We on the other hand, will be able to tackle problems head on and move forward with Canadian federalism. Talking about limiting the federal spending power is something significant and positive.

There has been conflict for 40 years. Who has anything to gain from it? Which political party in this House benefits from conflict or problems in the Canadian federation, if not the Bloc Québécois?

[*English*]

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and have the opportunity to address the Speech from the Throne that was delivered by the minority government last week.

I would also like to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Mount Royal.

There is no doubt that we live in interesting times. I dare say I think that characterizes the beginning of this second session of the 39th Parliament very well.

There are many people who cannot remember when they have seen the Canadian dollar as strong as it is, in relation to its U.S. counterpart, as it is performing today. But we have to recognize that sectors of our economy have lost a competitive advantage as a result of the strength of our dollar. In Waterloo region, which includes my riding of Kitchener Centre, there have been more than 8,000 jobs lost, well paying jobs, in the manufacturing sector. They are simply gone.

The Speech from the Throne conveys a vague reference to the hardships that exist in Canada's traditional industry, but clearly we see no plan.

The Conservative government recently announced a surplus that comes close to \$14 billion. That is an amazing amount of money, yet at the same time we have reports from Canada's municipal leaders that communities need roughly \$100 billion to rebuild aging infrastructure. That is a huge issue in municipalities right across Canada, including Kitchener Centre in Waterloo region.

The last federal budget included \$33 billion over seven years for infrastructure, with only a small portion of that being specifically earmarked for municipalities. We need only think back to the tragic bridge collapse in the province of Quebec to recognize the ramifications of neglecting that kind of investment for communities and for Canadians.

Waterloo region is looking for the federal government to invest in infrastructure in a significant way, especially in a project that it has that is incredibly visionary. It is a transportation project as well as a planning tool, a transit system that is key to the management and promotion of the region's growth over the years to come. It is the rapid transit system which eventually will hook us up to the GO Train, which would allow commuters to get off the 401, which we all know is one of the most heavily travelled pieces of highway in North America.

I was looking forward to some kind of specific announcement like that in the Speech from the Throne, and sadly there was none.

*The Address*

I was looking to see more substantive suggestions than the vague notions that were referenced in the Speech from the Throne. Does the building Canada plan include making the gas tax permanent? We do not know. Does it include allocating a cent from every dollar collected through the GST to roads, bridges and essential infrastructure that form the backbone of our communities and cities? We do not know.

Canada depends on strong cities and communities. They are the drivers of our prosperity. The link between healthy communities and productivity, as well as competitiveness, has been well established.

The most recent Speech from the Throne produced by the Conservative minority government alludes to health care, as if it were a challenge that had been met years past and no longer warrants any kind of focus or consideration, no study, no action, no explicit strategy.

I am very proud of our previous Liberal government and the lengths that we went to to address this very important priority for Canadians. The health care crisis that was emerging in Canada was addressed by the historic 2004 health accord, otherwise known as the 10 year plan to strengthen health care. We had a plan. We had specific action and it was done after vast consultation.

However, today it is estimated that 50,000 residents are without a family doctor in my region. That is from an area that is probably one of the fastest growing, most thriving economies in Canada, and yet we still have over 50,000 residents that cannot get primary health care providers.

We were, at one point, officially designated as an underserved area, but due to an awful lot of hard work by local people at all levels of government, including a great deal of leadership by the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, we are now off that list.

• (1550)

However, we cannot rest on our laurels because we need to make sure that health care is there for the people of Waterloo region and the people of Canada right across this country.

Members of Parliament come to this House with a variety of philosophies and I am sure in the main, 308 members come to do what they think is in the best interests of Canadians. I actually had a fairly simple philosophy when I came to this place and I continue to maintain it. And that is quite simply for some, those who are strong and able and can find their own way and make their own success, government's best role is simply to get out of their way, remove red tape, and provide incentives to support a climate where they can continue to prosper fully and to contribute to the Canadian economy and to society.

For others who face challenges and struggles, government has a more personal role to empower this group to overcome barriers. No matter what the fiscal status of our nation, we cannot afford to leave anyone behind any more than we can afford to hold anyone back.

In times of prosperity, in times where we see almost embarrassing levels of federal surpluses, how can we outline a plan for our nation that makes no mention of the more than one million children who continue to live in poverty in Canada? Solving poverty is much more than cutting taxes. Canadians are working, our economy is strong,

yet there are still families and children living in poverty. Clearly, what Canada lacks is a national strategy for poverty reduction.

The Conservative minority government identified crime reduction as a priority. If the government is serious about reducing crime and addressing the causes, it has to look at the root causes of crime and one of those is poverty. Solving poverty is essential in itself, but it is also a key to addressing issues such as health care and community safety.

I am astonished that the government continues to turn its back on families by refusing to honour its child care commitments. The government has failed to deliver the 125,000 child care spaces that it promised and has left families with little or no choice in child care.

The government's decision to cancel the child care funding agreements with the provinces and instead provide a small baby bonus for families with young children has simply not delivered the kind of support that families require. As the busy parent of any young child will say, \$1,200 a year or \$100 a month is bus fare, it is not child care.

Last week I joined many of my colleagues to mark the national Persons Day by celebrating the achievements of Canada's Famous Five. I am always inspired by this group of women, the victory that saw Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards having women declared persons under Canadian law in 1929. The victory of these women represents a significant milestone in the fight in this country for equal rights.

However, actions by the Conservative government remind me that the pursuit of equality is still important in Canada today. Women's groups have worked hard in order to obtain or work toward true social, political, economic, cultural and legal equality in Canada. What has the government done? It has silenced these groups by cutting funding.

It is ridiculous to silence those voices on those issues which are so important to Canadian women and Canadian society. Canadian women still make 71¢ for every dollar men earn in Canada and so many of them live with the threat of domestic violence. We must continue to strive for a better tomorrow for our daughters and our granddaughters.

We live in a complex, demanding, diverse nation and we must govern not just for today, but for tomorrow and beyond. The Speech from the Throne offers a range of ideas and mentions many important issues, but it lacks a cohesive vision to address the most important poignant needs in our community. In essence, it says very little about the Conservative government's agenda.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague opposite, who prides himself so much on his democratic principles.



*The Address*

I would like to talk about the province of Quebec, where I am from. For 40 years, the Liberals failed to recognize our rightful position, by virtue of our culture, within UNESCO. During the 40 years in which they were in power, they could not even recognize Quebec as a nation. However, during that same 40 years, they were able to invoke the War Measures Act. Now, that is serious.

I have a question for you here today. Since we are talking about democracy, are you willing to recognize an elected Senate, with senators elected for eight years?

[English]

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the candour and the tenor of the question of my colleague opposite. I know it is a very sincere question.

I believe that government and all parties of the House should be honest with Canadians. If the Prime Minister and the government do not like the way the Senate is working then they should not come in the side door and attempt to do by stealth when they do not have the guts to go to Canadians and consult with them. If they do not like the Senate they should go to Canadians, open the Constitution and change the formula.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question with regard to trade policy. She noted manufacturing concerns. We have lost 300,000 jobs in five years and one of the reasons has been because of trade policy practices.

Her former leader, the member for LaSalle—Émard, started negotiations on the Korea trade agreement. He gave the file to the member for Vancouver Kingsway who was part of her caucus at one point before he crossed the floor to the Conservatives and continues to work on that actual agreement today. It is of great concern to many Canadians in many different types of manufacturing industries.

I would like to know from the member whether her party still supports a trade deal with South Korea and under what terms and conditions it would support or not support that deal.

New Democrats have been calling for this to cease and desist, especially given the complexities of the auto industry in particular right now. I would like to know specifically what her party is doing to address this and what its policy is on either accepting or rejecting it. If it is going to be accepted, what are the conditions?

• (1600)

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, I think it is a very troubling bilateral pact.

I have written on behalf of my constituents. One in seven jobs in Ontario has to do with the auto or auto related industry. I do not have the knowledge nor the authority at this point in time to definitively outline what our party's position would be on it. However, I have heard from the people in my riding that this is a very troubling agreement. I share the member's concerns on how we go forward to ensure that it is at least fair to Canadian manufacturers.

I believe that the proposed bilateral agreement is very much tipped in favour of Korea.

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member's comments earlier about the issue of the Senate, Senate reform, the Constitution and a referendum, I recall, in the context of Liberal Senator Dan Hays' remarks when he delivered a report in the Senate on the crucial need for Senate reform, that he talked about a long-standing sore point in Canadian national politics. He was quite adamant in insisting that Parliament needed to enact legislation on fixed terms for Senators. Am I to understand that the member opposite disagrees with the hon. long-serving Senator Dan Hays?

The Liberal Senate, of course, did go on to kill our bill in the Senate. However, does the member disagree with Liberal Senator Hays with respect to his view that we need to get right to the job of legislating eight year fixed term limits for senators in the upper House?

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not have a problem with term limits, whether they are 8, 10 or 12 years, but I do believe that it is a debate that Canadians need to have. I personally do not support the idea of an elected Senate but that is the kind of engaged conversation we would need to have with Canadians.

The allocation formula as to how many senators are assigned to each region would be a very interesting discussion to have with the provinces and Canadians right across Canada. I feel passionate that one ought not to do by stealth what one does not have the stomach to do through the front door.

I would be all for comprehensive Senate reform but we need to engage Canadians. I do not believe in working around the edges. Term limits, in and of themselves, are not a particular issue for anyone. It is more the larger issue of representation. Canadians truly need an education as to what the Senate does.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of the great constituency of Mount Royal in response to the throne speech. I want to address the speech, not only in terms of what it says, but the importance of what it does not say, thereby undercutting its own stated priorities. I will address the missing priorities and the diminishing, thereby, the stated priorities on both the international and domestic levels.

First, the throne speech makes eloquent mention of our shared values: democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law and the need for international leadership to protect these values. We agree with that. However, it ignores the most compelling international concerns today and the corresponding assaults on these very fundamental values.

I am referring, for example, to the genocide by attrition in Darfur where 400,000 have already died, where four million are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, where the violence, including the indiscriminate bombing and burning of villages, sexual violence and assaults on humanitarian aid workers continues unabated, and both the Darfur peace process and the comprehensive peace process are in danger of unravelling, threatening, not only the stability of Sudan but its nine neighbouring countries.

*The Address*

I am not saying that the government is unaware of the Darfur tragedy or that the government has done nothing but it has not identified it as a priority. The best evidence of this is that the word Darfur, even the word Africa, is not even mentioned in the throne speech, let alone addressed in terms of the “commitment, focus, and action” of which the throne speech otherwise speaks.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

This is not a partisan problem. To put it simply, while the international community hesitates, the people of Darfur continue to die. I would hope that this government will show the necessary moral, political and diplomatic leadership within the international community to ensure that the required concrete action is taken.

[*English*]

Nor is there any mention in the throne speech of the state sanctioned incitement to genocide whose epicentre is Ahmadinejad's Iran. I say Ahmadinejad's Iran because I am not referring to the Iranian people nor to the many publics in Iran who are themselves the object of a massive domestic repression of human rights.

[*Translation*]

This flagrant omission is particularly disconcerting. As mentioned during the Global Conference on the Prevention of Genocide, held last week at McGill University, the enduring lesson of the Holocaust—and the genocides that took place in the Balkans and in Rwanda—is that genocides happen not only because of the “machinery” of death, but also because of an ideology of hate propagated by the state.

[*English*]

This teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other, is where it all began. As our own courts have affirmed in upholding the constitutionality of our anti-hate legislation, “the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers, it began with words”. These, as the court put it, are the catastrophic effects of racism. These, as the court put it, are the chilling facts of history.

Tragically, Ahmadinejad's Iran, in violation of the prohibition against the direct and public incitement to genocide, in both the genocide conventions and the treaty for an international criminal court, exhibits all the precursors to genocide that have led us down that road in the past.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly—and I repeat, this is not a partisan issue—the Canadian government should be a world leader in combating this culture of impunity, referring the matter to the United Nations and its agencies in order to ensure that the instigators of this genocide, promoted by the state, are held responsible for their actions.

[*English*]

On the domestic level, the omissions are again glaring. For example, the throne speech speaks eloquently of anniversaries we are commemorating, the 60th Anniversary of Canadian Citizenship and anniversaries we are about to commemorate, such as the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City.

However, it makes no mention of the fact that we are commemorating now the 25th Anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Indeed, there is no mention at all in the throne speech of the Charter of Rights even though the charter has had a transformative impact not only on our laws but on our lives.

For we have moved from being a parliamentary democracy to a constitutional democracy; the courts have moved from being arbiters of legal federalism, which they still are, to being the guarantors of our rights, because we, Parliament, vested in them that power; and where individuals and groups now have a panoply of rights and remedies that were unthinkable prior to the charter, which is why the charter has emerged as a respected and indispensable centrepiece, not only of our legal culture but for our human relationships.

Indeed, the only justice priority that the throne speech identifies is violent crime. Now safe streets and safe communities are the shared aspirations of all Canadians and the common objective of all parliamentarians and parties.

The point is that five of the six pieces of proposed legislation in the tackling violent crime act were initiated by the government in which I served as Minister of Justice. We were not only prepared to support that legislation in the last parliamentary session but we were prepared to fast track it into law.

However, the more important point here is that the justice agenda is not only about combating violent crime, whose objective we share, but it should include as a priority the protection of the vulnerable: women, children, aboriginals, minorities and the poor. The test of a just society is how it treats the most vulnerable among us.

There is no mention of women's rights, thereby marginalizing, as principle and policy, the principle that women's rights are human rights and there are no human rights which do not include the rights of women, while marginalizing also the needs of veterans and students.

Moreover, not only is there no mention of women's right and the ignoring of the Charter of Rights as a whole, but the government has dismantled the court challenges program, which was a bulwark in the promotion of both equality rights and minority rights, and while we welcome the government's commitment to the promotion and protection of official languages in Canada, it again undermines its own stated objective by the abolition of the very instrument that promoted and protected minority language rights.

Nor is there any provision for an early learning and child care program of the kind set forth in our government's federal-provincial child care agreements, which were jettisoned by this government, thereby denying needed child care to thousands of children, while repudiating a federal-provincial agreement, thereby undermining the government's own stated commitment to open federalism.

*The Address*

There is only perfunctory mention of poverty and the plight of the poor, but no undertaking of making poverty history on the international level or poverty reduction on the domestic level as a government priority. This, notwithstanding the fact that one million children live in poverty; that 2.8 million families, or one in five, live below the low income cutoff; and that the gap between rich and poor has reached a three decade high, an inequality gap usually associated with underdeveloped nations.

In the matter of aboriginal justice, while we welcome the government's apology to first nations as part of the residential school agreement that our government had negotiated with the Assembly of First Nations and the Conservative government is duly respecting, this is far from making aboriginal justice a priority on the justice agenda as recommended by federal, provincial and territorial justice ministers at the 2005 FPT conference. This includes the other framework agreements that were negotiated, as well as supporting the international declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Further, there is no reference in the throne speech as a matter of principle and policy, let alone a priority, for a comprehensive sustainable civil as well as criminal legal aid program, also identified unanimously as a priority on the justice agenda at the FPT conference in 2005. The lack of such a program also impacts adversely on the most vulnerable of our society: women, children, minorities, aboriginals, the elderly and refugees, thereby further exacerbating their plight.

Indeed, the government's throne speech is diminished by the absence of even reference to these priorities, while its own stated priorities are undercut and undermined by the priorities that are excluded to the detriment of all Canadians.

• (1610)

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would note specifically the comments by the member for Mount Royal regarding the troubling developments in Iran. I share his concern on the impact of the statements being made by the leadership in Iran, the impact that it specifically has on the people in the state of Israel, as well as peace in the Middle East and beyond generally.

I am specifically concerned about the reports of the possible development of nuclear weapons by Iran and I respect the member's point of view in that regard. I would like to hear from him what Canada's role should be to ensure that the proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially in the hands of a country like Iran, can be addressed. I think he would share my concern in that respect as well.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's concern. Indeed, the government of Iran is not only engaged at this point in the processing of enriched uranium and plutonium along the road to develop nuclear weapons, but it has defied UN Security Council resolutions calling upon it to cease and desist from doing so.

The government should take the lead in supporting enhanced sanctions at the Security Council where we can be supportive of those initiatives that are to be taken and work with governments like Russia and China, which have impeded such sanctions and resolutions being adopted.

As well, on the matter of state sanctioned incitement to genocide, we should not only refer the matter to the appropriate agencies of the United Nations, the Security Council and the like, but we should call upon the UN Security Council to refer this to the International Criminal Court for investigation and prospective prosecution, as we did with respect to the Darfuri in that regard, and ensure that all initiatives be taken to combat this culture of impunity with respect to Iran's incitement to genocide, including the Government of Canada initiating a state to state complaint before the International Court of Justice against Iran, which is also a state party to the genocide convention.

We can also call upon the secretary general of the United Nations, under article 99 of the United Nations charter, to refer this matter to the UN Security Council as threatening international peace and security as Iran continues to be a standing threat to the right of states to live in peace and security, free from any threats or acts of force. These are some of the initiatives that I would hope the government might in fact initiate.

• (1615)

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on that question in terms of the proactive leadership role that Canada could play with respect to Iran.

The member mentioned the Ahmadinejad in Iran. I take it he sees in that Iran another Iran, one that has democratic roots, one that out of a recent conference in Paris saw thousands and thousands of Iranians, who no longer live in Iran but are expatriates who live in various parts of the world, including Canada, calling upon the government to renew its interest in those pro democratic organizations that could be very influential with respect to political developments in Iran.

Does the member have any additional information that he could suggest would be part of a strategy that Canada could take major leadership above and beyond those he has already mentioned, which are extremely important, in support of democratic movements that consist of Iranians who are expatriates and are willing to get involved in balancing those dictatorial, authoritarian and fanatic regimes that exist in Iran at this time?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Mr. Speaker, I distinguished Ahmadinejad's Iran, and I would associate with that also former President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khomeini. Both have incited to genocide in their calls for the annihilation of a Jewish state and both, along with Mr. Ahmadinejad, have been engaged in a massive repression of the domestic human rights in Iran, religious communities such as the Baha'i political dissidents. There have been an increased number of executions in the last year alone.

There are a number of initiatives we can take in that regard on the human rights level. As we learned at the Prague conference, which was held and brought together for the first time dissidents from countries all over the world, it said that we had to make human rights a priority in our foreign policy. We have to lend support to dissidents who are themselves the targets of this repression. We have to stand in solidarity with those who are being singled out for differential and discriminatory treatment.

*The Address*

We should therefore combat in all forms the culture of impunity that Iran has been allowed to escape its responsibilities from, both with respect to the domestic as well as international levels.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my distinguished colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

I am happy to rise and speak in this House today, not because there is anything to be happy about in the throne speech, but because I am speaking on behalf of the people in my riding and the most underprivileged people in our society.

When the throne speech was read and the government members made their speeches, poverty was frequently mentioned. In fact, it was only occasionally mentioned, but for the Conservatives, that is what passes for “frequently”, because they do not often talk about it and they certainly do not often do anything about it.

The leader of the official opposition also talked about poverty. We should be able to expect the two main parties to set an example and fight in this House to alleviate poverty. But in many respects they are not setting an example. I would even go so far as to say that this throne speech represents a betrayal of political promises made by this government and the previous government.

I am careful to refer to the two successive governments, because they have done the most damage to the social safety net for the poorest members of our society, in terms of social housing and income support for seniors, especially those who were entitled to the guaranteed income supplement and who have been robbed of over \$3 billion. The throne speech made no mention of this, however.

In the previous session and this one, the Bloc has repeatedly raised this grave injustice to seniors.

It is the same thing with social housing. In the past 15 years, the federal government has slashed funding for social housing. Only since 2001 or 2002 has the government begun reinvesting in this. Still, funding in this area is seriously lacking.

Today, I want to talk specifically about employment insurance, as well as other promises that the Conservative government has not kept.

This week is national unemployment week. It would have been nice if the throne speech had had something for the unemployed.

Last week, we discussed, at third reading, Bill C-269, which is designed to reform the employment insurance fund and improve the employment insurance system.

That would have been a great opportunity for the government and the opposition to take strong action for the unemployed. In addition, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was celebrated last week.

There is no shortage of opportunities not only to express intentions but also to act. Yet, nothing is being done, especially not in the throne speech. We have recently had two byelections in Quebec. In the two ridings I visited, the candidates made commitments in that regard.

I notice in the House one of the candidates who got elected. I take this opportunity to congratulate him on his victory. I would rather be congratulating him today on his government having included in the throne speech measures to address the forestry and manufacturing crises to help those businesses and workers affected by these crises.

I call upon our colleagues, and particularly the one to whom I just referred because I am aware that he made such a commitment. I think that he was sincere. I have no reason to think he was not. Does he now realize that he was in the wrong party to make such a commitment? He sought election to be able to play a role in getting tangible measures introduced to help these businesses and workers. This was a unique opportunity. Yet, there is nothing to that effect in the Speech from the Throne.

● (1620)

I am not saying all this to make them argue for no reason, but to make them realize that they are far from following through on the promises made by their government, including the recent promises made during the byelections. It is unbelievable.

It is very unfortunate that income support is not being given to older workers in the forestry and manufacturing industries. The entire regional economy is affected when the government fails to implement concrete measures to make up for the inadequacies of the employment insurance program, to improve accessibility to employment insurance and to benefits. I know that is what the members opposite talk about when they want to get elected. They say they will resolve the problem if they are elected to power.

I would like to remind the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and his colleagues who are here today of something. I can still hear his recent speeches. When a worker does not receive insurance benefits after contributing his entire life, he suffers and so does his family, the region, Quebec or the provinces involved. When the federal government does not meet its obligations, the provinces and Quebec have to meet the needs of these people by using welfare and other programs.

This is a serious economic crime against workers, their families and the regions. Why is it a crime? Because someone is taking their money. The employment insurance fund consists only of contributions from workers and employers. Out of everyone who contributes to employment insurance, barely 45% can hope to receive such benefits if they have the misfortune of losing their employment. The government itself acknowledges that. Some 15 years ago, 88% of the unemployed had access to EI. This accessibility to employment insurance was cut to 50% for workers who lose their employment. It is scary, but there has not been a riot over this.

The purpose of the fund is to serve as insurance. Imagine an insurance company trying to do the same thing. They insure your house. When you suffer a fire, you go to your insurance company knowing you paid your premiums for house insurance for the past 30 years. The representative asks you where the fire started. Was it in the kitchen or the living room? If you make the mistake of saying it started in the living room, they will tell you that is no good. Your insurance does not apply because the fire should have started in the kitchen.

*The Address*

This is what unemployed Canadians are being told. What region are you in? What is the unemployment rate? Are you a woman or a young person? As we have heard, only approximately 43% of unemployed workers can receive employment insurance. Women represent only 33% and young people, only 17%. Here too, we see the discrimination in their treatment.

I would have liked to discuss some other matters today, but I am sure my colleague will do so with eloquence. What I find very surprising is that the Bloc's amendment included all that. It included concrete measures to support the workers, businesses and regions suffering because of the forestry and manufacturing crises. Our amendment served to eliminate use of the spending power in Quebec and provincial areas of jurisdiction. We were the only ones, however, who voted in favour of that amendment. The Conservatives voted against these measures, although they were the ones who promised it, along with us. The Liberals also voted against the amendment, as did our friends in the NDP, which is beyond me. I no longer understand. I know you know them well, Mr. Speaker, and you probably understand their reasoning, but we do not understand what is happening.

• (1625)

Canadians must realize what is happening in this House. Recently, someone said we have to walk the talk. In this House, several members have made speeches that contradict the positions they have taken. That is unfortunate. As a result, some Canadians are in trouble today because we fail to realize that by not carrying out our responsibilities in this House to correct the situation, we relegate these individuals to poverty.

The issue of poverty will be raised in this House again after the way we have voted recently. There is a lack of consistency there, and we must discuss it.

In closing—given that you are indicating, Mr. Speaker, that I have one minute left—we do not have the right to say in this House that someone lied. However, we can urge our colleagues to tell the truth. That is what I would like to say to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. He announced in this House that, under Bill C-269, the measures proposed by the Bloc Québécois would cost \$11 billion. The minister's own figures indicate it would cost \$1.9 billion, an amount already in the fund.

Therefore, I invite you Mr. Speaker, and your colleagues, to verify the minister's statement because, in my opinion, he is obliged to be honest and to correct the statement he made in this House.

• (1630)

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member opposite for raising the issue of the unemployed, which is an issue that we all care about, including us, government members.

However, there is one thing I would like to know. The member for Chambly—Borduas did say that the Conservative member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean was elected because he spoke about logging companies during the election campaign. Why is it that the Bloc Québécois candidate in that same riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean did not condemn Greenpeace, which scuttled the ship that

was transporting lumber to Europe, since this was jeopardizing the sale of that lumber?

I am putting my question to the member who talks a lot about the unemployed. Is he prepared, personally or as his party's critic on unemployment, to condemn Greenpeace, which is currently campaigning against logging companies, considering that our own member was elected to solve this issue? Is he prepared to condemn his Greenpeace allies? That is my question.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to condemn Greenpeace, but I would invite the hon. member to keep up with the news, because that has already been done. It was done on the very day that this statement was made by our friends opposite.

I want to take the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles back to an issue that he is supposed to be aware of, an issue that affects his riding. Hundreds of workers—primarily women—in the Saint-Émile shoe industry, at Chaussures Régence Inc., were laid off more than two years ago. When he got himself elected, the hon. member made a commitment to solve the issue by restoring POWA, along with us.

Did he do that? He has been in office for almost two years now. He made this commitment to these female workers who, according to the statistics, are among the 33% who qualify for EI benefits. These women are listening today and they keep close tab of what he is saying. They are listening to him.

I am putting the question to him. Of course he cannot take the floor again, but let him go and provide the answer to these people, in his riding. Why did he not help them? He is puffing up his chest when he refers to Roberval, but we are now talking about what happened in his own riding, in Saint-Émile. He is aware of the issue.

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this is my eighth throne speech in ten years, and I must say that, once again, it is meaningless, if not totally useless, where Quebec is concerned. In fact, the more things change, the more they stay the same. This is always a much anticipated speech, but it is always a very disappointing one.

Since the prorogation of the House was announced, there has been a lot of griping from all parts of Quebec, and back home, in Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, people had much to say.

First, I must say that the conditions set by the Bloc Québécois in anticipation of this speech truly reflected what the people have told us throughout the summer, particularly in my riding, where many of my constituents came to me with their concerns about the environment, the federal spending power and Afghanistan.

Allow me to stress the fact that the environment is a central concern for the young and the not so young, who are worried. Young voices can be heard calling us to order where it comes to looking after our planet. I think that is very encouraging. The people in my generation understand, as do those in older generations, and as I just mentioned, the younger generation is very sensitive to the issue. The Conservatives are the only ones in society who do not understand.

I cannot believe that, once again, the Prime Minister is siding with the Americans and adopting the same policy, when there are so many indications that the public is opposed.

*The Address*

I cannot believe that the Prime Minister is siding with the big oil companies instead of the people.

As if repudiating their signature were not enough, the Conservatives are also silent on the issue of a territorial approach. One understands, however, that such an approach would cost Alberta too much and, more importantly, that it would be too profitable for Quebec industries. How cynical.

Once again, Quebec distinguishes itself through its difference, having already gone a reasonably long way to achieving the objectives in terms of the targets set in the Kyoto protocol, yet it is totally ignored by the federal government.

Another thing that makes us realize that the Liberals and the Conservatives are cut from the same cloth is federal spending power. In 1996, Jean Chrétien wrote the same lines on this that we see in last week's speech.

Need I remind this minority government that there is a consensus in Quebec on eliminating federal spending power? Need I remind them that Quebec has been disputing this federal spending power's existence for more than 50 years? Need I remind them that, regardless of their political stripes, every Quebec government, without exception, has expressed their desire to defend the integrity of Quebec's jurisdictions?

We are far from it with the Conservative Speech from the Throne. In that speech, Quebeckers now have concrete proof that open federalism is a sham.

What bothers me the most about this Speech from the Throne is that, without asking the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister clearly announced his intention to pursue the current mission in Afghanistan until 2011, without first doing what he said he would on June 20; here are his own words:

Mr. Speaker, the government has made it clear that the mission will end in February 2009. A new mission after that date would have to be approved by this Parliament.

The purpose of the mission in Afghanistan was above all to be a mission of reconstruction, a mission in which Canada promised to resolve problems, not create new ones.

For some time now, this mission has taken a rather worrisome turn. More and more military resources are being sent to Kandahar and more and more soldiers are dying on Afghan soil.

In addition to all that, the NGOs on the ground are complaining about the bad management of money being sent by the Canadian government for humanitarian aid. If the objectives of this mission are to improve the quality of life of Afghans, the message we are hearing from the NGOs is quite simple: we have failed.

The Conservative government is clearly aiming to be as much like the Bush administration in the United States as possible. The reputation of our neighbours to the south is constantly criticized by the international community.

It is certainly not by copying our neighbour's warlike policies that we are going to improve the quality of life of Afghans. Take Iraq for example: there is nothing to be proud of there.

Now let us talk about the new Minister of International Cooperation, a new minister in the new Conservative government who is not doing anything really new. In the past, flags were being handed out; now it is cookies.

•(1635)

This minister has nothing new to offer. She has not done a better job than her predecessor, nor has she done a better job than the previous government.

Let us not forget that before taking on her current role, the Minister of International Cooperation was the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women. She did not take it seriously. In fact, the minister lost that role because the whole production was turning into a tasteless vaudeville show. The entire artistic community was disgusted with the minister's lack of leadership. Moreover, with this minister at the helm, women also lost ground.

In response to what was, at best, a poor performance and at worst, a complete failure, the Prime Minister put her in charge of International Cooperation during the last cabinet shuffle. That goes to show how unimportant he thinks this critical portfolio is.

People are expecting a lot from the minister, but they do not have a lot of faith in her. We are very concerned about the announcements in last week's Speech from the Throne. We are also very concerned about the kind of announcements the minister has been making. I should point out that this government's *modus operandi* has been to announce new programs without announcing new funding.

The total budget for international development assistance has been set, and there has been no new money since. The Conservatives' tactics are appalling.

For years now, we have been urging the government to support the millennium goals and dedicate 0.7% of GDP to international aid as recommended by the UN special committee. Unfortunately, we are still a long way from that goal. We expect more from the government. In light of the surpluses they have announced, what is stopping them?

It is practically impossible to get any answers to our questions. It is also very difficult to get information from the minister about what is happening with the money sent to Afghanistan.

The NGOs on the ground voiced their displeasure, but the government did not respond. It did not even comment, which is not very reassuring.

Too many letdowns give us no choice but to vote against this Speech from the Throne, which contains nothing new or tangible for Quebeckers.

•(1640)

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak in the debate on the Speech from the Throne. The theme is: strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions.

*The Address*

This government is committed to pursuing a federalism of openness that recognizes the strength and the contribution of each region of our great country. We committed to respect matters of exclusive provincial jurisdiction and to ensure accountability by clarifying roles and responsibilities. We have taken historic action by restoring fiscal balance in Canada and by putting this country's fiscal arrangements back on a predictable, long term, principled track. In fact, by restoring fiscal balance, federal support for provinces and territories was brought to unprecedented levels to support quality services for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

In the Speech from the Throne, we took additional measures to advance our vision of open federalism.

We promised to introduce a bill to impose limits on use of the federal spending power for new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, while allowing the provinces to opt out with reasonable compensation if they offer compatible programs.

[*English*]

Our approach is anchored in a desire to make Canada an even stronger federation by recognizing the strength and contribution of each region of this country, and under the Prime Minister and this government, the federation is stronger and more united than ever. A strong federation and a vibrant democracy are the foundations of our united and great country. Indeed, these two elements—federalism and democracy—are inextricably linked in the history of Canada.

Looking back at Canada's history, it becomes apparent that a federal system like democracy was a wise and prudent choice by our Fathers of Confederation, a wise formula best suited to the changing needs and the aspirations of such a diverse people stretched out across this vast land.

[*Translation*]

Indeed, history has shown that Canada is a country defined by its economic, social, geographic and cultural diversity.

[*English*]

In this context, our practice of federalism allows Canada to strike a balance, pursuing national goals while taking into consideration various local and regional factors, all the while continuously remaining flexible and adapting to change.

In fact, the Canadian federation's flexibility lends itself well to finding solutions to public policy questions and helps it rise to the challenges that we face to meet the demands of this diverse and ever-changing citizenry. It grants security for local interests while lending scope for carrying out the will of the nation as a whole in matters of national importance.

Our federation is a world success story. We are a model to others for effective governance, respect and recognition of diversity and pragmatic consensus.

As a federation, we will always have some regional stresses and strains, yet our great strength has been in how we address them, overcome them and build a stronger and a better Canada.

We have clearly been a success in Quebec with our recognition of the fiscal balance and our settlement of the fiscal balance.

May I say on this note that I look forward to sharing my time with my hon. new colleague from Quebec who will be speaking on this issue, in particular, from a Quebec perspective.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

When our government first came into power, it was clear that Canadian federalism was not working as well as it should have been.

[*English*]

It was becoming stagnant and unresponsive to the changing needs of the provinces and territories and the changing needs of Canadians.

What we saw before our government came to power was an unprincipled, what I like to call chequebook federalism, an unfettered use of the federal spending power to the detriment of the federation and to Canadians. Unplanned federal surpluses were used to spend massive amounts in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, often in the absence of consultation with the provinces and territories. This spending weakened the bonds of our federation. It resulted in strains between the federal government and the provinces and territories where expenditures were undertaken without adequate consultation or consensus on priorities and created resentment among the provinces.

This use of federal spending power in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction created new cost pressures on provincial and territorial governments, forcing them to adversely distort their taxing and spending priorities, particularly where initiatives required matching funds. Provinces were then faced with the dilemma of going into debt to help fund the new programs while still having to respond to their local demands of concerns of their citizens, and if they opted out from the program they subjected their citizens to taxation without benefit.

This spending in areas of primarily provincial jurisdiction increased uncertainty, where initiatives were introduced without long term or stable federal funding, leaving provinces facing greater budgetary challenges when the cost of the programs were fully downloaded as the federal government sought to slash spending.

[*Translation*]

Twenty one months ago, Canadians voted to change the government of Canada, because they wanted to change the direction of this country.

*The Address**[English]*

One thing that they wanted to see was a federalism of openness that allowed the provinces to provide the programs and services that their citizens required. The idea behind open federalism dates to well before 2006. It was born out of the idea that the federation is not static but an evolving institution that should respond to the changes and the impacts of a modern world. It was built on the idea of a strong national government working in cooperation with strong provincial and territorial governments, as envisioned in our Constitution and grounded in the British North American Act.

I am very proud of this type of federalism. It is also very different from the counterproductive and centralist federalism that had too often characterized the Liberal government's approach to federal-provincial relationships before we became government.

I am sure that we all hope, with the passage of this throne speech and our government's subsequent legislation, that this era will be well and truly behind us.

Canadians want their governments to agree and to cooperate. They do not want our federation's development to be marked by discord and confrontation.

The right hon. Prime Minister wants Canada's future to be one of vibrant optimism and renewed confidence in ourselves. The throne speech maps out that future in a way that inspires and rallies Canadians because the direction that we want to take our country reflects the priorities of Canadians, their hopes and their expectations.

*[Translation]*

The future we envision for Canadians will be made possible thanks to an open federalism that all Canadians can identify with and look upon with confidence, no matter where they live.

*[English]*

Open federalism means recognizing the maturation and evolution of the provinces and territories within the federation and respecting the clear and important role that they are playing in meeting their citizens' needs.

It means respecting areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction and limiting the use of the federal spending power. My colleague from Roberval—Lac-Saint Jean will be speaking to the House shortly and he will explain how important this is, particularly for Quebec.

By providing this kind of equitable and predictable funding for shared priorities and attempting to clarify roles and responsibilities in the federation, this government is offering a solid principle based approach on which provincial governments can continue to work.

Restoring the fiscal balance to the federation and proposing limits on the use of federal spending power gives the provinces the financial flexibility and ability to respond to the needs and demands of their citizens and ensure that there are adequate programs to do just that. It gives the provinces the resources and the ability to better meet their citizens' needs by providing better schools, better roads and better health care for Canadians.

As the Canadian federation evolves, we will continue to focus on measures to strengthen national unity. In the spirit of open federalism, this government has concentrated on its national role by reinvesting in core responsibilities such as trade, defence, public safety and security. We will continue to play a leadership role to promote national interests in cooperation and collaboration with the provinces and territories.

We will also continue to insert the importance of maintaining an open, honest and respectful relationship with the provinces and territories.

We also assert that true collaboration can only occur when resources and accountability are matched with clear roles and responsibilities. Our government believes that the jurisdiction of each order of government should be respected so that all Canadians can see their needs and desires moved to fruition.

That is why our government will introduce federal legislation to place formal limits on the use of federal spending power for new cost shared programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. This legislation will also allow provinces and territories to opt out with reasonable compensation if they offer compatible services.

By forging ahead with our vision of open federalism, we remain focused on building Canada's future prosperity by expanding the many advantages we already possess as a nation.

● (1650)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Before we proceed to questions and comments, I would like to remind the House and all members who might be listening to try and get in who you are sharing your time with if you are sharing your time at the beginning of your speech. There have been a number of occasions today when we had to go to some trouble to get people to mention who they were sharing their time with. In fact, there was one person, who shall go unnamed, who never did mention who they were sharing their time with. I just operated as if they had but I do not like to do that very often. If people would make a point of that, that would be great.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Etobicoke North.

**Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's remarks about the throne speech took me back to the last budget by the finance minister when he stood in this place and talked about how all the acrimony between the provinces and the federal government was a thing of the past and that it was all systems straight ahead. The very next day the premiers of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan said that there were significant problems, especially with respect to the offshore accords and revenue sharing, et cetera.

The minister said in her speech that all provinces were united with this great harmonious system with the federal government and yet the premiers of Newfoundland and Saskatchewan are still very angry. I wonder if the minister is actually connected and speaking with the provinces to learn their views because it sounds like she is not listening.



*The Address*

With respect to federal spending power, the former Conservative prime minister, Brian Mulroney, was accused of being the head waiter for the provinces. Is this another step in that direction?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose:** Mr. Speaker, when I speak with the premiers, finance ministers and other intergovernmental affairs ministers across the country, what they are happy about and what they do reflect on concerning the previous Conservative governments under Brian Mulroney, is that it is nice to have a federal government back in power that respects and collaborates with the provinces. I am proud that the member recognizes that our government has the kind of relationship with the provinces that Mr. Mulroney had.

Let me give some of the provincial responses to the Speech from the Throne. Nova Scotia premier, Rodney MacDonald, welcomed the news that Ottawa is going to—

● (1655)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would love for the minister to be able to do that but there were so many people rising to ask her questions that I think she has addressed the question from the member for Etobicoke North.

We will go to the member for Burnaby—Douglas and we will try to get one more in if we can.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kotheri, released his preliminary findings after a cross country tour of Canada. He had some very strong messages for Canada and the Canadian government. He said that he “was very disturbed by the housing situation in Canada”. I also want to quote him saying that he “hopes to see a radical shift in government policy when it comes to housing issues”. He also denounced the decision in the 1990s by the previous Liberal government to summarily abandon what he called a very progressive housing policy.

The throne speech does mention housing but only in the most general terms. It mentions homelessness only in the most general terms. Mr. Kotheri has travelled across Canada and heard from people who are homeless. He has spoken with aboriginal communities where the housing situation is most inadequate. He has spoken to women who are one of the groups most affected by the housing situation here in Canada. He has said that Canada can do better, that there is a surplus and that there are trust funds established with NDP money from the last Liberal budget, I might add, to do something about housing.

I would like to ask the minister why we still do not have a tangible federal housing program in Canada.

**Hon. Rona Ambrose:** Mr. Speaker, I must comment on the level of hypocrisy from that member. That is a member who talks about social progress when it is this party that wants to extend full rights to aboriginal women. It is this party that is supporting the mission in Afghanistan so that women can vote and little girls can go to school. The only people in the way of that is the member's party and the party across the floor. So this party will take no lessons from him on social progress.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with quite a bit of attention about open federalism and I also want to make a comment about these

solid relationships that are taking place now with the provinces. Recently, as the minister pointed out, the Conservatives signed a deal with Nova Scotia, or at least a clarification of a deal, but yet we do not see anything in writing at this point.

My question is quite specific because I know numerous other members want to question as well. As intergovernmental affairs minister, when she was going through the process of doing this with Nova Scotia, assuming she had something to do with it, what steps were taken to contact the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to allow it the opportunity to add its voice to the agreement that was supposedly to be signed with Nova Scotia? In other words, if this is going to affect only one province, therein lies breaking one of the basic tenets the Conservatives support, which is to say that it is a one-off deal.

Not only that, but the Conservatives also resurrected a former one-off deal in the royalty regimes with Nova Scotia. Why resurrect a one-off deal from the early 1980s and why would they not include Newfoundland and Labrador in this discussion about offshore resources?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose:** Mr. Speaker, the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador does not seem to have a problem having his voice heard. What I will say is that the offer to Premier Williams has always been on the table, the same offer that has been there since the budget was tabled. We have constructive relationships from the bureaucratic level with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to offer the same deal offered to Nova Scotia and to the provinces in Atlantic Canada to Premier Williams at any time should he like to have a cooperative relationship with the federal government.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to give my maiden speech in the House of Commons. Naturally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who made it possible for me to be here: my family, friends, colleagues, organizers and, most of all, the citizens of the riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean who placed their trust in me.

I am pleased to take part today in this debate on the throne speech. Our speech lays out for Canadians the intentions of our government with regard to the future of the country and the legislative agenda that will make them reality. Our Conservative government kept its promises with respect to the five priorities established in the 2006 election campaign, and I feel very proud of it and of the man who perfectly embodies the leadership sought by Canadians, our Prime Minister. I feel this same sense of pride in reading the Speech from the Throne, which mirrors the expectations of Canadians who voted for change in 2006.

*The Address*

I have chosen to focus on one aspect of the speech that was a promise in the 2005-2006 election campaign, and that our government has reiterated, restricting the federal spending power. This issue represents a challenge to be faced in order to strengthen our federation, one of the five themes of the throne speech. Our government will introduce a bill to impose specific restrictions on the federal spending power in new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. This legislation will allow provinces and territories to opt out with reasonable compensation if they offer compatible programs.

It is important to observe and recognize the advantages of the federal spending power, which has played a role as a factor of social development over the course of our history. It led to the creation, in cooperation with provincial and territorial provinces, of national social programs such as medicare. It also played a leading role in promoting equal opportunity for all Canadians. Finally, it helped guarantee that all citizens would have access to basic social services and programs of comparable quality no matter where they live.

By acting to limit federal spending power, our Conservative government has done something that illustrates the benefits of the type of federalism we practise, open federalism, as opposed to the centralist vision of power embraced by the previous government, which preferred conflict to solutions. Open federalism respects the provincial and territorial jurisdictions while taking Canadians' aspirations into account.

I am proud of the open federalism practised by our government, because it avoids the old dynamic of conflict that characterized the former Liberal government of the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, the Leader of the Opposition. Canadians have had enough of scandals and bickering. They are fed up with the quarrels between centralists and separatists. That is why they chose our Conservative government, to bring real change to Ottawa.

Canadians want governments that get along and work together. Our Prime Minister wants the future to be marked by optimism, trust and respect. The throne speech given on October 16 paints a promising and inspiring picture of that future for Canadians. The direction in which our government wants to take Canada reflects families' priorities and hopes and what they expect of us.

What we want for Canada is in direct contrast to the vision of isolation and perpetual conflict that the official opposition embraced when it was on this side of the House. Our open federalism is a federalism that all Canadians can identify with, no matter where they live. They can all share this vision of the future.

This has long been an important issue in the evolution of the Canadian federation. Until the 1960s, most provinces, aside from Quebec, accepted this federal influence. After a new government was elected in 1960, Quebec's objections grew even stronger. In the years that followed, other provinces began to object to the federal government's presence by way of its spending power. In subsequent decades, there was a great deal of public debate over the political and legal ramifications of federal spending power.

Our government has already demonstrated that it advocates openness and fairness toward the provinces, especially when it comes to the fiscal balance. Our government can boast that it was the

first to recognize the need to restore the fiscal balance in Canada. The federal Liberals always denied that there was a fiscal imbalance, and the Bloc was powerless to correct it. We have taken real steps to do so, thanks to the Prime Minister's leadership.

• (1700)

Let us not forget that our government is the one which, in budget 2007, introduced historic measures to restore fiscal balance in Canada by investing \$39 billion over the next seven years; by ensuring that our financial relationship with the provinces and territories are based on principles; and by increasing equalization payments and transfers to the provinces.

Naturally, general agreement for this approach of openness to foster Canadian unity cannot be found in this House. One of the five conditions for the Bloc leader's support for the Speech from the Throne is the elimination of the federal spending power, and what elimination means to us is separation.

There is one aspect of the current political debate which some members of this place tend to overlook, and that is the fact that this government delivers on its commitments to its provincial partners, and this is true for Quebec as for any other province.

Our government promised Quebecers that Quebec would be invited to participate fully and formally in UNESCO so as to reflect Quebec's tremendous contribution to our collective heritage. Our government has delivered.

Our government is the only one in Canadian history to have recognized the Quebec nation. The Liberals form the party of centralization, and the Bloc members, the party of separation, while the Conservatives form the party of the nation.

Our government has already done a lot to reconcile the legitimate aspirations of Quebec with our objective of strengthening the Canadian federation. These two realities are not incompatible. In fact, they are mutually beneficial. We have upheld our commitments to Quebecers, since we are truly defending their interests and will continue to do so. Honouring these commitments is a good example of a principle at the heart of our approach to governing. Once again, we will do what we promised.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the objective of a Speech from the Throne is to establish the overall objectives for the government in a new session of Parliament. It is neither the time nor the forum for introducing a bill or discussing, in minute detail, each bill that will soon be debated. At this stage, I will simply say that our policy on the spending power will reflect our desire to strengthen our federation and increase its effectiveness, and to respect our partners, while still respecting their fields of jurisdiction.

*The Address*

Quebeckers, like all other Canadians, want to see their governments work together to encourage progress and prosperity in the community. With this in mind, our government is pursuing the mission Canadians entrusted us with in January 2006. Our government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister will not deviate from this course.

• (1705)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first, I want to welcome the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean to this House. I know what it is like to deliver one's maiden speech. I too did it in the context of a throne speech.

I would like to put a few questions to the hon. member. First, as regards the fiscal imbalance, when do we know, in his opinion, that the issue is settled? Is it when the Quebec government agrees, or is it when a vast majority of Quebeckers agree? If so, what happens if there is a change of government and the new government feels that the issue is not solved? That is my first question.

Second, does the member not believe that municipal infrastructure programs are a form of interference in a provincial jurisdiction? If so, why does his government persist in following the path of the previous Liberal governments on this issue?

Third, does the hon. member support the clarity legislation? If not, does this mean he and the Prime Minister are in disagreement?

**Mr. Denis Lebel:** Mr. Speaker, we recognized the existence of the fiscal imbalance and we continue to work to ensure that the Canadian federation works effectively, unlike some who had always refused to acknowledge the existence of that imbalance. This is very important for us.

As regards infrastructures, I will not say what should be put forward in the negotiations to limit the federal spending power. In a previous life, I had the pleasure and the honour of serving as a full time mayor and of dealing with municipal infrastructures for seven years, in Quebec. I was a member of the Infrastructures-Québec committee. Clearly, there will always be needs, but the important thing is to continue talks with our provincial partners to make life easier for everyone in Canada. That is what our government is committed to doing, and that is what we will continue to do.

• (1710)

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my hon. colleague from Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean. In terms of geographical areas, we are not too far from one another, but otherwise, I feel we are oceans apart. Indeed, Lac Saint-Jean separates us and, I must say, it is an enormous lake.

There is something about the throne speech that I would really like to understand. He managed to get himself elected. It is a fine document, which I read and re-read, just as he did, I imagine. However, the word "forestry" appears only once in the Speech from the Throne.

The hon. member was elected based on this file. I know this because, since we are neighbours, somewhat distant, but in neighbouring ridings nonetheless, I followed his election campaign. There is nothing in the throne speech that indicates how the Conservative government intends to address the crisis in the forestry industry.

My question is very specific. Will he resign his seat? If we give him five or six months to implement a real plan to save forestry in Quebec, is he prepared to put his seat on the line on this matter?

**Mr. Denis Lebel:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has been in the House of Commons for 6,000 days and has asked 4,000 questions.

It has introduced 288 bills and promised one in my riding's election campaign. It has had two bills passed concerning name changes for ridings. I was forced to talk about the forestry sector throughout the campaign, which is natural given the region I am from. This is yet another of the many bills that would never have been passed.

The Bloc will never have a bill passed because it is stuck in the opposition. I am proud to be a member of the Conservative Party. We have announced that we will fix the forestry problems. We will work to help forestry workers in Quebec as in the other provinces. That is what we will do.

[*English*]

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all my colleagues in the House, and I know certainly the colleagues on this side of the House, we are delighted to welcome the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean. We have a couple of things in common. I was a pitcher and he was a catcher, and it is great to work together on the same team.

I am particularly interested as well that we have both shared a number of experiences on municipal council. How does he believe rebalancing the federation in the way the Conservative government is going to will be of benefit?

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean should know that his colleague used up the allotted time. However, I will give him a few seconds to answer the question.

**Mr. Denis Lebel:** Mr. Speaker, I will simply say that politics is for people to allow us to represent them. Let us continue to be close to the public, to those who allow us to represent them. The experience that the hon. member and myself share at the municipal level, along with many others in this place, provides us with a good understanding of people's needs, and also allows us to be close to them. This is how we will continue to move forward, for the good of those people who allow us to be here.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On Friday, October 19, during question period, the member for Mississauga South said that I was "caught collecting information from passport applications to send out birthday cards".

I wish to inform the House that this allegation was investigated by the conflict of interest Ethics Commissioner and his subsequent report found no wrongdoing on my part.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** I am not sure there is a point of order there, but I am sure that the House will appreciate the information that the hon. member has given us.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Egmont.

*The Address*

**Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the House that I am splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Centre.

I am very pleased this afternoon to have this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the beautiful riding of Egmont.

At the opening of the new session, I would like to take a moment to thank my constituents and my family for their support over the last 19 years and over the span of six elections. I appreciate their support. During my tenure, I am proud to have represented them and their interests in the federal arena.

I listened with interest to the speech as the Governor General outlined the five priorities on which the government plans to focus during this session. I would like to make remarks on two of those themes.

I am proud of my work with the Standing Committee on National Defence and of my responsibility as an advocate for Atlantic Canadian issues. As a result, I will address two issues that are of great importance to me and to Atlantic Canada: Canada's sovereignty and place in the world and the government's plan to strengthen the Canadian federation.

First I would like to comment on Canada's sovereignty and place in the world. Canada has a long and proud history of leadership in the international community. From Lester B. Pearson's creation of the first international peacekeeping force during the Suez crisis to Canada's condemnation of apartheid in South Africa, we have always been a strong advocate for diplomacy, peacekeeping and the protection of human rights.

We are a committed member of international organizations such as the United Nations, the G-8, the OAS, NATO, the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Through these organizations, we have developed our domestic values of democracy, good governance and respect for diversity.

Canada encourages diplomacy and multiculturalism and has often worked hard with other countries to forge important international agreements, yet we have never been afraid to act when it was necessary to protect what we believe in. After the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, we joined in the fight against terrorism by becoming a part of the military mission in Afghanistan. Today, we continue to be a key part of the UN sanctioned NATO force there.

Our combat mission is scheduled to end in February 2009, which was a decision made by Parliament. As we draw closer to the deadline, it is crucial that parliamentarians have an open, informed debate on the future of the mission. It is our responsibility to represent the opinions of our constituents concerning our continuing involvement in the war. This is not a political question. It is a question of what Canadians want.

We have been doing good work in Afghanistan. I would like to congratulate our troops, who have been outstanding. They have sacrificed time with their families, the comforts of home and, in some respects, their lives to fight for Canada.

Our appreciation and admiration for the men and women of the Canadian Forces is limitless. The House of Commons standing committee visited Kandahar province. We met with the soldiers first-hand and saw first-hand the pride they had in serving their country in that benighted country.

Their efforts have included improving the security situation in Afghanistan, decommissioning weapons, clearing landmines, reconstructing roads, schools and other infrastructure and providing development aid, and training the Afghan police force and the Afghan army. No one can deny the importance of these efforts.

However, it is time to evaluate the success of the mission up to this point, our goals in Afghanistan and our strategy for the future. It is important that parliamentarians and Canadians are informed about the mission's progress and the plan going forward so that we can make the right decision.

Information from the government and from the military on what is going on in Afghanistan on a going forward basis is something that the standing committee has always had difficulty getting. The creation of an independent, non-partisan panel to investigate our options for the continuation of the mission is a step in the right direction.

I look forward to hearing the recommendations in January 2008. However, in the end, it is members of Parliament who will make the final decision. In order for MPs to have all the tools necessary to make the right decision, I ask the government to consider creating a special parliamentary committee to review the mission, in addition to the independent panel. Six hours of debate in the House will not be sufficient. This matter deserves careful attention and examination.

• (1715)

Some of the questions that come to mind regarding the mission in Afghanistan are as follows.

What are the indicators of success? What are Canada's and NATO's specific operational goals and are they being achieved? It is simply not enough to say, with no proof, that we are making progress. Parliamentarians need to be able to assess how close we are to reaching our goals.

Is Canada taking on more of the military burden than other NATO nations? Canada has been involved in heavy fighting in Kandahar province while other NATO nations refuse to allow their troops to operate in the region of Kandahar and Helmand provinces. It is ultimately up to every country to decide what degree of involvement it should shoulder in any conflict; however, we have to ask ourselves why other nations have not been fully committed to this war.

At the fall meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Association held in Iceland just recently, Canada tried to get a commitment from parliamentarians in the 26 NATO nations, particularly those from Germany, France, Italy and other European countries, to share the burden with Canada on the front lines. Our success, I must say, probably was not resounding, as we did not get a firm commitment from the parliamentarians from these countries to pick up their share of the burden.

*The Address*

Canada's efforts in Afghanistan should be a combination of the three Ds: defence, diplomacy and development. Have development and diplomacy been given enough attention? That is the question. Total defence spending for the combat mission is estimated to reach \$4.3 billion by February 2009. The total financial commitment for development is \$1 billion over 10 years. Will concentrating more of our efforts on diplomacy and development help us reach our goals more quickly and be more in keeping with our reputation as a force for cooperative change?

If the mission were to continue beyond 2009, what roles and responsibilities would we take on? The panel has been presented with four scenarios: continue training the Afghan army and police so Canada can begin withdrawing its forces; focus on reconstruction and have forces from another country take over security in Kandahar province; shift Canadian security and reconstruction efforts to another region in Afghanistan; or withdraw all Canadian military except a minimal force to protect aid workers and diplomats.

However, as noted by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, in his response last Wednesday, the government seems to have already chosen the first option. If the panel proposes a different route, will the government listen?

In the Speech from the Throne, the government refers to the first option by stating that "Canada should...accelerate the training of the Afghan army and police so that the Afghan government can defend its own sovereignty", which is a noble objective.

Currently, Operation Archer, the Canadian contribution to the retraining of the Afghan National Army and Afghan police, is comprised of only 30 Canadian Forces members, compared to the 2,500 troops deployed in Kandahar. It is a massive difference in commitment: 2,500 to 30. What is the government's plan to increase the number of Canadian Forces members participating in the retraining of the Afghan army and police?

These are questions we have a right to debate as parliamentarians. I urge the government to give us a forum in which to do that and to provide us with full and complete information about the mission so that we can make the right decision when the issue comes back to the House for a vote.

My last comments are about strengthening the federation. Since I am running out of time, I will save my comments on that initiative for a later date.

• (1720)

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me say for the hon. member for Egmont regarding his notification that he will not be running next time that I express certainly on behalf of most of the colleagues in the House the belief that he has had a most honourable stay here. His values, principles and beliefs are well respected throughout the House. Though I and others may occasionally differ with him on an ideological point, I do not think anybody could second-guess his commitment and passion for Canada. I thank him. We thank him.

I was at the NATO conference in Iceland, which the member mentioned, and it honestly was quite rewarding to hear the accolades that Canada was given from all of the participants. As a matter of

fact, Canada was singled out by Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer for our efforts and in acknowledgement of the difficult and trying times Canada is going through.

I might also add, however, that the hon. member mentioned in his comments that he felt final deliberations should come back to the House for input and evaluation as far as the continuity of our mission is concerned. I believe the Prime Minister is on record as saying that this is exactly what will happen. Does the member recall the Prime Minister speaking in the House and making that commitment?

**Hon. Joe McGuire:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Prince Edward—Hastings for his very generous comments. As he said, we worked together on the NATO association meetings in Iceland. That was the first time that we were together on such a mission.

I certainly am impressed with the whole committee and the way it operated on behalf of Canada in putting forth our views and in supporting our troops. As the member said, we received accolades from countries all over the world about the commitment we have made there and the necessity of a country such as Canada taking a lead role in a very tough area.

However, we have to ask when enough is enough. How long are we going to put our troops on the front lines? Is it two more years during which we can reasonably expect our troops to be on the front lines or is it the next 10 years? It is going to take a long time before Afghanistan becomes a country that can function on its own with its own police force and its own army.

There will have to be a long term commitment to Afghanistan made by NATO and by Canada as a member of NATO, but I think the burden of the front line should be shared with other countries that seem to have forgotten the lessons of the first and second world wars, particularly in Europe.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, which raises the following question.

He said that in past years, his party has always been concerned about human rights. I would like to review a little history to remind him about something because I was not in the House at the time.

In 1981, your party repatriated the Constitution without Quebec's approval. What happened to human rights? A few years later, your party torpedoed the Meech Lake accord. What happened to human rights then? Recently, your party refused to recognize my nation. What happened to human rights then?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles should know that he must address the member in the third person, not the second. We have just 50 seconds left, so I will give the member for Egmont time to respond. If the member wants to finish his question, he must do so quickly and in the third person.

*The Address*

**Mr. Daniel Petit:** Mr. Speaker, I have just one question for the member. In light of the fact that one of the most important human rights is to have elected representatives, I would like to know how we can expect his demands for democracy to play out when we try to bring in Senate reform. Is he ready to support the government in its effort to bring in a reformed, elected Senate?

[English]

**Hon. Joe McGuire:** As we know, Mr. Speaker, the present Senate does a lot of great work and should be commended for its work, but things can be improved.

As for the way the government is going about improving the Senate, it seems that the government refuses to sit down and talk with the provinces about reforming the Senate. The Senate was designed as a voice for the regions. The government has yet to call a meeting of any region to discuss what changes the regions may desire in Senate reform.

If the province of Quebec is that keen on Senate—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I stand to speak on the Speech from the Throne, but I am having a hard time because there is so much smoke and mirrors in the speech. It is distorted to the extent that it is difficult to tell what is real and what is fantasy.

Here are some examples from the Speech from the Throne: “Canadians now have more money in their pockets because taxes have been cut”. Which Canadians? Certainly not the low income Canadians who have had their taxes increased by 5% by the government.

The speech also states: “Families now have real choice in child care”. That is \$100 a month, \$60 after taxes, this does nothing for early childhood development.

Another statement in the speech states: “a government committed to helping them get the medical care they need more quickly”. The Fraser Institute has just told us that in fact wait times have gone up. There is nothing in the speech to deal with health human resources which everyone knows is what will help to break wait times and there is nothing dealing with some of the management issues that we need to put in place to bring wait times down.

Another part of the throne speech states: “Our Government will stand up for Canada’s traditional industries. Key sectors including forestry”. I think we will recall that the government has done nothing to deal with the fires that occurred in the Okanagan, or to prevent them. It has done absolutely nothing for the pine beetle that is devastating British Columbia forests. It sold us out on softwood lumber, cheating our softwood lumber industries of \$1 billion and now we are back speaking to the United States again about the same old thing. What fantasy world is the government living in is the question I want to ask?

What is interesting about the Speech from the Throne is what is not in it than for what is in it. The government speaks of concern for children but nowhere in the speech is there anything about sport or physical activity, yet one in four children in Canada are obese or

overweight, 26% of them; 41% of children off reserve are obese or overweight and 55% of children on reserve are obese. Provincial and federal governments agree that we need to have a sport infrastructure to create daily physical quality activity for these children.

Our Liberal government put this in place. The Conservative government came into power and it disappeared. All the provinces are wondering where the sport infrastructure money is. It is not there. Two years later we still cannot hear about it. So much for caring about children.

As a physician I can tell the House that being overweight and obesity creates heart disease and will create type 2 diabetes, and our children will not live as long as their parents.

We have heard again in the Speech from the Throne about homelessness and housing. The government cancelled the Liberal \$1.4 billion homelessness program. It cancelled the deal with the cities with which we were partnering to deal with housing and homelessness. The government obviously never spoke about housing before except in one word in the Speech from the Throne with absolutely no follow through on the sentence. It was just plunked into the middle of the sentence.

We know that in my city of Vancouver middle class people cannot afford to own their own homes. They cannot afford to rent affordable housing for their children. This is what is going on and we know that the government has absolutely nothing to say about it except words.

On arts and culture, why does it not surprise me that there is nothing about arts and culture in the Speech from the Throne? This is a government that voted against the UNESCO convention on the protection and promotion of cultural diversity, a convention that was written by and large by Canada over the past 10 years. The Conservative government voted against it.

We know that arts and culture is essential, not only for a sense of Canadian identity but for social cohesion in this very diverse geographic and demographic country. As well, in a post-industrial era if we wanted to really look at how Canada could be productive and competitive, we need to be able to stimulate creativity, imagination and innovation. That is what arts and culture is about. It is an essential part of an economic development plan.

While the Speech from the Throne is filled with all these wonderful buzz words, with all this fantasy and ideology, indeed I wonder if an ad agency wrote it because it is Pablum for the people.

• (1730)

There is such a lack of vision in the Speech from the Throne. It is so bland, so banal and lacking in substance that one has to wonder what there is to vote against. There is nothing there. It is a nothing speech.

Perhaps the only red flag in the speech that causes me some concern is the rehash of that old Brian Mulroney ideology about limiting federal spending and allowing provinces to opt out of shared programs. These programs are the glue that hold the country together.

*The Address*

Medicare will be gone if we allow provincial governments to opt out of shared programs. The federal government should be standing up for accessibility and portability for all Canadians, so that they can have access to social programs and medicare no matter where they live in the country, no matter what their language or who they are. That is not going to happen.

Mutual respect, which is a word used in the Speech from the Throne for this devolution of powers, actually in our language as Liberals means partnerships.

We spent a great deal of time as a government developing the social union framework agreement that allowed us to build partnerships with provinces and municipalities working together to create something that binds us as a country. This is gone. We see that the partnerships are gone. Obviously, it worked because we were able to develop shared programs on child care, the Kelowna accord, and we were able to develop a deal for cities in the country.

However, since the current government came into power, aided and abetted I might add by the NDP, it has actually had one agenda and that is to dismantle social programs, to dismiss the most vulnerable in our society, and to disregard agreements that have been written together by governments in the country.

Indeed, we are coming close to the Prime Minister's dream of firewalls around the provinces. But Liberals will continue to do what we do best: we will continue to respect Parliament. We will continue to ensure that Parliament works and that parliamentary democracy is honoured. We will be watching closely as the Speech from the Throne unfolds. We will stand on guard for a united, compassionate and strong Canada. That, Mr. Speaker, I promise you.

● (1735)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the hon. member's speech, especially given her experience in the House, but also because as a physician I believe she has some insight into one of the areas of greatest concern to Canadians, one area where there has been significant federal spending, namely health care.

From what I have been reading there are many who are saying that if we want to tackle wait times, which the government promised to do two years ago and has not done a thing about, we need to spend more money in this area for diagnostic equipment for doctors and nurses.

How would this work if we had limited spending power, would we have medicare today? That is the first question. The second question has to do with municipal infrastructure programs. How does the hon. member see infrastructure programs? We have a government that talks very nicely with a lot of platitudes about flexible federalism and limiting federal spending power, yet I am sure that it is concocting that it can invest in arenas and cultural centres across the country. How would the member look at that?

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, I am actually very pleased to answer the question. Anyone who understands anything about medicare, the Canada Health Act and health care financing across the country will know that the way to resolve wait times is to set the protocols, and to look at how we devise a system in which we have people to deliver the care.

There are three million Canadians today in Canada who cannot find a family physician. We need doctors, nurses and technologists. We had set up a plan as Liberals to deal with this. We had developed a health human resources strategy. That is gone. We have not heard a word of this since the government came into power. Anyone who asks questions about it gets absolutely blank stares and no answers.

We cannot bring down wait times without having human resources. As well, we know that there are management issues which the provinces can do very well. There needs to be a pool put together of all of the wait lists so that people can move in and out of the pool based on the various doctors or nurses. That is the way to work it. Provinces can do that on their own but we need to support them.

Many municipalities and small provinces do not have the ability to deliver the equal programs and we need to give them the opportunity to do that with federal spending.

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it was hard getting out of that chair with a shiver going up my spine because of the fact that she is going to be watching over us. I hope that she and her colleagues do not watch over us the same way they watched over taxpayer money during the sponsorship scandal.

Something really baffles me. The Liberals, my colleague across the way included, always talked about supporting crime, supporting agriculture, the environment and all these things, but nothing ever happened until, all of a sudden, their backs were against the wall and they realized they may not get elected again for a long time. This is I guess typical. There seems to be a theme here.

The government is doing a lot of good things that Canadians want to see. We are working on the environment. It may not satisfy her, but at least something is getting done on it instead of the reverse. We are fighting crime.

My question for my colleague is, first, will she ever admit that we are actually doing something? Second, she had 13 years, why did she not do some of the things she talked so much about?

● (1740)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** I would like to ask the hon. member for Vancouver Centre to keep an eye on the Chair because in 30 seconds her time will be up.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting. We know that in the last 10 years statistics in crime have gone down remarkably in this country. The police chiefs have told us that and justice institutes have told us that. It does not mean that we are devoid of crime but crime has gone down. Let us speak to the issue of crime, for instance, and the concept that the government has developed a strategy for the war on drugs. As a physician, I can tell members—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Lanark—Renfrew—Lennox and Addington.

*The Address*

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I regret to inform you that the riding I represent is actually Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. While I love Renfrew county very much, as I used to cottage there as a kid, I do not have the good fortune to represent it. For what it is worth, I have not had a Speaker yet who has not screwed up the name of my riding in some way or another, so I will add this to the list.

I am here to talk today about our very exciting democracy agenda. Since this government came to power about a year and nine months ago, it has engaged in the most assertive approach to improving Canada's democracy of any government in the country's history. It is exciting to be a part of such a government.

I want to list some of the democracy measures that we have put forward and then I will talk in a little more detail about them.

If there is time, and I hope there is, I will be dividing my time with the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

We have had eight pieces of legislation that have dealt with democracy and I have divided them into three headings. It seems to me that there are three fundamental theme areas. We have dealt with greater accessibility to the polls for voters. We did that by putting forward legislation that created more advance poll days and more geographically dispersed advance polls allowing people, particularly in areas of the country where advance polls were not easily accessible, access to those advance polls thereby ensuring that we could help people to vote in greater numbers and with greater ease. Nunavut comes to mind as perhaps the best example of this.

We have put forward several pieces of legislation that deal with greater security of vote, greater transparency and honesty in our voting. Bill C-31, which essentially deals with electoral fraud, has put in new requirements for voter identification that will significantly reduce the potential for voter fraud in ridings. That passed with widespread support in the House of Commons. All parties, except the New Democratic Party, were enthusiastic in their support for it.

Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act, had provisions ending the role of corporate and union contributions in our electoral process. This is a very healthy thing for an open and transparent electoral process where money no longer plays a role.

Bill C-54, which dealt with election loans and the loophole that was exploited by so many Liberal leadership candidates in terms of getting loans and then finding ways to potentially get the terms of those loans rewritten after the fact, shut down that loophole. This is also a very important part of ensuring openness and transparency in our election financing laws.

The areas that I would like to concentrate on today are the four pieces of legislation that are working toward providing greater democracy in the most direct sense to our representative system: the legislation the government put forward dealing with the election of senators and with the creation of eight year terms for our senators, Bill S-4, which was presented in the Senate in the last term; the legislation, which was passed, creating four year terms and fixed election dates for the House of Commons, which removes the capacity of prime ministers to call elections when the polls are convenient, something that was used extensively by Mr. Chrétien

when he was prime minister and had been used by other prime ministers in the past; and finally, Bill C-56, which introduces greater representation by population in the House of Commons.

I want to concentrate on greater democracy in the Senate and then greater democracy in the House of Commons, the two areas that are the most detailed proposals put forward by the government in this area of greater democracy.

Let me start with the Senate and the election of senators.

We talked about introducing in Bill S-4, the idea of eight year terms for senators. This was found to be constitutional in the upper House reference case of 1980 by the Supreme Court of Canada. The court indicated, in rough terms, the length of term would have to be fixed. There would have to be four senators in order to fulfill the constitutional obligation. Senators would be exempt from the kinds of pressures that re-election causes and that short terms could cause that might affect the voting patterns of an individual in either that House or this one.

● (1745)

I note that before the Liberals in the upper House decided to vote against this bill, the Leader of the Opposition indicated that he was perfectly happy with fixed terms. Therefore, we hope he can assert that love he had of democracy and bring his unruly senators into line when this bill is reintroduced.

The upper House was intended as a House of sober second thought, not of partisan second thought. The intention was not that the upper House become what it has become, a House of patronage.

In explaining the spirit of the bill, I wanted to make the point that the upper House has wandered very far from its original intention of being a House of sober second thought. Senators unfortunately are, as a rule, not appointed based upon their merits. They are appointed based upon their partisan affiliations.

Let me quote from former Senator Dan Hays in a presentation he made to a Senate committee on May 25 of this year. He made the following statement:

In the appointments made to the Senate by Prime Minister Mackenzie King, only two of the 103 were not Liberals. Under Prime Minister St. Laurent, only three of the 55 appointments were not Liberals. Under Prime Minister Diefenbaker, only one of the 37 appointments were not Progressive Conservatives. Under Prime Minister Pearson, only one of the 39 appointments was not Liberal. Under Prime Minister Trudeau, 11 of the 81 appointments were not Liberals. Prime Minister Clark made eleven appointments to the Senate and all were Progressive Conservatives. Under Prime Minister Mulroney, only two of the 51 appointments were not Progressive Conservatives. Under Prime Minister Chrétien only three of the 75 appointments were not Liberals. Under [the member for LaSalle—Émard], five of the 17 appointments were not Liberals.

The upper House has simply become a den of patronage and we are trying to break free from that. This is the point of Senate elections.

It is possible, I suppose, to consider abolishing the Senate. Our friends in the NDP have indicated that is their preferred approach. It is not my preferred approach. It is not the Prime Minister's preferred approach. Moreover it is a very difficult avenue to pursue because it requires the consent, depending upon which constitutional scholar one goes to, of either all the provinces, or at least seven provinces with half the population.



*The Address*

At any rate, it is a difficult avenue to pursue, but if it turns out that the other parties are unwilling to pursue elections to the Senate, it is clear that the abolition of the Senate is preferable to the approach of simply using it as a House of patronage, the pattern of course of previous governments, and in all fairness of both partisan stripes, in the past.

I want to talk for a moment about representation by population in the House of Commons. Bill C-56, introduced in the last session of Parliament, dealt with greater representation by population, a more equitable system in the lower House, and I am a great fan of this.

The representation by population formula that was incorporated in the original Constitution Act, 1867, has by reason of repeated amendment become less and less representation by population and more and more representation by population, with one exception after another. It was amended in 1915, again in the 1940s, in 1952, in the 1970s, in 1985, and each time it moved further and further from one person, one vote, the equality of voting, regardless of the riding or the province in which one lived.

This has produced the situation that there is now great disequilibrium. The bill attempts to bring back a measure of representation by population. It would introduce new seats for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. In the cases of Alberta and B. C., they have been brought right up to equality with the level that Quebec is at, essentially at the national medium number in terms of electors per MP.

Ontario would be below that, but far further ahead than they are now, and this is a major step, for the first time, in the direction of returning to the spirit of rep by pop that was part of the original Confederation deal for the lower House.

• (1750)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** I would like to apologize to the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington. The counties of Lanark and Renfrew were previously tied. I promise him that when I go back to my office, I will write on the blackboard, 100 times, Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made a very clear and distinct speech. Therefore, I want to ask him a question.

If it is true that there is no longer something called patronage, and if the hon. member, his party and the government believe that we should no longer name people to the Senate, why is it that the very first act of the Prime Minister when he became Prime Minister was to name Senator Fortier, who actually refused to run, and make him a minister of the crown with no ability to sit in this House and respond to questions? How does that reality and the sort of fantasy speech I heard here actually come together?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, the best way of responding to the question by the hon. member for Vancouver Centre is to point out a number of things.

First of all, the Prime Minister has not filled most of the vacancies in the Senate because he is hopeful that it will be possible to fill these

by means of an election. Only the obstruction of the members on the opposite side can prevent that from happening. Hopefully this is a sign that the member for Vancouver Centre will be able to go ahead and support Senate elections.

Second, I point to Bert Brown, who has now been appointed to the upper House. He of course was elected by the people of Alberta. He is now Canada's second elected senator and the first individual in this Parliament to represent what hopefully will become a universal trend.

Third, let me address the question regarding Mr. Fortier. He was appointed on a very specific basis. The member may disagree with it, but the basis was that the city of Montreal deserves some representation. It is the second largest city in the country. It is the largest city in Quebec. It deserves to have some representation in the cabinet; thus the reason for appointing him. He has indicated that of course he will resign and run in the next election for a seat in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's speech this afternoon. I always look forward to his speeches as they are always well researched and contain a tremendous amount of information.

My colleague talked about why it is important to do those things in terms of the democratic reform we have proposed. What I want to know from his perspective is what the danger is of the House not pursuing the changes needed to make this a more democratic place.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about making this place more democratic, so I will assume that his question refers not to the Senate but to the House of Commons. The short answer for the Senate, if he had asked me about that, in a nutshell would have been that if we cannot reform the Senate, I think the move for the abolition of the Senate would grow. Having a unicameral Parliament in a federation is not as good as having a bicameral Parliament, which is why we see them in all the other federations of the world.

With regard to this place, the danger is simply this. Ridings are getting larger and larger as the population of the country is growing, but they are getting larger in the provinces with the most rapidly growing populations, which in practice means Alberta, B.C. and Ontario, where there is a more rapid rate than elsewhere. There is an increasing discontinuity between the size of an average riding in Ontario, for example, and Saskatchewan.

I wrote an article for the *National Post* three or four years ago in which I pointed out that if current population trends continue, Statistics Canada predicts that 20 years from now the average riding size in Alberta will be twice the size of an average riding in Saskatchewan, for example. There is something fundamentally unfair about a system like that. We are simply trying to do what we can to rectify that situation.

• (1755)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** We are resuming debate with the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform. He should know that he has 10 minutes, of which he will have a little less than 5 minutes this evening.

*The Address*

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that approximately four minutes from now, we will be breaking to let the bells ring for a recorded division. I will not be able to get through all of my comments, but I do want to make a few comments, if I may, in the short period of time that I do have.

I am very pleased to stand here in response to the Speech from the Throne and say how excited I was when I heard the speech that was delivered so eloquently by the Governor General.

One of the other things I want to say is that for the first time we had an opportunity to let the majority of Canadians really get engaged in listening to the speech, because for the first time the speech was actually primarily delivered in prime time in terms of television. Certainly in eastern Canada it was viewed in prime time. I know that from my own standpoint, we received several calls in my constituency office from people who actually had a chance to view the Speech from the Throne and they viewed it as a great opportunity. This is something about which we should all be excited, because it is actually getting more citizens engaged in the democratic process.

Of course, not everyone was in favour of it. Members collectively from the opposition parties seemed to criticize it. They called it Americanization. Let us face it: If the collective opposition cannot make a couple of references to George W. Bush on a daily basis, life just is not worth living for them.

That fact notwithstanding, it was a very positive move, because it allowed Canadians to see firsthand how this government intends to conduct itself over the course of the next months and we hope the next few years.

It spoke specifically of five priorities, what this government intends to do in strengthening the federation, strengthening our sovereignty, strengthening our economy, strengthening our environmental practices and, of course, with Bill C-2, strengthening the ability for all of our citizens at home to feel more secure in their daily lives. One of the things we wanted to make sure with our tackling violent crime bill is that we enacted some measures that have been long overdue to protect our citizens, whether they be children, adults or seniors. We wanted to make sure that we took positive action to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians. That is why we have introduced Bill C-2, a comprehensive bill to deal with some very important pieces of legislation that had been stalled for far too long both in this House during committee and in the Senate.

I also want to touch very briefly on some of the points that my colleague was mentioning about Senate reform. One of the things we do have the ability to do in this House and in the upper chamber is to take some positive action in reforming the Senate.

For too many years, well over 100 years, we have had an unelected, patronage appointed Senate. What we are attempting to do is take the patronage appointments away from how we conduct our Senate.

By allowing citizens through a consultation process to voice their opinions on who they wish to represent them regionally, as senators, has got to be viewed as a positive thing. However, I do not see much

acceptance of that initiative by members opposite and members of the upper chamber. That is clearly unfortunate.

Also, what we need to do very seriously is, this House, as an assembly, should send a direct message to the Senate that when we send a piece of legislation from this place to the other place, the Senate must deal with it expeditiously with no delay.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is tight and I thank you for the brief opportunity I have had to give these remarks.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** It being 6:00 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendment now before the House.

● (1805)

[*English*]

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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

*And five or more members having risen:*

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

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 2*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra  
Bains  
Beaumier  
Bell (North Vancouver)  
Bevilacqua  
Boshcoff  
Brown (Oakville)  
Chamberlain  
Cotler  
Cuzner  
Dhaliwal  
Dion

Bagnell  
Barnes  
Bélangier  
Bennett  
Bonin  
Brisson  
Byrne  
Chan  
Cullen (Etobicoke North)  
D'Amours  
Dhalla  
Dosanjh

*The Address*

Dryden  
 Eyking  
 Fry  
 Goodale  
 Holland  
 Ignatieff  
 Kadis  
 Karygiannis  
 Lee  
 Malhi  
 Marleau  
 McCallum  
 McGuire  
 McTeague  
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)  
 Neville  
 Patry  
 Proulx  
 Redman  
 Robillard  
 Rota  
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 Guarnieri  
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 Jennings  
 Karetak-Lindell  
 LeBlanc  
 MacAulay  
 Maloney  
 Matthews  
 McGuinly  
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
 Minna  
 Murphy (Charlottetown)  
 Pacetti  
 Pearson  
 Ratansi  
 Regan  
 Rodrigue  
 Russell  
 Scarpaleggia  
 Sgro  
 Simard  
 St. Amand  
 Steckle  
 Szabo  
 Temelkovski  
 Tonks  
 Valley  
 Wilfert  
 Wrzesnewskyj

Goodyear  
 Gravel  
 Guay  
 Guimond  
 Harper  
 Harvey  
 Hearn  
 Hill  
 Jaffer  
 Julian  
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
 Khan  
 Kotto  
 Laforest  
 Lake  
 Lavallée  
 Lebel  
 Lemieux  
 Lévesque  
 Lunn  
 Lussier  
 Malo  
 Mark  
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)  
 Masse  
 Mayes  
 Ménard (Hochelaga)  
 Menzies  
 Miller  
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
 Moore (Fundy Royal)  
 Mourani  
 Nadeau  
 Nicholson  
 O'Connor  
 Oda  
 Pallister  
 Paradis  
 Petit  
 Plamondon  
 Prentice  
 Priddy  
 Reid  
 Ritz  
 Savoie  
 Schellenberger  
 Siksay  
 Smith  
 Sorenson  
 St-Hilaire  
 Stoffer  
 Strahl  
 Thi Lac  
 Basques)  
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)  
 Tilson  
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 Grewal  
 Guergis  
 Hanger  
 Harris  
 Hawn  
 Hiebert  
 Hinton  
 Jean  
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
 Komaricki  
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
 Laframboise  
 Lauzon  
 Layton  
 Lemay  
 Lessard  
 Lukivski  
 Lunney  
 MacKenzie  
 Manning  
 Marston  
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)  
 Mathysen  
 McDonough  
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)  
 Merrifield  
 Mills  
 Mulcair  
 Nash  
 Norlock  
 Obhrai  
 Ouellet  
 Paquette  
 Perron  
 Picard  
 Poilievre  
 Preston  
 Rajotte  
 Richardson  
 Roy  
 Scheer  
 Shipley  
 Skelton  
 Solberg  
 St-Cyr  
 Stanton  
 Storseth  
 Sweet  
 Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les  
 Thompson (Wild Rose)  
 Toews  
 Tweed  
 Van Loan  
 Verner  
 Wallace  
 Wasylycia-Leis  
 Williams

**NAYS**

Members

Abbott  
 Albrecht  
 Allison  
 Anders  
 André  
 Arthur  
 Atamanenko  
 Baird  
 Batters  
 Bellavance  
 Bernier  
 Bezan  
 Black  
 Blaikie  
 Blaney  
 Bouchard  
 Bourgeois  
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
 Bruinooge  
 Calkins  
 Cannon (Pontiac)  
 Carrie  
 Casson  
 Chong  
 Christopherson  
 Comartin  
 Crête  
 Cummins  
 Davies  
 DeBellefeuille  
 Demers  
 Devolin  
 Doyle  
 Dykstra  
 Epp  
 Fast  
 Fitzpatrick  
 Fletcher  
 Gagnon  
 Gallant  
 Godin

Ablonczy  
 Allen  
 Ambrose  
 Anderson  
 Angus  
 Asselin  
 Bachand  
 Barbot  
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)  
 Benoit  
 Bevington  
 Bigras  
 Blackburn  
 Blais  
 Bonsant  
 Boucher  
 Breitzkreuz  
 Brown (Barrie)  
 Brunelle  
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)  
 Cardin  
 Carrier  
 Charlton  
 Chow  
 Clement  
 Comuzzi  
 Crowder  
 Davidson  
 Day  
 Del Mastro  
 Deschamps  
 Dewar  
 Duceppe  
 Emerson  
 Faille  
 Finley  
 Flaherty  
 Freeman  
 Galipeau  
 Gaudet  
 Goldring

**PAIRED**

Members

Lalonde

Warawa — 2

**The Speaker:** I declare the amendment lost.

[English]

It being 6:35 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:35 p.m.)



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