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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*Translation*]

JAMES BAY AND NORTHERN QUEBEC AGREEMENT AND NORTHEASTERN QUEBEC AGREEMENT

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 32 (2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the annual reports for 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03, for the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Northeastern Quebec Agreement.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-465, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (identity of electors).

He said: Mr. Speaker, we all remember the controversy caused by the Chief Electoral Officer's decision to allow voters to vote while wearing a veil. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I promised to introduce a bill to amend the Canada Elections Act.

This bill will require all voters to establish their identity, with their faces visible, before they can vote. The bill also provides that when a voter does not have photo identification with their name and address, the voter can provide two pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer.

As we have mentioned, this situation is absurd and must be corrected through legislation. This is why we are introducing the bill.

In any case, I believe this bill will easily receive unanimous consent. I would remind the House that every party has indicated its support for this approach. Furthermore, the government announced this very intent in the Speech from the Throne.

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

•(1005)

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-466, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (definition of “employer”) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

She said: Mr. Speaker, we have a rather ridiculous situation right now where members serving in the Canadian reserves do not have a guarantee of job protection when they serve on a mission for Canada. My bill aims to rectify that.

When reservists serve on a Canadian mission, they should have a guarantee that their job will be protected and be there for them when they return to Canada.

Currently, three provinces have elected legislation, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, to protect jobs that are covered under provincial jurisdiction. My bill would change the federal legislation so that people who work in jobs under federal legislation would be covered.

Actually, the House proposed some changes in 1998 but, under successive Liberal and Conservative governments, those changes have never been implemented.

I push the government to ensure that our reservists who serve Canada have a guarantee that their jobs will be protected when they come back to this country.

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

* * *

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-467, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (medical equipment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, charities are increasingly funding the acquisition of medical equipment that community hospitals need. In my riding alone, the St. Mary's Hospital Foundation's Back the CAT campaign raised \$1.6 million for a CT scanner and the Whistler Health Care Foundation raised \$1.3 million for a CT scanner. The Powell River Health Care Auxiliary has similar plans.

Routine Proceedings

Canadians who give to our hospitals and help their neighbours get the medical care they need should not have to pay GST on these donations. The bill would ensure that the funds raised by our hospital foundations will go even further in helping to improve Canadians' health care.

I ask my colleagues from all parties to support the bill and help gets results for our hospitals and for Canadians.

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

* * *

CANADA'S CLEAN AIR AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-468, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, the Energy Efficiency Act and the Motor Vehicle Fuel Consumption Standards Act (Canada's Clean Air and Climate Change Act).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with some pleasure and some regret that I present this bill. This was, of course, the clean air and climate change act that was rewritten by all members of this House.

I have the support of the member for Toronto—Danforth, the leader of the NDP, who has helped create the full circle of this bill. He created the subcommittee, the standing committee that was able to address the flaws in the original government act, and worked with all members of Parliament from all sides of the House to create some progressive environmental legislation for this country in the absence of true leadership on this front, which Canadians are demanding on a daily basis. The world is demanding that Canada finally take its place on the stage and do its part in the battle against climate change.

It seems that, in coming full circle, we finally present the government with a way forward, a way in which it can no longer delay real action against climate change and can no longer tell Canadians that it cannot be done.

We in the New Democratic Party believe that this is an issue that must be addressed and that it can in fact be done.

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

* * *

PETITIONS**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. Doug Alderson of Peterborough, 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 the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners call upon the Conservative minority government to admit that the decision on 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.

●(1010)

LOGGING INDUSTRY

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present to the House today.

The first petition involves restrictions on log exports from private lands. Private lands are regulated by the federal government and one-third of the land mass of Vancouver Island is actually a private land forest.

The petitioners note that of approximately one million acres of private forest land on central Vancouver Island, nearly 70% of the logs harvested are currently destined export. They are, therefore, calling upon the Government of Canada to implement a tariff on logs exported from private lands to level the playing field and ensure that Canadian mills, as well as secondary industries that rely on byproducts from processing, are given equal opportunity.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition involves the E & N railroad, that is the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railroad, which goes from Victoria up to Nanaimo in my riding and further up to Courtenay and Comox.

The petitioners are calling on the government to act speedily to keep the E & N railroad running. They note that the E & N is part of Vancouver Island's economy and its history and that it was a federal guarantee made as a precondition of British Columbia entering Confederation.

I would note, along with constituents, that we all have an interest in advancing green energy and transportation options. The petitioners are asking for help to keep the E & N railroad running.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my final petition involves a private member's bill, Bill C-404, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (natural health products). There are 564 signatures on this petition from my own riding; Qualicum Beach; Parksville; Brandon, Manitoba; London, Ontario; and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Canadians are asking that support for the use of national health products is widely accepted in our society to promote health and wellness and improved access to natural products would allow Canadians to better manage their own health and relieve pressure on the health system.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to enact Bill C-404 and take the GST off natural products and make them more available to Canadians to help promote wellness and health.

* * *

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.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine on a point of order.

* * *

POINT OF ORDER

BILL C-357—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. As I am sure you recall, a few days ago, I informed you that the Bloc Québécois intended to respond to the Conservatives' request concerning Bill C-357. They called for a royal recommendation concerning the creation of an independent employment insurance fund. I will now raise a few points that will surely enable you to make an informed decision about this issue.

I would like to bring to your attention our argument against requiring a royal recommendation to pass Bill C-357, to create an independent employment insurance fund. That is why I am addressing you today.

At the outset, we recognize that the content of Bill C-357 is very similar to Bill C-280, as introduced in the 38th Parliament. It is clear that the Speaker's ruling on June 13, 2005, included a number of elements that were open to interpretation. The Conservatives are referring to those very elements to support their assertion that the bill now before us requires a royal recommendation. That is why we must take the time to review the Conservatives' arguments point by point.

First, the Conservatives claim that passing this bill would lead to additional expenses. That is totally false, because the current legislation already provides for fluctuations with respect to premiums and conditions of eligibility, which determine the fund's revenues and expenditures that go through the government's consolidated revenue fund. This bill is not designed to change these provisions, so it is not true that the bill would engender additional costs. Therefore, there is no basis for the claim that this bill would bring about "additional" or "new" expenditures.

The Conservatives are saying that the appropriation of public revenue will be altered depending on the circumstances and the way it is managed. The current legislation provides for a contribution to be deducted from every pay cheque and it is understood that this money will be used to ensure supplementary income to contributors

Point of order

who need it because of their own economic circumstances. The eligibility criteria for employment insurance and the premium rates that determine the revenue and expenses of the fund, will serve the same purpose and use the same mechanisms when this bill is enacted. I would add that a change to the eligibility criteria would still require a legislative change. Let us be clear, not only does this bill not require additional expenditures, but what is more, the purpose of and reason for these public funds will not change in any way.

We acknowledge, as the Speaker said on June 13, 2005, that it does involve transferring public funds to an independent employment insurance fund, but royal recommendation is not needed for two reasons. The Speaker himself said, on May 9, 2005, that:

The royal recommendation is also required where a bill alters the appropriation of public revenue "under the circumstances, in the manner and for the purposes set out" in the bill.

Although there will indeed be a transfer of revenue to an independent fund, the circumstances, manner and purposes by which the commission will set the premiums and manage the revenue will not change at all. Furthermore, the spirit of the current act will be better protected since the revenue generated by the premiums will no longer be used to serve interests other than those defined by the act, namely those of the workers. Using revenues that should go into the fund, but instead are taken into the consolidated revenue fund for purposes not listed in the act, will no longer be possible.

A royal recommendation would be necessary if the bill were seeking to withdraw revenue from the government's consolidated revenue fund to be used for purposes other than those described in the act. In this case, it is clear that the purpose of the bill will not alter anything in the current legislation. On the contrary, it will allow the spirit of the act to be respected and prevent the misappropriation of funds that the Liberals and Conservatives are known for.

● (1015)

Fourth, the argument cited on June 13, 2005, that the investment of public monies by the Commission represents new or different expenditures, must have workers seeing red.

The federal government continued to invest—or, in other words, spend—the public monies from the fund to pay down the Canadian debt, which violated the spirit of the law. It clearly did not act in the interests of workers, who watched these monies—that they, with their employers, had paid to ensure themselves against economic downturns—disappear. It was the government, not this bill, that invented a new purpose for the fund and its surpluses.

Finally, adding 13 commissioners will be financed by a small increase in expenses, which will no longer appear as an expenditure from the consolidated revenue fund, given that the Conservatives recognize that the employment insurance fund will no longer be a part of the consolidated revenue fund. Since the Conservatives no longer know how to oppose an idea that they supported in the past for purely populist considerations, today they are attempting to use procedural arguments to avoid openly declaring themselves against a bill that is necessary and that contributors have demanded for many years. Only their neo-conservative ideology, hidden behind a populist facade, can justify such deplorable actions.

The Address

With that, I conclude my presentation.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his comments. I will most certainly take them into account, along with the others, when I rule on this bill.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from October 22 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your team a good session, and to welcome the new pages as they start their new jobs.

No one will be surprised if I speak specifically about justice. Overall, the Bloc Québécois was disappointed in the throne speech. Our leader, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, clearly indicated our conditions and expectations.

We also spoke about the Kyoto protocol. We clearly wanted the government to confirm that it would follow through with the commitment we made when Kyoto was signed: to bring greenhouse gases down to their 1990 levels and then reduce them further still. We do not have a green government—this we know. This government is very irresponsible when it comes to the environment, and the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has had many opportunities to speak about this.

We would also have liked the government to agree with the views of many important representatives of civil society and our fellow citizens, that Canada's mission in Afghanistan must end in 2009. Since the beginning of the mission we have been critical of the fact that there has not been a satisfactory balance of development assistance, international cooperation and military objectives.

Obviously we hope that attention will be focused on the entire question of forestry and the manufacturing sector. We know what hard times those sectors have experienced. Certainly we hope that supply management will also be discussed, for it is an extremely important issue in rural communities. And we hope that the government will eliminate the spending power in relation to matters under provincial jurisdiction. There have been calls for this for 50 years, and the Bloc Québécois is certainly not going to be satisfied with the government's dishonest subterfuge.

With that introduction, we must now talk about the justice system. First, what an exercise in cosmetics this is, what an exercise in stage management! Watching the press conference given by the Minister of Justice, his colleague the Minister of Public Safety, and the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, we had the impression that we were attending a play by Molière, starring Tartuffe. We were given to think that since the Conservatives took power in 2006 the House of Commons has been the victim of obstruction when it comes to the

justice system. We were also given to think that the government has been prevented from having its justice initiative passed.

And yet when we look a little closer, we see that since January 2006 the Conservative government has tabled 12 bills relating to the justice system. As we speak, six of those bills have received royal assent and have thus become law. Of those six bills that have become law, three were passed using what is called the fast-track procedure, with the unanimous consent of all leaders in the House of Commons.

So out of 12 bills, six have become law, and three of those were passed with the consent of all parties using the fast-track procedure; four reached the Senate, at first, second and third reading, while both in the House and in committee there were only two bills remaining. It has to be said that in parliamentary history there have been more vigorous examples of obstruction. When six bills receive royal assent, four are being considered in the Senate and only two are left, you cannot, in all honesty, appear at a press conference and say that you have been unable to get your bills passed.

• (1025)

For the benefit of our constituents, I will mention the bills that were passed.

First, there was Bill C-9, on conditional sentences. It is true that we did propose some amendments. It is our job to do that. We are a responsible opposition. What is the role of the opposition? It is to ensure that bill are improved and made as perfect as possible. We would be completely irresponsible if we did not do our work. As far as the bill on conditional sentences is concerned, the government ultimately wanted to do away with that option for judges and we highlighted that.

Bill C-17, which dealt with judges' salaries, was also passed, followed by Bill C-18, a rather technical bill on DNA data banks. Moreover, in tribute to our unfortunately deceased colleague, Bill C-19, which creates a new offence under the Criminal Code with regard to street racing, was passed unanimously.

Two other bills were passed within 48 hours, which is an indication of the cooperation among opposition parties. One of those two was introduced by the Bloc Québécois, because of incidents of piracy, the unauthorized use of camcorders to record movies in theatres, particularly in Montreal. The other bill dealt with the signing by Canada of an international convention to fight organized crime.

Four other bills were being dealt with in the Senate, or I should say, "the other place." There was, first, Bill C-10, concerning minimum penalties for offences involving firearms.

Next, there was Bill C-22, which dealt with the age of protection under the Criminal Code. Some of my colleagues followed that subject with a great deal of interest. The Bloc Québécois had asked for a five-year proximity clause. The Bill was before the Senate. In spite of some questions, our position was relatively favourable. The bill had been amended in committee.

The Address

Then there was Bill C-23, somewhat technical, on the language of juries and the accused.

I do not want to forget to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am sharing the time allotted to me with the likeable and charming member for Sherbrooke.

Finally, Bill C-35 on reversing the onus of proof was also passed. Some television journalists described this bill as reversing the onus of proof for parole. However, the bill was not about parole but about pre-trial bail hearings.

There were two bills remaining about which we had and still have questions and amendments to propose.

The first deals with drug-impaired driving. We are in favour of the new provision in the bill requiring individuals to take sobriety tests. Peace officers and police could stop people who are driving erratically under the influence of drugs. We were in favour of certain provisions to require people to submit to sobriety tests.

We amended the bill however because, as unlikely as it might seem, it would have been irresponsible to pass this Conservative bill without any amendments. Imagine someone driving along in his car together with a friend. They drive down the road—let us say the Trans-Canada highway, for example, to please some of my colleagues here—and it turns out that the friend, who is driving, has marijuana in his pockets or his luggage. If we had passed this bill, the car owner would have been held liable. That did not seem responsible to us or legally sound.

There was also another bill about which we had a lot of questions. Unfortunately though, I have only a minute left and so I am going to proceed to my conclusion and allow the hon. member for Sherbrooke to take over.

We are going to take our work in committee very seriously. We will not allow ourselves to be dictated to by the government which, in a fit of authoritarianism, might demand that the opposition propose no amendments to Bill C-2.

● (1030)

We will amend Bill C-2 if we think that is the direction in which the testimony we hear is taking us. As always, I can assure the House that the Bloc Québécois will act in a serious, responsible, reasoned way. We would also like to remind the House of the justice proposals we made last June.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, because of time constraints, I did not hear my eminent colleague talk about this last bill, about which we had serious reservations. I would like him to give us some more information about it.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my young colleague. If I am not mistaken, he is the youngest member of Parliament from Quebec. The bill he is referring to concerns dangerous offenders.

For 50 years, the Criminal Code has contained provisions we have not challenged. We agree that some people are extremely violent and present such a high risk of reoffending that they must be declared dangerous offenders. People who are declared dangerous offenders can receive indeterminate prison sentences and are not eligible for parole for seven years.

The problem with the new Bill C-2, has to do with the list of 22 offences. Some of them, such as incest or attempted murder, are very serious, but others such as assault need some explanation. For instance, if my dear colleague and I were to have a fight—it would not last very long—that would constitute assault.

We are not downplaying assault, but we want to know why it is on the list of 22 offences. After an offender has committed three offences on the list, automatic sentencing applies. We question whether this is the right way to assess how dangerous an offender is.

This does not mean that we will vote against the bill, no more than it means we will vote in favour of the bill. What it means is that we have some serious work ahead of us, in committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy listening to this member. I do not speak his mother tongue, but I get the impression that his speeches are always very fluent and very well delivered, and of course our interpreters do a fine job as well.

I, too, would like to ask him about the member's response to this question vis-à-vis the reverse onus. I am exasperated when I hear this member and other members in the House, members from the Liberals and sometimes also from the NDP, decrying this. Somehow they feel it is unfair to people because they are being called guilty instead of being called innocent until proven guilty.

Is it not true that if one has been charged and convicted of serious crimes such as aiming a gun at a person, pulling the trigger and missing, not once but twice or three times, it really has been the accused himself who has proven he is a dangerous offender? The bill the member is talking about merely proposed that at this stage this individual be declared what he has already proven himself to be, that is, a dangerous offender. The reverse onus actually is a way out, whereby this person gets yet another chance in which he can say, "I am not a dangerous offender and here is the proof". It gives him that opportunity.

Do we not have, as a government and as the enforcers of the law in this country, the obligation to put away people who just cannot learn after one, after two and after three times?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, what has come across only too well is my hon. colleague's understanding.

I will therefore try to be very clear. First of all, the American states that tried this system of reverse onus later reversed their decision.

Why? Because in matters of justice, when we set out to imprison someone indefinitely—I hope the interpreter will translate this clearly: the result of being declared a dangerous offender is indefinite incarceration—this is not seen as automatic sentencing.

The Address

We agree that the Criminal Code should contain provisions for declaring someone a dangerous offender. Now, maybe after just one offence, an individual might have to be declared a dangerous offender. Perhaps three offences are not needed. It is possible, at this time, for a psychiatrist to be called by the Crown in order to testify, after one offence, that the individual should be declared a dangerous offender.

The problem is that, when his colleague, the Minister of Justice, appeared before the parliamentary committee, he was unable to explain to us why the system is not working, why we should modify the system and resort to automatic sentencing after three offences.

We will have the opportunity to listen to the minister again during our work on Bill C-2 and I hope his explanations will be clearer this time than when he first appeared.

●(1035)

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak with regard to the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

The Bloc Québécois was quick to set out what the throne speech should contain. Even though this has probably been done many times before, for the benefit of the voters who are watching us on the parliamentary channel—I imagine there are a few million people watching this morning—we should give a bit of background again and tell people what may have inspired this throne speech.

Thirty-one of the 126 Conservative members used to be Reformers, and eight of the 32 cabinet members were as well. That gives us some idea of the thinking behind this throne speech.

The Bloc's demands were very clear on Afghanistan, federal spending power, measures to address the forestry crisis, meeting Kyoto commitments and commitments to Quebec, and supply management. Of course, there were many other elements, which my colleague from Hochelaga mentioned previously, including justice. Important issues still have to be discussed in this House, and I know he will do a good job and introduce important improvements to the bill.

The government did not address any of the Bloc's five priorities. Although we demanded a withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2009, the government set the date at 2011, after creating a commission to analyze the situation and make recommendations to the government.

Federal spending power has by no means been eliminated. Instead, the government is placing limits on federal spending power for new shared-cost programs in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. We were clear on this. Federal spending power had to be eliminated, and in the event the government invested in areas of jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, they had to have the right to opt out of these programs with full compensation.

We also care about respecting our Kyoto commitments. The government's sanctimonious attempts to make us believe that it is an ardent crusader in the fight against greenhouse gases and for clean air are green indeed, but they are more often the inexperienced sort of green than the environmentally friendly kind. We are a long way from achieving the goals that we must reach as soon as possible

given the current state of our air quality and the greenhouse gases that are threatening the entire planet.

I would like to discuss measures to address the crisis in the forestry industry and supply management.

The crisis in the forestry industry has been going on for a long time. The Conservative government—which has done no better than its Liberal counterpart—resolved the softwood lumber crisis in a way that was bad for the industry and for workers. The Bloc Québécois has demanded that the government do something to help the forestry industry and, especially, forestry workers.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government said that it was concerned about the crisis, but it offered nothing concrete to help revive the industry or to help older workers who have been laid off. I would like to read the following excerpt from the throne speech.

Our Government will stand up for Canada's traditional industries. Key sectors including forestry, fisheries, manufacturing and tourism are facing challenges. Our Government has taken action to support workers as these industries adjust to global conditions and will continue to do so in the next session.

●(1040)

When I hear that “it will continue to do so in the next session”, knowing that 130,000 jobs have been lost in Quebec in the manufacturing sector since 2003—of which 65,000 since the Conservatives came to power—I find unfortunately that the fears of Quebec and Canadian workers are justified with regard to even greater job losses in the future than what we have already experienced.

With regard to the manufacturing sector, I would like to return to the attitude of the Minister of International Trade, who is currently negotiating 28 free trade agreements with various countries. He is rushing into 28 agreements when no study or analysis of the impact on Quebec and Canadian industries has been carried out—nothing that was not minor or cursory. Consequently, we are unaware of the potential impact on manufacturing jobs in Quebec and Canada.

We know very well that the Minister of International Trade supports purchasing goods at the lowest cost for our companies. Therefore, he supports importing to supply Canadian companies. This also has a direct impact on the Canadian suppliers of the same types of goods. This will result in greater job losses.

My colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville tabled Bill C-411 to establish more specific and pertinent criteria for preventing, among other things, dumping by various countries. In the meantime, our Minister of International Trade is attempting to negotiate, piecemeal, quickly and without any analysis, all sorts of free trade agreements with other countries. That gives rise to concern, as voiced by the government itself in the throne speech, that the situation will further deteriorate rather than improve.

The Address

Finally, there is supply management. It is obviously an important aspect which has an impact on the regions, in agriculture, forestry and manufacturing, because of the crises.

We know full well that the regions are important components in the development of a country—Quebec and Canada as well—and in the stability of agriculture, as well as of employment in the manufacturing sector.

As for agriculture, let us remember that in the past few months, the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food have made many statements that betray the government's true intentions. Even if, in the throne speech, the government seems to be in favour of maintaining supply management, contradictory comments have been made. The Minister of International Trade even said that one day supply management would have to come to an end. The former Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food suggested that supply managed farmers prevented the government from properly defending the interests of Canadians at the WTO, and that they should consider compromising.

So it is clear that none of the Bloc's five demands was satisfied. And even if there seems to be an interest in supply management, the evidence is there and the comments have been made. The agricultural community will not be able to survive with policies like the ones this government could develop.

• (1045)

In conclusion, supply management is very important, as is the manufacturing industry. But all the other issues brought up by the Bloc Québécois in speeches and debates are important as well.

So, for these five main reasons—the demands I mentioned earlier—and for a number of other reasons that were brought up in this House, we ask the Liberal Party to reconsider its position, to not give in, to not go against its beliefs and to give the Conservative government a chance to go back to the drawing board.

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments in his speech today.

The hon. member and I sat on the international trade committee together in the last session. We had some very interesting discussions. We learned many interesting facts, some of which the hon. member maybe did not portray in the best light, regarding some of the reflections from witnesses who talked about what this new government has done to support the economy, to grow the economy and to encourage trade.

I take exception to some of the member's comments. Certainly some jobs have been lost in many of the sectors, and we empathize with those folks who have lost their jobs. However, we have to look at the overall numbers. Since this government took power, there have been 590,000 new jobs created and 80% of those new jobs are high paying jobs.

Canadians are very adaptable. They do not necessarily have to move to find these jobs. They have gone out and found these jobs. That is a positive. They think that this government is doing a great

job of providing new economic growth for them. In the last year alone, 280,000 new jobs have been created.

I realize in the hon. member's region there have been some job losses. We have had this discussion. However, is there not a reflection in the jobs that have been created that they actually are compensating for some of the lost jobs?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, we have to look beyond the job creation numbers. On a political level, the Conservatives are telling us not to look at the polls but at what is happening on the ground. However, when we see statistics on the unemployment rate, we have to be equally careful not to always accept the figures we are given as gospel truth, since determining the unemployment rate and conducting political polls are done by a similar process and methodology.

Indeed, jobs have been created, but what kind of jobs? We have to make a distinction between the manufacturing world in Quebec and that in the rest of Canada. It is absolutely not the same thing. They do not compare. Quebec's economic growth is largely geared toward exports. The manufacturing world is rather seriously affected by the Conservative government's international trade policies.

In my opinion, the ease with which the Conservative government enters into free trade agreements with other countries, without really weighing the consequences to the manufacturing industry, causes significant job losses: since 2003, almost 130,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing. These jobs may have been replaced, but not with jobs of the same quality with the same income for the workers. We see more workers slipping into poverty.

In our society we look at the unemployment rate from time to time and we say that everything is going well since the rate is steady or going down. Nevertheless, people are getting poorer. We have to do everything we can to try to keep our manufacturing jobs. We have to invest in research and development. We have to encourage innovation and not just settle for creating indirect service jobs that often pay minimum wage. We have lost a great deal of good salaries that helped people get out of poverty, a poverty they are quietly slipping back into with Canada's trade policies.

• (1050)

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the member for Macleod, which was once my home.

I am proud to stand here today to talk about one of the five priorities that our government set out in last week's Speech from the Throne.

As was laid out in the speech, this is a time of economic uncertainty and volatility in the wider world, and while the economic fundamentals of Canada continue to be strong, our country is not immune from this turbulence. The key to getting through this kind of turbulence is coming out in a strong and prosperous way and making sure that we get the economic picture right. This is critical.

*The Address**[Translation]*

We are certainly living in dynamic economic times. Technology is changing faster than ever and there is no slowdown in sight. The power of computers doubles every 18 months and bandwidth is expanding even faster.

Just when we have finally figured out our BlackBerries, we are being offered the next generation of wireless devices we can use to access more information faster than we could ever have imagined. All of this is already here, literally at our fingertips.

[English]

Amid this fast-paced change, intense global pressure is now redefining how businesses must compete. As a result, economic success is judged by different standards than it was even 10 years ago because with the click of a mouse, billions of dollars can move around the globe.

As it stands, Canada is well positioned to be successful. Our economy is strong, growth continues to rise, unemployment is low, and taxes are declining.

•(1055)

[Translation]

Many of our industries are in excellent shape. Our aerospace industry is the fifth largest in the world. Our biotechnology sector ranks third in terms of the number of firms. Our automotive industry stands among the best in the world and our performance in oil and gas extraction is unequalled the world over.

Despite all this, there is no doubt that Canada is still facing economic challenges and that we must be vigilant if we are to be able to stand up to global economic pressures. As I said, part of the solution lies in having a clear understanding of the overall situation. It is the government's responsibility to do that.

[English]

Since coming to office, our government has taken that responsibility seriously. We have worked hard at creating the right economic climate, cutting taxes, reducing the federal debt, investing in education, improving the regulatory environment. In other words, we have ensured that the best conditions for the private sector exist so that the private sector may flourish, so that it may do what it does best, which is to create jobs for Canadians and prosperity.

[Translation]

This fall, the Minister of Finance will present an economic and financial update that will provide information on the next steps in the Advantage Canada process, along with the five priorities in the Speech from the Throne.

Advantage Canada, the government's long term economic plan, is based on sound fiscal management and is intended to create five advantages for Canada that will help individuals to improve their quality of life and help businesses to succeed on the global scene.

[English]

First is a tax advantage establishing the lowest tax rate on new business investment anywhere in the G-7. Second is a fiscal advantage eliminating Canada's total government net debt within a

generation. Third is an entrepreneurial advantage reducing unnecessary regulation and red tape. Fourth is a knowledge advantage developing the best educated, most skilled and flexible workforce in the world.

[Translation]

And the fifth advantage, an infrastructure advantage, will create modern, world-class roads, bridges and ports to ensure the seamless flow of people, goods and services.

[English]

In providing effective economic leadership, the government has made great strides, but we realize that more needs to be done. The Speech from the Throne gives us a clear path to follow in moving toward Canada's goals and economic objectives.

[Translation]

We believe that the taxes Canadians pay are still too high. Since we came to power, we have implemented or announced income tax and other tax reductions of over \$37 billion for individuals and families, and reductions of more than \$3.5 billion for businesses. But we have to cut taxes even farther.

That is why we will be presenting a long term plan for broad based tax relief for individuals, businesses and families, one that will include keeping our promise to cut the GST again.

[English]

We know it is the government's role to set the right conditions for entrepreneurs to succeed and to help create the ideal climate in Canada. In this sense, the Prime Minister released the national strategy on science and technology in May and invested \$1.9 billion in budget 2007 to support new science and technology policies, programs and priorities.

[Translation]

Canadians expect all levels of government to cooperate in creating a more vigorous economy. The government of Canada is firmly resolved to work together with the provinces and territories to eliminate barriers to domestic trade. We will be considering ways of using the federal power to regulate trade and commerce to improve the way our economic union works, for the benefit of all Canadians.

[English]

Our government is aware also of the need for copyright reform and that this is essential to ensuring Canada remains competitive. We will introduce legislation in the next few months that will provide legal measures for rights holders, clarify the rules relating to copyright as they apply to Internet service providers, address the educational and research use of copyrighted materials, and address consumer interests.

The Address

We will launch our building Canada plan, the largest investment in Canadian infrastructure in half a century. The result will be safer roads and bridges, more competitive businesses and, indeed, a better quality of life for all Canadians.

Our success as a trading nation relies in part on modern and efficient transportation systems. This is indeed a primary responsibility of government. Through the building Canada plan, we are investing in our transportation and trade hubs, including the Windsor-Detroit corridor and the Atlantic and Pacific gateways.

It is clear that what the government has put forward in the throne speech has received wide acclaim from Canadian business leaders. Today in the *National Post* Carrie Tait noted that Canadian business leaders praised this particular throne speech, with 71% of business leaders from small and medium-sized businesses considering this a great road forward for the country. Of the people surveyed, 90% support the Prime Minister's plan to cut taxes for individuals and families. Only 5% found these measures to be undesirable.

That is an incredible vote of confidence. Of the people surveyed, 88% are in strong support of reducing interprovincial trade barriers. As well, a majority of those polled are strongly in favour of the proposed plan to reduce the GST to 5% from 6%.

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

And by providing economic leadership, our government will also be standing up for Canada's traditional industries. Key sectors such as forestry, manufacturing and tourism all have challenges that must be met. The fluctuation in the Canadian dollar in recent years is one of the factors causing problems for Canada's traditional industries. While our government has already taken steps to assist Canada's traditional industries, we will be doing more. Our long term plan of broad based tax relief for individuals, businesses and families will provide significant and timely assistance for those industries.

[*English*]

The agricultural sector will benefit from our government's promotion of biofuels and the new growing forward agricultural framework.

In sum, this is an excellent throne speech. Canadians can trust that the government will provide them with continued leadership to ensure continued prosperity and a quality of life unequalled anywhere in the world.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am not surprised that the minister would think the Speech from the Throne is indeed excellent, but I think the reality is quite different, especially if we are in a family looking for a child care space or if one is a student looking for student debt relief or an individual who cares about cities. There are many deficiencies.

I think the government missed a wonderful opportunity to paint the future for Canadians. A successful Speech from the Throne is one that paints a future where people see themselves. I do not think many Canadians see themselves in this Speech from the Throne.

Cities do not see themselves in this speech. Gord Steeves, the president of the Canadian Federation of Canadian Municipalities states, "Clearly, the budget surpluses of recent years demonstrate that

the government has the resources to provide tax relief to Canadians and invest in our cities and communities".

That, of course, was the Liberal legacy.

Mr. Steeves states:

We are disappointed that the Government has chosen to forgo this opportunity.

None of these municipal priorities and strategies were fully addressed in today's Speech from the Throne. This will not only hinder the success of our cities and communities in a competitive world; it will impede the realization of the Government's overall objectives because the future of our country is tied to that of our cities and communities.

That is hardly a ringing endorsement of the Speech from the Throne.

I also want to state very clearly that this speech is very much a reflection of the retail politics approach of the Conservative government. I say this because there are major issues in the medium term, the short term and the long term, issues such as Canada's aging society. Where is that? What is the government's plan to address that particular issue?

Where is the government's plan to address the issue of emerging markets like China and India?

● (1105)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The plan is for there to be some time left for the minister to answer the question. The member has taken up half of the five minutes. I have to give the minister some chance to reply.

Hon. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I respect my colleague and I appreciate the question. Let there be no doubt that when Canadians look at the throne speech, they will not see an image of the Liberals. There will be no Liberals who will find themselves represented in this throne speech.

Whether we talk about sovereignty and Canada's place in the world, economic leadership, or dealing with criminal justice or the environment, and I will deal with each of those in turn, this is not a Liberal throne speech. It sets the priorities of Canadians, not the priorities of the Liberal Party. In that sense, I agree with my friend. If Liberals look at this throne speech, they will not find themselves.

In regard to dealing with sovereignty and Canada's place in the world, the Liberal Party had 13 years to deal with these issues. The Liberals had 13 years to assert our sovereignty in the world, in the north, in the Northwest Passage, in Canada's Arctic, and they did not do that. This government is doing it. We are engaged in the necessary steps to make that happen.

In terms of our place in the world, this government and this Prime Minister have done more to put Canada on the world stage in a proud place, standing up for freedom and democracy, than ever happened under the Liberal Party.

The Address

It is true, and I do not think anyone in the House would disagree, that we will not find the Liberal image in this throne speech, because we are getting on with broad based tax cuts for families, for businesses and for individual taxpayers and that is not what the Liberal Party is about. We have reduced the GST. We have indicated that we are going to reduce the GST again. Liberals will be deflated by the throne speech because the throne speech is about reducing the taxes of Canadians.

On criminal justice, the bill that has been put before the House is dealing with the priorities of Canadians. If one is soft on crime the way the Liberals are, one will not find one's image in the throne speech. There is no doubt about that. But this is what Canadians are telling us they want to see. We are moving forward. We are tough on crime. We are going to deal with these issues because they matter to Canadians. We are going to keep our streets and our communities safe. That is what people want us to do.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Industry was on a roll and I almost want to hand the microphone back to him so he can continue. He was doing an amazing job of explaining why the Liberals cannot understand the wonderful things we are talking about in the Speech from the Throne, but we hope they will listen very closely to our responses to the throne speech. Maybe they will understand when we finish explaining it to them.

I very much appreciate this opportunity to add my remarks to those of the Minister of Industry as well as those of the Minister of Finance in support of the Speech from the Throne.

Let me say first how honoured I am to be the newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. This is an honour I share with all of my constituents in the riding of Macleod. I look forward to working with the minister and with Parliament on finance related policy issues and legislation.

Canadians sent us to Ottawa to get things done. They were tired of all the talk and little action. We promised Canadians that Canada's government would provide a long term vision toward a strong future for Canada. We promised to do it in a manner that was committed, focused and fiscally responsible. That is exactly what we did and that is what we will continue to do.

The Minister of Finance has spoken about the government's plan to build on the decisive action it has taken thus far in fulfilling its commitment to Canadians. This commitment is why Canadians sent us to Ottawa. We have a plan, a plan that is not just for the short term to win votes. Our plan shows that we are in it for the long haul. It is a long term economic plan called Advantage Canada.

Advantage Canada provides Canada with five key advantages so that we can compete effectively in the global economy and attract new growth and investment. Let me remind hon. members of just what those advantages are.

First, Advantage Canada provides a tax advantage. In short, our goal is to reduce taxes for all Canadians and establish the lowest tax rate in the G-7 on new business investment.

Second, Advantage Canada will create a fiscal advantage by eliminating Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation.

A third part of our long term plan is to create an entrepreneurial advantage for Canada by reducing unnecessary regulation and red tape and increasing competition in the Canadian marketplace.

Fourth, Advantage Canada will provide a knowledge advantage. This will create the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce so that Canada is ready to take on the world.

Finally, Advantage Canada will create an infrastructure advantage. In order to compete internationally, we need to build the modern bridges, roads and gateways necessary to link our nation and make our workers and businesses more efficient.

We have put our plan into action by building on previous initiatives to deliver on the government's vision for Canada. Today, I would like to remind hon. members of some of the initiatives the government has taken, initiatives that are important to Canada and to Canadians.

One of the first jobs to be done when we formed the government was to reduce taxes for Canadians. We did that in our inaugural budget of 2006. In fact, we delivered more tax relief than the previous four federal budgets combined, something to be proud of.

We did not stop there. Our first two budgets, combined with our tax fairness plan, have provided significant tax relief for Canadian individuals, families, students and seniors.

To start with, we reduced the GST from 7% to 6%, which was a tax cut for everyone.

We introduced the Canada employment credit to help offset the costs of working. This recognizes employees' work expenses for things such as home computers, uniforms and supplies.

We are providing a new child tax credit that recognizes the additional expenses involved in raising a child. About three million taxpayers will benefit from this initiative.

What is more, we are introducing a working income tax benefit to help low income Canadians over the so-called welfare wall.

• (1110)

We are increasing the lifetime capital gains exemptions for Canada's two million small business owners to \$750,000 from the existing \$500,000, and the first increase in that in 20 years.

In our tax fairness plan, we introduced income splitting for pensioners, a move that will provide targeted assistance to many seniors. The tax fairness plan also took action to level the playing field between corporations and income trusts, bringing Canada in line with other jurisdictions around the world.

In budget 2007, we are taking tax fairness a step further with our anti-tax haven initiative, an initiative that will help prevent tax avoidance.

The Address

This government also recognizes the importance of improving our ability to compete globally and we have done just that. The fact is that we have moved quickly to improve Canada's competitive environment.

Look at what we have done so far. We are reducing the general corporate income tax rate from 20.5% in 2008 as part of our commitment to 18.5% by 2011. We are eliminating the corporate surtax in 2008. We increased the threshold for small business income eligible for a reduced federal tax rate from \$300,000 to \$400,000 as of 2007.

We are reducing the 12% rate for eligible small business income to 11.5% in 2008 and 11% in 2009. We eliminated the federal capital tax in 2006 and we increased capital cost allowance rates for buildings used in manufacturing and processing and other assets.

We are also providing a major new accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturers until the end of 2008. This will allow them to write off their investments and equipment over two years, a much needed shot of adrenalin to help Canadian businesses encourage new economic investment and create jobs.

Of course, our plan for Canada is more than just reducing taxes. Advantage Canada's multi-faceted plan illustrates just that. Just look at budget 2007's historic investment of more than \$16 billion over seven years for infrastructure. This brings federal support in this area to over \$33 billion.

Moreover, we are reducing the federal paper burden for businesses by 20% and reducing the number of tax filings and remittances for more than 350,000 small businesses. This government set out a challenging agenda for Canada and it has risen to that challenge.

As I mentioned, we have reduced taxes significantly for individuals, families and businesses, total tax reductions over three years of approximately \$41 billion. We have reduced the federal debt by \$27 billion. Not only that, through our tax back guarantee we are passing on the interest saving on reducing the national debt to Canadians by reducing personal income taxes.

We are limiting the growth of spending in government, we are balancing the books, and we are taking on the environmental challenge with a plan that is both responsible and capable of being achieved in Canada.

Where are we today? I can say that we are in an enviable position internationally. Our economic fundamentals are rock solid. We are on the best financial fiscal footing of any country in the G-7.

Where do we go from here? We have a solid foundation firmly in place. The Speech from the Throne lays out the plan for the future that will build on that foundation. The government said in the Speech from the Throne that it will bring forward a long term plan of broad based tax relief for individuals, businesses and families. This follows through on our commitment to ensure economic security for Canadians as we look toward the future.

Now we need to work together as Canadians. By supporting the initiatives contained in the Speech from the Throne we can make this happen. The upcoming fall economic and fiscal update will detail progress on our plan, which is built on a foundation of sound fiscal management.

Together we have built a country that is prosperous and safe. Now, with strong leadership and a solid plan, we can build an even stronger Canada and offer an even better future for our children.

•(1115)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to take some exception to my colleague's comments. I am always incredulous when I hear Conservatives take credit for all the money that was left by former governments, the good fiscal policies that left the money so they could actually make some of these decisions.

I have a direct question for him on reducing taxes. You mentioned that it is a good deal. Before we hear your comments, you were talking about the thousands of jobs that have been created, the hundreds of thousands. I want to know what tax cuts do for people that do not have jobs.

In my riding of Kenora thousands of jobs have been lost and across northern Ontario tens of thousands of jobs. These people do not have jobs. You can mention in here the softwood lumber deal, but—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member has been here awhile now. He should know he should not be saying "you" this and "you" that. You are supposed to address your remarks through the Chair.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I do need to remind the member and other hon. members here that we do not take lightly the fact that Canadians have lost jobs, but we do take seriously the fact that the unemployment rates in Canada are the lowest they have been in 33 years. As I said before, Canadians are very adaptive. They have gone out and found new jobs. There are job opportunities because of the strong economic growth in this country.

I realize this may not refer specifically to the hon. member's province, but in Quebec alone that province added 70,000 jobs this year. Those are not just part time jobs. Those are real, high paying jobs.

The hon. member asked how tax cuts help Canadians. We cut the GST from 7% to 6%. Every Canadian who spends money benefits from that tax cut. So for anyone to suggest that this tax cut did not help all Canadians is not reflective of the positive decision that was for this government to make. Positive enough with the feedback we have received, we are going to push forward on reducing it to 5% because we realize with this strong economy people are spending money. They want to receive the tax benefits and by reducing it to 5% there is going to be tax reductions for all Canadians.

The Address

• (1120)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no fairness in this throne speech. Ordinary Canadians are working 200 hours more today than nine years ago and two-thirds of Canadians are not benefiting from economic growth. I cannot understand where is the fairness when there is over \$60 billion of corporate tax cuts since 2000 and just last year alone there was a tax cut of \$12.67 billion in corporate tax cuts.

Where is the fairness when corporations such as the big banks are making \$19 billion worth of profit and there is absolutely nothing for ordinary Canadians whether it is for child care, universities, home care, public transit, or for cities like Toronto? Where is the fairness in this throne speech?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member uses some very definitive numbers and let me quote some numbers that would reflect perhaps the opposite of what the hon. member is suggesting.

There is \$3.7 billion to support low and modest income Canadians through the cut in the GST. Those are real numbers. Those are numbers that Canadians paid less in taxes; \$11.7 billion for families with children through the universal child care benefit. Those are real numbers. More than \$7.4 billion for Canada's low income seniors and \$1.4 billion to provide basic social development programs for our first nations.

I fail to see the argument that the hon. member raises. These are real numbers that Canadians can vouch for because they have seen the savings.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to participate in this debate on the Speech from the Throne, which was delivered a week ago today.

The Speech from the Throne is a broad array of platitudes. It is made up of self-congratulatory statements and promises, some of which are encouraging, some of which of course were made before and remain unfulfilled.

The Deputy Speaker: Will you be splitting your time?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Yes, I will. I neglected to mention that. I will be sharing my time with the member for Don Valley East, and I want to thank you for pointing that out to me.

Some of the general ideological thrusts I certainly can agree with. I certainly support some of the statements dealing with the Arctic. The last time I believe I read a statement about this, the direction at that time was to have three or four major military boats in the Arctic and leave it at that. This speech seems to develop on that and take it one step further, talking about development, research, et cetera, which I find a much better direction to follow.

Canadians are going to be disappointed in some of the other areas that they are looking for. With climate change of course, we have more words, but we are dealing with a government that has done absolutely nothing since it got elected. It canceled the Kyoto accord. It removed any reference to it on its web page. It joined the APEC organization, which is dead against Kyoto. It wants to use what it calls aspiration goals, which members know, I know and every Canadian knows, are totally meaningless.

The speech talked about the Afghan mission. I certainly agree Canada has a role and Canada has a future role in that particular part of the world. It is very important but it is my position and our party's position that the combat mission should end in February 2009. We certainly will have other roles and obligations in that particular country. It is time for other NATO countries to put their shoulders to the wheel.

Again, what the government has tried to do here is put it over to a group of five individuals who are told not to consult the public, have no public consultations, but come back with a report in February. In other words, to turn the channel as it has done with climate change.

However, I want to use the limited time available to me today to talk about a statement in the Speech from the Throne that I believe we as parliamentarians should consider. It is very significant to this country, and that is to introduce legislation to place formal limits on the use of the federal spending power, which of course is implicit in the British North America Act. It has been recognized by our courts and of course it has been going on for years and years.

The Government of Canada has to consult with the other 10 provinces and three territories, respect their wishes, their aspirations and their values, but at the end of the day, the Government of Canada has a responsibility for each and every Canadian for the common good. It has to have a pan-Canadian view. It has the responsibility to act on behalf of the country.

Successive governments from various political stripes have developed programs, they have maintained programs, and they have enhanced programs under this particular ambit. Some examples are the Canada Health Act, medicare, employment insurance, old age pension, the old age supplement, the Canada pension plan, the child tax benefit, post-secondary research, the national housing program, infrastructure, and the new deal for the cities. This is just a partial list.

Each one of them was supported by successive governments, enhanced, improved and changed, but each program required a government with a pan-Canadian view.

We are in a large geographical country with a relatively small population. We have to have a shared destiny. We have to have common goals because many of us in this House and many Canadians believe that Canada is stronger than its diverse parts. We have to have programs, policies and initiatives that respond to our values, our sovereignty as a nation, and as a government we have to act in the best interests of the nation.

• (1125)

We have at this juncture a toxic mix of a government that does not believe in a strong Government of Canada and another party that does not believe in Canada. This is an unholy marriage and it should concern all Canadians.

The Address

Many Canadians may ask where this thinking is coming from. It is not coming from Canadians I have talked to. It is not coming from members of the government. People will say that they are proud Ontarians or proud Manitobans but first they will say that they are proud Canadians. Where does this come from? The answer is that it comes from the Prime Minister.

I would suggest that the last time the Prime Minister was elected, he set out his vision for Canada in an open letter to the premier of Alberta. In that letter, he stated that Alberta should build a firewall around itself, that it should withdraw from the Canada pension plan, that it should collect its own personal income taxes, that it should eliminate any association whatsoever with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and that it should ignore whatever provisions there are in the Canada Health Act. In other words, it should break the law, fight the matter in the courts, pay the penalties and allow no federal involvement in health care in that province.

The letter concludes, “take the initiative, to build a firewall around Alberta”.

I assume the letter was addressed to the premier of Alberta, but that same policy, that same line of thinking, would apply to the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, et cetera.

There might be those who are watching this on TV who think I am making this up. I am not. I will post that letter, that vision of Canada, on my website later today for all Canadians to read and analyze and come to their own opinion.

This is not my agenda for Canada. It is not the agenda of those people who sent me here to Ottawa. This is not about standing up for Canada. People are screaming that they want their country back. It is not the position of members of the government party either. This will be an interesting debate in this particular Parliament.

Before we even start the debate, as we discuss the role of the federal government to meet the future challenges of this great country, we should ask ourselves what John A. Macdonald would think. What would Tommy Douglas think? What would his views be on this direction? What would Lester Pearson think? That is going to be a very interesting aspect.

I have put my thoughts on the table on this particular issue. It is my firm belief that to succeed in the future, this country needs a strong federal government, a government that has a pan-Canadian view and a government that acts on behalf of every Canadian. I do hope we have that in the years and decades to come.

• (1130)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's impassioned remarks about Canadian things and un-Canadian things. Apparently he does not believe in questioning how any particular part of the country should be allowed to fit in to the entire framework that is Canada.

He rhymed off some of the things that were mentioned in a letter that the current Prime Minister was one of five authors of in which the offending word was mentioned one time in the entire letter. People will get the impression that it was start to finish, firewall, firewall, firewall. The word was mentioned one time. The member

acts as if he is doing the country a service by tabling this letter, which, of course, has been public knowledge for many years.

An hon. member: It has you worried.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: It does not worry us at all.

Does the member believe that provinces, like Quebec, Alberta, Saskatchewan or any other, should be able to state their place in the country under the terms of the Constitution, which gives them the right to pursue things like health care, policing, pensions and so on, as the province of Quebec has done and as any other province has the right to do under the Constitution? Does he believe those rights should be taken away from the provinces?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the provinces certainly have a role, a duty and an obligation to do these things but there must be a role for the central government.

What would have happened back in the 1950s when health care was being developed if someone had said “no, that is a provincial jurisdiction”? What would have happened when the Canada pension plan was being developed if someone had said “no, that is a provincial jurisdiction”? We would have none of those plans and programs.

My friend references the letter. Yes, it was mentioned once but in the whole letter that was the final conclusion. The whole gist of the letter is that particular province should get out of everything, that it should withdraw from the Canada pension plan, that it should collect its own personal income tax and that it should eliminate any association with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I invite my friend to read the letter where it states that Alberta should ignore the Canada Health Act and fight the matter in the courts. If it then loses in the courts, it should pay the penalty and allow no federal involvement in health care policy in Alberta. After going through this whole hodgepodge of initiatives, which that particular province should do, it should, “take the initiative to build a firewall around Alberta”.

I have a question for my learned friend. Is that his vision of Canada? I do not believe that is the vision of the people in Edmonton who sent him to Ottawa.

• (1135)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, we will ask the questions around here. I do thank my hon. colleague for his response. It is a matter of legitimate debate as to what role the provinces play and what role the federal government plays.

Clearly, and this Prime Minister is no different, there is a strong role, and he has never strayed from that, for the central government in Ottawa. There is also a very strong role to be played in cooperation with that central government in Ottawa by the provinces in determining what is best for those provinces. There is some leeway. There is some overriding federal legislation, such as the Canada Health Act, on which all the provinces need to stay between the ditches.

The Address

Surely my hon. colleague would agree, or not, that the provinces should be in a position to deal with the federal government on, not necessarily an equal footing but a respectful footing, and that their aspirations that apply to their area of the country should be taken into consideration.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the very short answer to that question is yes, there is a legitimate role for the provinces. They need to cooperate and collaborate. The point of what I am saying here is that there is a role for the federal government.

Let us look at the whole list of plans that came forward. All it would take, if someone had the attitude that certain people in this House have right now, which is that the provincial jurisdiction cannot do it, then we would not have medicare, the Canada pension plan, employment insurance, the child tax benefit nor the old age supplement. The list goes on and on.

Yes, there is a role there. Both levels of government need to stop the politics and begin to cooperate, collaborate and act in the best interests of the people they represent.

However, these programs cannot change just to suit the ideological bent of a certain provincial party that is in power in that province. Ottawa must have a strong central government that puts the interests of every Canadian first, that has a pan-Canadian view and is here for the common good.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured, as a member of Her Majesty's official opposition, to speak today on behalf of my constituents of Don Valley East in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Now that I have had the opportunity to review the contents, I am astonished, not by what is actually contained in the speech, but more so by what the speech fails to mention.

As the chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I am shocked by the fact that the throne speech makes absolutely no mention of women or women's programs in spite of the fact that women constitute 52% of the population. This is astonishing given the fact that Persons Day, the day in 1929 when the British privy council office declared that women were persons under the law, fell in the same week as the Speech from the Throne.

I suppose this apparent omission by the government is due to the fact that this past year the Conservatives made history through drastic cuts to the Status of Women, including the closure of regional offices, staff layoffs and the elimination of advocacy from the mandate of the organization.

Canadians are also surprised that the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was somehow overlooked in the throne speech as well.

Another glaring omission is any mention of relief for the estimated one million Canadian children who live in poverty and an estimated half million impoverished seniors, many of whom are women.

I can assure all members and my constituents that a plan to fight poverty will be at the heart of any future Liberal agenda, as it always has been in the past.

What of the aboriginal Canadians where poverty is rampant in communities across the country? The Speech from the Throne does contain a decision to finally offer an apology to the victims of the residential schools program but it in no way discharges the Conservative government from its obligation to implement the Kelowna accord.

By ignoring the aboriginal people, the Conservatives are refusing to provide desperately needed measures in health, education and infrastructure as promised in the accord. Instead, the Conservatives see it far more fit to make "the serious problem of auto theft" a national priority.

On the subject of crime bills, Canadians are wondering why the Conservatives are attempting to blame the opposition for holding up legislation when it was the Prime Minister who sabotaged his own agenda when he prorogued Parliament. The fact is that for more than a year now the Liberals have offered repeatedly to fast track as much as 70% of all the justice measures that the Prime Minister brought to Parliament.

Indeed, when the Prime Minister decided to prorogue Parliament and kill all five of the original justice bills, four of them had passed through the House of Commons and were awaiting approval by the Senate. In fact, those bills would have been law by now if it were not for the partisan games that we are currently witnessing.

This is just a lame attempt by the Conservatives to force an unwanted federal election on Canadians. Who pays the price as a result of this political brinkmanship? Ultimately, it is ordinary Canadians who will pay the price while the Prime Minister dithers and wastes another 18 months with no measurable results.

In order for Parliament to work, the Prime Minister must learn to work with parliamentarians.

On the subject of the economy, the throne speech mentions tax cuts but, after almost two years, the Conservatives new government has come up short on tax relief.

● (1140)

While there has been a 1% reduction in the GST, many leading economists have warned the Prime Minister that the reduction in consumption tax does little to stimulate the economy. Nor does it allow Canadians to keep their hard-earned cash. In fact, the first budget of Canada's new government introduced a tax increase for those who earned the least in our society. Low income Canadians saw their personal tax rate increase from 15% to 15.5% in budget 2006. It is unfair to low-income Canadians to pay for a reduction of the GST when it is far more efficient to reduce income taxes at source and give Canadians a real tax break.

Last week, the leader of the official opposition addressed the Economic Club of Toronto on the subject of how to generate more investment, improve living standards and ensure good jobs for ourselves and for our children. Part of the plan is to continue to reduce corporate income tax.

The Address

Under the previous Liberal government, the corporate tax rate was lowered from 28% to 19%. As a result of these tax reductions, companies have more capital to reinvest in the Canadian economy and ultimately offer high quality jobs to Canadians. Unfortunately, the Conservative government's tax record has been, to say the least, sadly lacking thus far.

The finance minister's first blunder was the income trust fiasco, when the Conservatives deliberately broke their promise to Canadian investors, many of them being seniors, who saw more than \$25 billion in retirement savings go down the drain overnight.

The new government's next blunder, which was universally denounced as the worst tax policy announcement in 35 years, was to end interest deductibility and therefore deny Canadian companies a competitive edge in the global economy.

When the Conservatives were first elected, they promised to usher in a new era of accountability and transparency into government. Indeed, the throne speech declared that Canada's new government was clean, this despite the fact that the Conservative Party is under investigation by the Ontario Provincial Police, the Commissioner of Elections and the federal Privacy Commissioner.

The Privacy Commissioner has launched an inquiry into whether the Prime Minister violated the privacy of Canadians by compiling a mailing list based on the ethnic and religious background of Jewish communities and other so-called target groups.

The Commissioner of Elections is looking into an alleged multi-million dollar sham where the Conservative Party attempted to cleverly circumvent electoral laws by channelling funding for radio and television ads through at least 66 local candidates in the 2006 election.

The Ontario Provincial Police is investigating the Prime Minister's inner circle concerning allegations that an Ottawa candidate for mayor was asked to leave the race in exchange for a federal appoint.

What of transparency in government?

It has now been disclosed that the current Conservative government is far more secretive than any previous government. Not only are access to information requests taking longer to be released, they are far more likely to be censored and to have information withheld. Moreover, many requests have to be vetted by the Privy Council Office, the bureaucratic office of the Prime Minister.

Canadians would like to know what this has to do with transparency and democratic government.

Certainly the people of Nova Scotia are questioning what is happening in the constituency of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, where the entire Conservative riding association has been suspended for daring to oppose the Prime Minister. They democratically elected a candidate of their choice, a candidate who is currently a distinguished member of the House. He was kicked out of the caucus for simply defending his province in Confederation.

This turn of events is not surprising, considering the Prime Minister, after 18 months, has yet to call a first ministers meeting and address provincial grievances head on.

In closing, once again I thank my constituents of Don Valley East for electing me to be their representative. I intend to work hard on their behalf and I intend to do everything I can to make this Parliament work. That is, after all, what Canadians elected us to do.

• (1145)

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the record. Oftentimes we are faced with some inaccuracies coming from the other side.

I note that the funding for Status of Women was increased by 42%, bringing it to its highest level ever, at \$15.3 million in the last budget, and the member voted against this.

My question has to do with taxes. I want to also point out that I think most Canadians obviously support a reduction in the GST, which is something that maybe the Liberals do not understand. We have had many Liberal members who have publicly stated that they would raise the GST if they came back into power.

Does the member agree with the Liberal approach to the GST? If so, how much would she raise the GST by and how quickly would she do it?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government never lets truth stand in its way. In its first budget the Conservatives cut \$15 million from the Status of Women. When the women's groups started challenging them, they reinvested that \$15 million, so it zeroes out. They have not done any 42% increase.

In terms of the GST, all economists, anybody who has any common sense in economics, say that the \$5 billion is misspent. That lack of revenue could have been better utilized in social spending.

The Conservatives need to learn economics 101, which is that consumption taxes are not important. We have to eliminate poverty through reduction of income taxes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in her conclusion, my colleague touches on the issue of poverty, about which I would like to hear more from her.

In the throne speech, the Conservative government has chosen a so-called offensive strategy in matters of defence, crime and public safety and security. The vocabulary can be found in this document.

The government uses an attack approach and goes full steam ahead with everything connected to its ideology. However, when it is a matter of—to use one of its expressions—addressing poverty, the silence is resounding. And yet an entire segment of our society—comprised of youth, families and the elderly—is affected.

Thus, I would like to hear more about this from my colleague, whom I thank for her speech.

The Address

• (1150)

[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting question. As the chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we have heard from poverty groups. Poverty affects mostly women, especially women who are single and divorced and who have children.

In terms of addressing poverty, they have overwhelmingly told us that they need a change, a reduction in income taxes. Instead of reducing income taxes, the Conservative government increased it from 15% to 15.5%.

In terms of child care spaces, the Conservatives created no child care spaces. The \$100 baby bonus gave nothing to families struggling to make ends meet.

I agree with the hon. member that the attack on crime is really smoke and mirrors compared to what should be done for poverty.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Don Valley East for an excellent speech.

I want to point out that when we consider we have an aging population, where in a few years the ratio between workers and seniors will drop from five to one to three to one, how can the Speech from the Throne be silent on the very important issue of immigration? Immigrants represents the greatest hope to fill labour shortages in the country.

Finally, is the reaction to the Speech from the Throne shared by the residents of Don Valley East? In my area the residents of Vaughan are asking how a nation improves its standard of living and quality of life by reducing investment in people, workers, seniors, students, children and families, and how does a G-7 nation improve its quality of life by cutting in areas like research and development, education and the environment?

The citizens of Vaughan have rejected the Conservative vision of the country. Has the hon. member found the same thing in her riding?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right that the Speech from the Throne is missing in specifics in a lot of areas. I have been on television and have talked to my constituents. They find that the government has no vision whatsoever. How do we take the country from here to the 21st and 22nd century?

The Conservatives have nothing for research and development. Despite the fact that the Canadian Foundation of Innovation received its first funding from the Liberal government for \$800 million, the Conservative government cut it to \$500 million.

It is very important to note that this is a visionless government, but we will have to work and fight to get there.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to speak to the throne speech. I will be sharing my time this morning with the member for Simcoe—Grey.

When I was a younger man, as a public servant in British Columbia, the premier of the day had an expression which I find has been very useful to me over time and is useful again today. He used to say, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there".

The throne speech is a good example of a document with leadership provided by the Prime Minister and the government. It shows Canadians and parliamentarians where we want to go.

Concerning the reference to the North Star, as members know, the North Star is a navigational beacon that helps navigators, who are faced with turbulent waters or confusing routes, with a variety of choices. They always come back to that North Star, that navigational beacon, to ensure they are always ultimately headed in the right direction.

If we think about the North Star in the context of the throne speech context, there are five points to a star. These correspond to the five priorities articulated in the throne speech.

I will focus on the economic prosperity priority, economic management, in my comments.

When we look at the Canadian economy and address the issue of Canada's prosperity, and we have had a lot of it over the last 10 or 15 years, indeed over the last many decades, we have to recognize that Canada is a small trading economy. By that I mean Canada's population is about 34 million people spread over a varied and huge land mass, close to 10 million square kilometres of land, the second largest land mass, nationally speaking, in the world. We can compare that with the state of California which has 37 million in one state.

Therefore, we are a country where our prosperity has been fundamentally driven by international trade. Without liberalized and open trade, Canadians would be much poorer. In fact, we would be a marginal economic society today without trade and commerce.

When we look at the global economy and what is going on in the world, the whole issue of trade, the way we trade and what drives trade and competitiveness has changed fundamentally with changes in the global economy. People talk about globalization.

In his book Thomas Friedman refers to the world as being flat. It is a world where it is no longer good enough to sit back in Canada, produce here and sell abroad. We have to face the fact that in the world economy today we are dealing in an economy of global value and global supply chains. We are in an economy where anyone in any part of the world is a potential customer, supplier and competitor.

We are in a world today where if one wants to be competitive, one has to be prepared to import technology. Over 95% of the technologies developed in the world are not Canadian. We have to reach out to the world economy to get them.

We are in a world where if one wants to be a competitive supplier in the global economy, one has to recognize that production, distribution, marketing, manufacturing, research may all have to be situated in different places around the world. That is not to say that Canada cannot have a very powerful economic base here. We absolutely can, but we have to recognize that we are competing in a global economy. There is nowhere to hide.

The Address

China is here to stay as is India, Brazil and Russia. There are many emerging economic dynamos in the world economy and we will have step up and compete with those economies as we go forward.

• (1155)

That is why the throne speech refers to a global commerce strategy. The government is developing a global commerce strategy. It is a strategy that changes the way we think about international trade and investment. It is a strategy that basically looks at trade in the world as dominated by global supply chains, global value chains and networks, whatever one chooses to call them.

In that kind of world, the objective of a global commerce strategy has to be to ensure that Canadians and Canadian companies get as high up in those value chains as they can possibly be. Ideally, we want to be driving those supply chains on a global basis, but at a minimum, we want Canadians and Canadian companies to be high up in those chains.

That takes a different approach to trade. It is no longer good enough to go on trade missions to try to sign contracts for sales here and there. Global competitiveness in this economy requires that Canadian companies invest abroad, that we bring foreign investment into Canada and that we import, because a lot of imports are in fact critical inputs into Canadian production and ultimately into Canadian exports and wealth creation.

We have to take a very different approach to global commerce today, but the goal is to get high up in the global value chains. The question is what are the tools that we have to do this and how do we array those tools in a cohesive way, in a way that knits them together in a self-reinforcing, comprehensive and effective trade strategy? That is what we are doing with global commerce.

First, we are looking at the negotiated legal framework agreements that facilitate global trade for Canadian companies, such as free trade agreements and foreign investment promotion and protection agreements. We are looking at bilateral trade agreements. We are looking at multilateral trade agreements. We are looking at air bilaterals. We are looking at all of the framework policies that we have to negotiate with other countries to create a level and attractive playing field for Canadian companies.

Second, the frameworks do nothing by themselves. There has to be a globally competitive transportation and logistics system. The throne speech focuses on gateways and corridors for trade. The Asia-Pacific gateway initiative is a good example of a transportation and logistics system that is going to transform Canada's and indeed North America's ability to compete in the global economy of today.

There is nothing that will do more for northern Canada, whether we are talking about the northern Prairies, the territories or the Arctic, for the creation of wealth and prosperity than the Asia-Pacific gateway initiative, particularly the port of Prince Rupert and the whole transportation and logistics corridor through Prince Rupert, across Canada and up into Canada's north.

The third piece of our strategy is to provide direct services and resources. Whether it is Export Development Canada, the Canadian Commercial Corporation or our trade and consular service, we are increasing the tools that we have to directly support Canadian

companies that are engaged in international commerce. We are expanding our presence.

When we look at the regional focus of our global commerce strategy, we begin with the North American platform, as we call it. The North American platform basically refers to NAFTA. The North American economy is an economy of 400 million people. That is a huge market. It is one of the most dynamic, technologically rich economies in the world. It has enormous sources of capital. It is an opportunity for Canadian companies to participate in a major economy which is broader and deeper than Canada's and to build our competitive strength on the basis of the North American platform.

We have given top priority to ensuring that the North American platform is strengthened. Whether it is a security prosperity initiative, improvements under NAFTA, or a variety of other initiatives relating to improving the flow of goods and services and people within North America, the platform is critical.

• (1200)

Going from the North American platform, we are giving top priority to the Americas. The Prime Minister has given top priority to the Americas. We are negotiating free trade agreements with a number of countries in the Americas. Then when we look across the Pacific, we are doing an enormous amount of work to develop trade agreements, investment agreements, technology cooperation agreements with countries in the Asia Pacific region. We are doing the same on the Atlantic side. We have just signed an agreement with the EFTA countries and we are intensifying our work with the European Union.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his speech. Of course, we will not agree on some issues related to the economic plan of the government, particularly its lack of a proper level of investment as it relates to human resources development.

The minister did touch upon an issue which is extremely important and that is Canada's population. As the minister knows, we are going to see a decline in the ratio of workers to seniors from five to one to three to one. The minister would understand the implications that would have in Canada's economic capacity to be productive.

What is the long term view of the government as it relates to the issue of immigration? I happen to think that we have not maximized the human resources potential of individual Canadians who can build bridges to other countries. Would the minister favour increasing immigration levels in this country as well as increasing immigration settlement funding?

• (1205)

Hon. David Emerson: Mr. Speaker, this government's fundamental approach to immigration is actually consistent with the premise to the hon. member's question. We recognize that we have human assets, many of whom come from China, India and other countries around the world where we are attempting to develop deeper and stronger trade and investment and other international relationships.

The Address

First off, we do believe very strongly that we have to do better than governments have done in the past to take advantage of our human resource assets which are multicultural in nature. Second, the government has put in place and will continue to implement an agency to assist with the recognition of foreign credentials. Many of our ethnic communities are highly trained and could contribute very substantially economically, but they have not had their credentials recognized. This government is committed to doing that both with resources and the way we organize—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke about the economy and wealth. He even referred to the North Star, a reference used in the conclusion of the throne speech, to toot his own horn. We were told that:

Like the North Star, Canada has been a guide to other nations—

After congratulating himself, could the minister tell us why the Conservative government ignores and neglects an entire segment of the population and the very sad, but true, reality of poverty? When will the government follow the light of this North Star and tackle poverty?

[*English*]

Hon. David Emerson: Mr. Speaker, the reality is this government has a focus on homelessness. It has a focus on poverty.

When we look at the Canadian economy, the potential for growth, the potential in the north, the potential in communities which have been at the margins of the Canadian economy for decades and decades and sometimes throughout our history, we are entering an era, thanks to the northern focused policies in particular of this government, where many, many Canadians are going to have opportunities they could not have dreamed of 10 or 20 years ago. They are going to have opportunities to participate in wealth creation, to benefit from the education system, to have jobs which are permanent and sustainable, to learn technologies, to start to participate in the global marketplace.

We are going to see the rising tide of the Canadian economy raising all boats, including the boats of those who have been less fortunate up to now.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate on the Speech from the Throne.

A little over a year and a half ago Canadians made a choice. It was a choice to end the reign of a tired, scandal plagued and directionless Liberal government. Canadians seized the opportunity to elect a government with clear goals, focused determination and a willingness to make tough but very necessary decisions.

Our government is achieving real results. Our government is being accountable to the people. We are putting the needs of individuals, families, workers and seniors first.

Canadians elected a Conservative government with a bold new vision for Canada, a government that is continually aspiring to further growth and greater prosperity for the benefit of all Canadians. At the centre of this vision is our long term economic plan called Advantage Canada. It is a plan to give Canada and Canadians the key advantages to be able to compete effectively and attract new growth and investment.

Advantage Canada focuses on creating five key advantages: a tax advantage, reducing taxes for all Canadians and establishing the lowest tax rate on new business investment in the G-7; a fiscal advantage, eliminating Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation; an infrastructure advantage, building modern, world-class infrastructure that promotes economic growth, a clean environment and international competitiveness; a knowledge advantage, creating the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world; and an entrepreneurial advantage, reducing unnecessary regulation and red tape, and increasing competition in the Canadian marketplace.

This is an ambitious, forward thinking plan. It is, as Thomas d'Aquino of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives remarked, a strategy that will "enable Canadians to take on the world and win".

Advantage Canada was laid out before the Canadian people last fall. Since then we have not let this plan collect dust on a shelf. Canadians elected a government that would act and not deliberate ad nauseam. We have begun taking concrete action to create the advantages to build a strong economy for today and for tomorrow.

Over the past 20 months, we have been creating an environment for further investment by reducing taxes significantly for individuals, families and business. It is a total of \$41 billion in reduction of taxes over three years.

We are paying down the national mortgage by an amount equivalent to \$1,142 for each man, woman and child in Canada. In fact, in September the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance announced an additional debt payment of \$14.2 billion for 2006-07. This moves the federal debt to GDP ratio to its lowest level in a quarter century.

We are dedicating all of the interest savings from the shrinking federal debt to further reduce personal income taxes as part of our tax back guarantee. To date, we have provided Canadians with over \$1.5 billion in annual personal income tax relief.

We are limiting the growth on spending. We are balancing the books and improving our environment with a plan that is not only responsible but is achievable. After years of debate we have also restored fiscal balance in Canada.

The Address

While advantage Canada is the road map guiding our way, the Speech from the Throne gets us closer to our destination. The Speech from the Throne outlined five core priorities for this session: strengthening Canada's sovereignty and place in the world; strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions; providing effective economic leadership for a prosperous future; tackling crime and strengthening the security of Canadians; and improving the environment and health for all Canadians.

These priorities do not respond to the needs of politicians and bureaucrats in Ottawa. These priorities were not imagined through a top-down, paternalistic approach. Those of course are the hallmarks of a Liberal government.

Responding to and acting on the needs of everyday Canadians, these are the hallmarks of a Conservative government. We are putting Canadians and their families first. We are building a proud legacy of tax relief by committing to broad base tax reductions for all Canadians. We are giving all Canadians real choice in child care through the universal child care benefit. We are working to ensure Canadians get the medical care they need faster. We are making historic investments in infrastructure and post-secondary education. We are creating safer neighbourhoods through tough new legislation on crime.

• (1210)

These are all issues that matter to everyday Canadians and we are taking real action to tackle these issues. That is what Canadians want: a government that responds to their needs and gets the job done. This government understands that.

The opposition, especially the Liberal Party of Canada, does not understand that. In government, the last Liberal leader, the member for LaSalle—Émard, was routinely derided for his lack of direction. In opposition, the current Liberal leader, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, has carried on this legacy, waffling on issue to issue to such a degree that even some of his Liberal colleagues have openly criticized him. I raise this not simply as partisan rhetoric, but to contrast our decisive leadership with that of the Liberals. We do not waffle and dither. We get the job done.

We are getting the job done on cutting taxes, but taxes in Canada are still too high. That is why, as I mentioned earlier, the Speech from the Throne made a commitment of further broad based tax relief for individuals, businesses, and families. This, in addition to a further cut in the GST, is something that constituents in my riding of Simcoe—Grey cannot praise enough.

Further tax cuts will help make a strong Canadian economy even stronger. Indeed, since we took office, over half a million new jobs have been created. Even better news is that not only is the economy is creating a lot of jobs, but it is creating good, high paying jobs as well.

Quoting from a July 2007 CIBC World Markets report, I note, "The good news is that the Canadian economy created almost 200,000 new jobs in the first 6 months of 2007". In even better news, the quality of those jobs is on the rise and, states the report, "the combination of rising employment and improving quality is a sure recipe for rising personal income".

The significance of such employment numbers should not be minimized. As Eleni Bakopanos, former Liberal MP and now new chief adviser to the present Liberal leader, once noted in this very House, "The best economic and social program is job creation".

We believe in the value of work, but we acknowledge that some people need support to succeed in the labour market. For many low income Canadians, taking a job can mean being financially worse off. Some individuals who receive social assistance benefits often lose in-kind benefits such as subsidized housing if they get a job.

Having had eight and a half years at the provincial level working as a political staffer and having spent a great deal of time in constituency work, I can relate and I can recall this as an issue. Of course our Minister of Finance also worked provincially, and I am so pleased to see that this is why he has addressed this issue. That is why we are implementing the working income tax benefit. This new benefit will make working more profitable for low income Canadians, helping them over the so-called welfare wall.

We have also acted to support low income Canadians on other fronts. We have provided \$1.4 billion in funding to increase the affordable housing supply. We launched the nearly \$270 million homelessness partnering strategy to help homeless and at-risk individuals build a better future.

Canadians made a choice a year and a half ago. They chose a government with goals and a vision responding to their needs. We have delivered results. We have put the needs of everyday families first. To quote a recent *Maclean's* editorial, "It's been a long time since we've had a prime minister so closely attuned to the interests and priorities of the Canadian main street".

Yet there is still work to be done, with opportunities and challenges ahead, but Canadians can rest assured that this Conservative government will provide the leadership needed to ensure a strong and secure economic future for Canada.

• (1215)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not get into comments which might be fairly highly partisan.

However, in the minister's capacity with respect to Canadians abroad, I wonder if she would undertake to apprise this House of the latest developments with respect to Brenda Martin, a Canadian who has been incarcerated for some time in Mexico. It is a very complex case. We have now learned that she is no longer able to make collect calls to Canada. Her situation appears to be desperate, to say the least.

I would like to find out from the minister if she will undertake to this House to ensure that our consular officials are attending to Ms. Martin's situation. We had every expectation that she might be released within the next few weeks, but it turns out that this case has been put back again.

The Address

While the minister will probably respond by saying that we do not get involved in judicial matters within another country, I am looking to ensure that from a consular perspective—I will not bore the minister with all the details because I think she knows them—she will undertake to apprise herself of the latest developments with respect to Ms. Martin's case, and I hope there will be absolutely no misunderstanding with Mexican authorities as to how important this case is for Canadians and, I trust, for her office.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I want to let the member know that I honestly do look forward to working very closely with him on a number of consular cases where Canadians are in difficult situations abroad.

I think the hon. member knows very well, as he did stand in my shoes—and I can pull out *Hansard*, media reports, correspondence and such—that he himself very often in the past has said two very important things, one being that I am bound by the Privacy Act with respect to speaking in detail about a case. I can assure him that on any consular case I will do my ultimate, my very best, to work with our consular officials to ensure that every Canadian is being provided the consular services he or she is entitled to.

I am very aware that he has a keen interest in this case. I will continue to follow up with him. However, I do also want to point out one more thing with respect to consular services. He made a comment about getting involved in the judicial system. Again, I have endless quotes and endless pieces of correspondence in which he has said that very thing himself: we do not have the authority to intervene in the judicial system in another country.

• (1220)

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I certainly did not want to give the impression to the hon. minister that I was misquoted. It appears that she may not have heard me correctly. I would urge her to look at the blues with respect to what I did say. While we cannot get involved in the judicial matters of another country, we do have a consular perspective, and I do understand that the minister may have mistaken what I said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am not sure that that is a point of order. We will move on to questions and comments. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question actually has to do with housing. Yesterday the UN special rapporteur on adequate housing talked about Canada's track record on housing and homelessness. He talked about how shocking it was in a country as prosperous as ours to see housing and homelessness in a state of crisis. His report talked about a number of factors, but there were two specific things I would like the member to address.

First, he said that he was “disturbed to see the devastating impact of the paternalism that marks federal and provincial government legislation, policies and budgetary allocations for aboriginal people on and off reserve”.

Second, he talked about the fact of the lack of funding to non-government organizations that advocate on behalf of first nations, women and other minority groups for adequate housing. These organizations are seriously underfunded in Canada. He said that it undermines our democratic process when we do not have NGOs that

can actually advocate in a democratic way for people who are perhaps facing homelessness and the housing crisis. I wonder if the member could address those two questions.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, with respect to issues for our natives in this country, we do have a new minister who is very dedicated to the file and of course we have seen some incredible progress from the former minister on that issue.

What is really important here is that we can have a debate in the House and talk about how we can improve situations, but I think it would be nice just every once in a while if the opposition were able to recognize some of the support the federal government does give to low income Canadians. I happen to have a list of that support with me and I would not mind going over it.

Budget 2007 proposed significant benefits for low income Canadians. It included \$550 million annually through the working income tax benefit to make work more rewarding for more than 1.2 million individual Canadians. There was also a working families tax plan that will remove 230,000 low income taxpayers from the tax rolls. That is a substantial number. I have just one more, which is the introduction of a new registered disability savings plan program to improve the financial security and the well-being of children with severe disabilities. This is just part of what we are doing.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

I really was looking forward to the government's throne speech. The government said when it prorogued the House that it would chart a new course for this country. I expected it to live up to those words. The government prorogued this House. That is a very serious act. That turned back the clock on many bills and motions that had been worked on for months by the members of this House.

I thought that since the government took this step, it would truly have a new direction, a new course, but I was disappointed. Once again the Conservative government looked in the rear-view mirror. It missed an opportunity. It is taking Canada in the wrong direction, the wrong direction on climate change and the wrong direction for seniors, for children, for first nations and for ordinary Canadian families.

The biggest disappointment was the government's complete and utter failure to address climate change. Last spring, my colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, worked hard in an all party committee to improve Bill C-30, the clean air and climate change act, so that Canada could begin to move in the right direction.

The Address

All parties agreed that Bill C-30 was going to be a good start, but the government is not even bringing it back. In fact, it is bringing back only a small portion of it even though the majority of the House agreed on the changes to Bill C-30. What arrogance. What contempt for this House the government has. Once again it has broken the trust of ordinary Canadians.

I and many others from my riding and across the country are disappointed in the government's stance on the environment because we are running out of time. Ordinary Canadians are doing their part. They are changing their light bulbs. They are conserving water. They are converting to hybrid cars. However, no matter how many of us change our light bulbs, if the government does not change course all our efforts will be futile.

The government could have made a big difference if it had implemented hard caps on large carbon emitters. That would go a long way to meeting our emission targets. It decided to go with intensity based measures instead. With the expansion of the oil sands looming on the horizon, intensity targets will do nothing to reduce Canada's emissions. When we produce more oil from the oil sands, we also will be producing more greenhouse gases.

Another opportunity was missed by the government when it came to addressing the needs of seniors. My colleague, the member for Hamilton Mountain, introduced the seniors charter last year. It was debated and passed by the House, but the government has never enacted it. The government had an opportunity in this throne speech to implement the priorities of the charter, including primary care, long term care, home care and free pharmacare and dental care. These things would all enhance the quality of life for seniors.

However, once again the government has let seniors and all Canadians down. It is another broken promise. The government said it would act on what was passed by the majority of this House.

When it comes to hope and fairness for ordinary Canadians, the government has done nothing on the issue of affordable housing and homelessness. We have just seen \$14 billion in federal surplus. The government has announced that this year's surplus will be twice what it had anticipated. Quelle surprise.

With all that extra money in the coffers and with all the need for housing in my communities, and in fact with nearly two million Canadians across this country who do not have what is deemed to be acceptable housing, why did the government not make it a priority to invest in a national housing strategy?

I have been to many first nations communities in my riding. The housing situation there is even worse. For example, in Port Hardy, the Gwa'Sala-Nakwaxda'xw are in dire need of acceptable shelter. They live in mouldy homes. Sometimes as many as 25 people are living in one house and three families live together in a home built for single family occupation. These are deplorable conditions and they need to be addressed immediately.

• (1225)

The same goes for child care. I have been talking with parents and child care workers in my riding from Port McNeill to Courtenay, and they are telling me that there is a crisis. Failure on the part of the government to address the crisis has resulted in longer wait times for child care space and increasing costs. There is up to a two years wait

for a space. That means we have to register our child before it is even born.

Child care centres need reliable, long term funding to provide the kind of access that parents and their children are looking for. That is why the NDP proposed the child care act that will soon be voted on at third reading. That is the kind of solution today's families are looking for, real commitments to child care in this country.

I would like to address two things that are crucial to Vancouver Island North, two things the government mentioned in its throne speech that it would protect. It said it would stand up for forestry and fishing, but on these two files, the government has a very bad track record.

The Conservatives sold out forestry communities and forestry workers in my riding and across this country when they signed the sellout softwood agreement. Because of that agreement, it is not profitable for companies to mill logs in Canada, so they ship raw logs to the U.S. or abroad and we get to buy them back as finished lumber.

The irony is not lost on the constituents of Vancouver Island North. Our communities are surrounded by forests, yet lumber mills are closing from B.C. to Atlantic Canada as more and more raw logs and jobs leave this country. Pulp and paper mills and fibre mills are having a hard time getting fibre because there are very few sawmills left to provide it.

I introduced Motion No. 301 to curtail raw log exports and to encourage value added and manufacturing right here in Canada. The natural resources minister said he recognized that something needed to be done about the situation that is killing our resource based communities, but again, the government has failed to act. I do not call that standing up for an industry, for workers or for our communities.

The other issue that I would like to mention is that the Conservatives said they would stand up for the fishing industry, but again, they are going in the wrong direction. Last spring, they introduced Bill C-45, a new fisheries act, without consultation with fishermen, first nations or anyone from our communities. That bill has gone now because of prorogation, but why did they bring it forward in the first place? No one wanted it.

They also said that they would decentralize the DFO and have more decision making on the coasts of this country. After almost two years there has been no movement on this promise. Instead, I have to ask the government if they are trying to kill our west coast fisheries.

The Address

Just a few weeks ago an order came down from on high to cut the Chinook egg take for the entire west coast. When asked why, the Conservatives said it was due to a lack of funds, but I remember last year when I asked the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans about a budget cut, I was told that it had not been cut, so there should have been lots of money there.

Thankfully, the decision to cut this egg take and to kill the Chinook fishery was turned around, but a decision like that should never have been made in the first place.

Also, a recent barge spill in my riding in Robson Bight is causing grave concerns because the fuel tank and vehicles are on the bottom of the ocean continuing to leak oil and diesel to the surface. Environmental groups, local businesses, students and concerned people from around the world donated money to carry out an investigation. We called on the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to also carry out an investigation, but the ministry waited a full two months and finally, after the environmental organizations announced that they would do carry out an investigation, the government was embarrassed and had to come forward and say it would do one too. It finally did the right thing.

These oil spills are having a devastating effect on the waters and on the salmon in the Strait of Georgia. Salmon are the canary in the coal mines of our oceans. They feed whales and people, and are a source of cultural and ceremonial significance to first nations of B.C. The health of salmon is important to the west coast and we are in danger of losing them.

Enhancement must be increased. Monitoring of sport and commercial fishing must be increased if we are to have a clear picture of what is going on off our coast.

•(1230)

There are many reasons not to support the direction in which the government is going. I am speaking for the thousands of Canadians in my riding who oppose this direction. I and they have little confidence—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Peterborough.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what the hon. member was saying and I cannot help but think that she is missing the point.

I would like to address a number of things, but I recognize that my time is limited so I will go back to what she said on the environment. She said regular Canadians are cleaning up, they are changing their light bulbs, changing cars that they are driving and they are taking transit. Is that not exactly what the government has been encouraging? Is she not missing the point? Did the government not take the initiative to encourage a change from incandescent bulbs to the new energy efficient bulbs?

I spoke to the Vancouver Transit Authority. Its transit pass sales were up 40% after the measures that the government took to encourage people to buy transit passes. The member misses the point.

There are ecotrust transfers to the provinces. In my own home province of Ontario we are going to start piping in clean hydro

electric power to replace coal-fired energy. These are massive advances on the environment. It is a shame the member misses the point and does not see it. I would like to know if she would acknowledge these advances on the environment.

•(1235)

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his questions, but I think he missed the point on a whole lot of areas.

I said that ordinary Canadians are doing their part. They are trying really hard because they understand how critical it is to save the environment and they are looking for leadership from their government and they are not finding it.

The ecoenergy program that the government put forward is a disaster. People are writing to me to tell me they have tried to get funding but that they cannot get it, so many things are not covered, things that would actually work such as solar panels. It is one thing that is not covered.

The government needs to take action on large final emitters. We can do everything such as change light bulbs, cars and all kinds of things, but if the government does not introduce hard caps on large emitters, it is all for not. It will not make any difference.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, my hon. colleague mentioned the softwood lumber agreement. As we all know, the Bloc Québécois has long criticized the government's inaction in this file. We were calling for, among other things, loan guarantees to allow businesses to get by until we could resolve all the problems with the Americans, using every available legal recourse against the United States. The government refused to act and, in the end, concluded this terrible agreement, which is a sellout.

However, the companies were in such a difficult situation that everyone in Quebec was asking their member to support the agreement. When I say everyone, I mean employers, employees, unions and the entire industry. Naturally, since the Bloc Québécois represents Quebecers, we supported the agreement. The NDP did not support it, which I can understand, given that, at the time, that party had no elected members in Quebec and does not claim to represent Quebecers.

Thus, I would like to know the following. Now that the NDP has a member in Quebec, the next time such a situation arises, when the party must choose between defending the interests of people outside Quebec or the interests of Quebecers, what will it do? Will it continue to turn a deaf ear to the people of Quebec? Or will it change its stance? For instance, is the party going to allow its member in Quebec to vote in favour of something that is unanimously called for in Quebec, even if it goes against the official party line?

The Address

[English]

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement has devastated the industry in Vancouver Island North and like I said, the irony is not lost on people in my riding. We see truckload after truckload of raw logs leaving our forest dependent communities to be milled elsewhere. That is all a direct result of the deal that was made with the U.S. It has basically sold out our industry and communities.

It is tragic. Thousands and thousands of jobs have been lost and now we are seeing the effects across the country. In Atlantic Canada there are mills closing. My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst was showing me pictures of trains of logs that are leaving his communities and that is costing thousands and thousands of jobs there.

I have to ask once again, why is the government not standing up for our communities and jobs for Canadians? We should be protecting jobs for Canadians.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to take part in this debate. It is a privilege for me to rise in the House today to reply to the Conservative government's throne speech.

I want to re-emphasize that our caucus, unlike others, is united in our belief that the throne speech shows clearly that the Conservative government is planning on taking Canada further in the wrong direction.

I am part of a party that knows what it believes and unlike some other members of the House, we will not be afraid to stand up for the principles we share with hard-working Canadians.

I will speak a little later about some of the specifics of the speech, but I want for a moment to reflect on what is not in the throne speech. What is not in the speech is almost as telling about the Conservative vision for Canada as what is in it.

Even though one of the Conservatives' key promises in the last election was for health care and reducing wait times the throne speech makes no mention of improving wait times. In fact, the throne speech does not even mention the words "health care" or "medicare", not even once.

The throne speech also does not speak about education or training. The words "university students" and "post-secondary education" never even appear in the throne speech. In fact, the only reference to education in universities and colleges at all is to say that families are worrying about the escalating cost.

Apparently, if one is a student or a parent looking to save for post-secondary education, one cannot depend on the Conservatives to deliver. It is not part of their vision.

Development workers we are asked to honour by voting in favour of a mission in Afghanistan that we know a majority of Canadians do not support. Other workers mentioned are those in Canada's traditional industries, like manufacturing industries and steel. Steel is still a major employer and economic driver in my community. I guess apparently these industries can rest easy. At least they are mentioned in the Conservative vision for Canada.

How workers in these industries who are supposed to be comforted by the fact that for nearly two years in power absolutely nothing concrete has been done to plan for the future of these industries is actually beyond me.

At least manufacturing workers are in the vision for the future. No other workers are mentioned. The entire topic of jobs alone is mentioned only once in the entire throne speech.

Afghanistan gets six mentions, the military three, the same for the Canadian Forces, but jobs and the Conservative vision of this country is worth only one single mention.

The throne speech also does not speak about inclusion or multiculturalism. Those words are not in the speech because of a lack of vision that the Conservatives have in these particular area. The only time women are even mentioned in the throne speech is in the context of men and women in uniform.

I could go on but during this last week Canadians are beginning to express the concerns the NDP have expressed for months in the House and in communities across the country. They are beginning to say as we have that the government must change direction. Canadians see Canada at war. Canadians see our climate in crisis and that middle class families are falling further and further behind.

This was the time for the federal government to show leadership. This was the time for the Conservative government to show all Canadians that its vision includes their needs, their hopes and their desires for a better future. Sadly in the eyes of many it did not do it. The Conservative government has proven once again that it simply cannot get the job done.

Our NDP members listened very carefully to the throne speech and the subsequent debate, and we were somewhat surprised to hear that the Prime Minister is now open to the NDP proposal of long standing that the Senate should be abolished. That is a long ways from the man who put an unelected Senator in charge of signing cheques for our people's money.

The promised apology in the Speech from the Throne to Canada's first nations for the terrible injustices and abuses in the residential school system is possibly the only bright spot. An actual apology might have been better. It is unclear why Canada's aboriginal peoples have to wait even one moment longer, but that promise is one that I guarantee my colleagues and myself will hold the government to.

During the prolonged summer break I met with many of the hard working folks in the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. As an aside I would like to mention and acknowledge the excellent provincial campaign of the NDP's Paul Miller in my riding. The people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek have chosen the NDP to represent them in Ottawa and now in Queen's Park. I know they have chosen an excellent representative.

The Address

●(1240)

Over the extended summer break, I heard countless stories from hard-working folks who are having real trouble making ends meet. Today, when tremendous wealth is being created in our country, in fact more wealth than at any other time in history, these families have told me that they now need to work longer just to make ends meet. Something is clearly wrong with this picture and Canadians know it.

The NDP has been warning about the growing prosperity gap and how it is putting working families and the middle class further and further behind. Now we have the shame of more than two million seniors living in poverty across this country, the same folks who helped establish the fundamentals that gave us the wealth that we have today. At the same as our seniors are facing financial and personal crises, a few people at the top are enjoying the benefits of the current economy.

A fine example of the growing gap happened in my community. When Stelco came out of CCAA protection and was sold, while former shareholders and retirees dangled in the wind, one of Stelco's top company executives pocketed over \$60 million. People also told me that they were expecting action from the government to help their families make ends meet, to make the necessities of life more affordable and to ensure them greater financial security.

With the throne speech, the Conservative government could have chosen to reduce the prosperity gap between the rich and the workers of Canada, but no. Instead, it chose to do nothing on that front.

Speaking of workers from my riding, on the weekend I was told of their disappointment in the throne speech because it showed them how much the government fails to understand their plight or, worse, that it does not care. Canadians know that what is needed now is real leadership in these key sectors of the economy. What they also now know is that the Conservative agenda announced in the throne speech has failed them once again. A quick mention of the sector fails to give hope to the families and communities that are suffering massive job losses across this country resulting from the government's devastating policy.

The speech also fails to provide leadership for families when it comes to health care. Still today, across Canada millions of families cannot find a doctor, wait times are still too high and the cost of prescription drugs continues to skyrocket. By ignoring these fundamental issues, the Conservative agenda, as it was laid out in the throne speech, has turned its back on improving health care for today's families.

I want to say here today that despite the Conservative indifference through all of this, the NDP caucus will redouble its efforts to campaign for universal drug coverage. Whether it does so in the House or on the streets, no matter. The hard-working families of this country must get the drugs they deserve based on their doctors' advice and not on their ability to pay.

Earlier this summer, I was in Montreal in Outremont and I observed one very important thing that voters in Quebec have in common with voters all across Canada. They are terribly concerned with climate change. If we listen, working Canadians everywhere are very concerned about the future climate changes being predicted by

scientists from around the world. They are now beginning to recognize that the current government has and the preceding government failed to get Canada on the right track for tackling climate change.

Quebeckers and all Canadians know that under the Liberals greenhouse gases increased by 23% beyond Kyoto objectives. Canadians are asking questions, such as how the Liberals, when the current leader was minister of the environment, could have allowed greenhouse gases to increase to levels even greater than the Bush administration. Canadians know we are facing an uncertain future and an unprecedented global crisis and they are, rightly, asking why the Conservative government continues to use Liberal failures as an excuse for inaction on this file.

Beyond those questions, Canadians are demanding real, concrete action now. They know that the watered down clean air and climate change act is not the path to follow if Canada is to truly respond to this crisis.

In my riding, I have heard folks talk regularly about the growing concerns with regard to the combat mission in Afghanistan and that it is not the right mission for Canadians. People were very clear. While they support our troops in every sense of the word, they told me that this was not the role they wanted to see their country play on the world stage.

It is only the NDP that has always been clear and consistent on this issue. It is the wrong mission for Canada. We are not afraid of the consequences of our actions because we firmly believe in our principles.

●(1245)

This is why we will oppose the Speech from the Throne. Unlike the leader of the Liberal Party, we will not pretend and we will not criticize only to sit back later and hide behind excuses. We will not shirk our responsibilities.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to Afghanistan, the NDP is consistent. It will abandon Afghan women and children to the Taliban.

However, that is not what I want to talk to the hon. member about. He quoted some items on poverty. Many people in Canada are living in poverty and this government is committed to making a difference there. However, it is not helpful when the statements used are completely misleading and at complete odds with actual facts.

The Address

In its May income report, Statistics Canada revealed that Canadians at every level benefited from the positive economic conditions that have prevailed since the early 1990s. Before taxes, the richest 20% in the country make 13 times as much before taxes in income redistribution as the bottom 20%. However, after taxes and transfers, that gap is 5.6 times, which can be significant to the folks in the bottom 20%. I would point out to my hon. friend that in 1996 the gap was 5.6 times. It has not changed.

For the member to stand there and say that poverty is accelerating off the clock is absolutely untrue. I would like him to acknowledge the fact that it is his socialist roots that are making him mislead this House and mislead Canadians. Poverty needs to be dealt with but let us deal with it on the facts.

• (1250)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, somewhat like a magician, they trick us with one hand to keep our attention and then they pick our pockets with the other.

I can speak directly to poverty. In my riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, according to the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, 95,000 families are living in poverty and 52% of those are seniors. The majority of the remaining people in poverty in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek are women and children. Those are the facts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the hon. member tell us, among other things, that he wanted to promote a universal drug plan. That is just like the NDP. I agree with him, except that the way he describes it, we would have a universal drug plan imposed and run by Ottawa. In Quebec, we already have drug coverage.

He said he went to Outremont and that Quebecers have things in common with Canadians when it comes to the environment. I agree. However, having a centralist party like the NDP in power would mean the imposition of Canada-wide standards, when we are fighting to get recognition for the efforts made by Quebec's industries to achieve the Kyoto protocol targets. But the NDP would like to impose Canada-wide standards.

I have the same question for him that my colleague had for his predecessor: with respect to the Bloc's amendment to reduce and even eliminate the federal spending power in provincial jurisdictions, namely that of Quebec—for which there is a consensus in Quebec—why did he vote against the Bloc amendment, against our desire to stop the federal government from interfering in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces?

I would like an answer. I do not want him to be evasive and skirt around my question, as his colleague did. I would like him to respond directly to the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate hearing from the member opposite. Having a prescription drug plan in his province is certainly an achievement and one that should be shared across the country, but we are part of a federal establishment here and the role of the federal government is to set standards nationally across our

country. We see the prescription program as something that must be a national program.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the throne speech did not mention how the immigration system would be fixed in order to have less wait times to bring families to Canada, to have the rules relaxed so that more family members can join their loved ones in Canada and so the visitor visa system would not be arbitrary so people can visit their loved ones in Canada. Because that is missing in the throne speech, how does it impact on the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, it is a very concerning topic because in my region we have tens of thousands of new Canadians who are separated from their families and looking forward to the opportunity of bringing their families together.

We have the once in a lifetime bill that was proposed by the member for Hamilton Mountain. It is shameful that there was nothing in this throne speech to even begin to address that significant issue.

• (1255)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brant.

I am pleased to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne in this second session of the 39th Parliament. However, much like the original first session throne speech, there is a lot of rhetoric but little substance. Even worse, the new government has completely failed to live up to its billing in its first throne speech. I need to mention a couple of those points.

One of the reasons that I believe I need to mention that is because we really need to see specific legislation because the words of the government mean little other than to try to manipulate the public minds, in which it tries to leave the impression it will do something and does not do it. I will give a couple of examples.

In its highly publicized and propagandized Federal Accountability Act, the public appointments commission never came into being and yet Conservative political patronage just about flows like molten lava, frothing against what seems to be a brow-beaten federal bureaucracy and the appointments go through. I cannot understand how many of those appointments that are going through are strictly political patronage appointments coming out of former premiers' offices.

On accountability itself, the new government finds itself under three investigations and the Prime Minister fails to answer questions on those matters. Question period is dominated by the Conservative in and out scheme, in which the Conservative Party padded its last campaigns to the benefit of its national election spending.

Increasingly, there is evidence of the Prime Minister for the new government saying and doing two very different things. Nowhere is this more evident than the government's response to primary producers, the farmers of this country.

One of the new government's greatest failures is in agriculture. I want to spend a little time on that subject as agriculture critic for the official opposition.

The Address

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will remember the Prime Minister, in April of 2006, standing in this House and promising farmers cost of production. He even promised cash before spring. That cash never did come through. Did farmers see cost of production? Is a \$720 cheque on a \$60,000 loss meeting cost of production? No, I certainly think not.

The Prime Minister in fact broke his word and he cannot be trusted.

The former minister though did cancel the family farm options program that took \$246 million directly out of hard-strapped farmers' pockets. Again, the Conservatives broke their commitment to hard-pressed farmers in this country.

The Prime Minister did in fact keep one commitment. He did not have the right to make that commitment, mind you, and he attempted to do it illegally. He attacked the Canadian Wheat Board and its duly elected farmer board of directors. The only thing that stopped the Prime Minister from his ideological attack on the Wheat Board was that the federal court ruled that the Prime Minister, the Government of Canada, broke the law of this country. That is a Prime Minister who claims to talk about law and order but, against the advice of the Department of Justice, he went out there hoping that farmers would not challenge him in court, which they did, and he was stopped by the Federal Court of Canada for trying to do an illegal act.

Obviously, the bottom line is that the Prime Minister cannot be trusted, especially when it comes to the farm community. He cannot be trusted on accountability. The evidence is in. He cannot be trusted on his word to farmers because he failed to meet cost of production. He cannot even be trusted on law and order because the federal court has basically claimed that he was involved in an illegal act.

• (1300)

The throne speech absolutely fails to address the agricultural concerns of our country. The government has failed to follow through on its commitment to farmers in the last election. The throne speech has failed to demonstrate any concern for the plight of beef and hog producers facing historic low prices. It has failed to address the unfair trade practices used by our competitors internationally. It has failed to bring in more aggressive safety net programming to deal with low farm incomes and high debt. It has failed to propose implementation of an all party agriculture committee recommendation to deal with the farm crisis.

That all party committee made 36 recommendations, any number of which the Government of Canada could have picked up. For example, it could have ensured that a product in a box was a product of Canada. The government failed to pick up that recommendation. It could have ensured that imported food met the same standards as those that Canadian farmers have to meet. It failed on that one and failed to pick up on 34 others.

If the Conservatives really wanted to go a little further out on a limb, they could have gone back to a report that I drafted in 2005 called "Empowering Canadian Farmers in the Marketplace". They could have picked up on any number of recommendations in my report, such as strengthening the Competition Act so farmers had some protection or policies to help farmers receive decent prices from the marketplace. Again, they failed in that regard.

Let me mention where the government has tried again to manipulate the public mind through the throne speech.

The throne speech claims support for supply management. However, with the government's targeted attack on the orderly marketing of the Canadian Wheat Board, which appears in the very same paragraph, it is demonstrating complete hypocrisy and an absolute contradiction of its stated support.

Actions speak louder than words. The Prime Minister stated "he will enact market choice" for western grain farmers. This completely undermines collective marketing through either the Canadian Wheat Board or supply management.

Let me be clear. The alleged support for supply management in the throne speech is an absolute and complete fraud, nothing less, nothing more. We just need to look at the paragraph. If there is choice in one marketing system, it has to be allowed in the other. It will undermine collective marketing, which empowers farmers in Canada to receive decent returns in the marketplace. Obviously that point is in the throne speech for consideration only.

Let me come back for a moment to hogs. The hog industry is in terrible trouble. Let me quote a letter from a person in my riding:

I'm not angry, just resigned to the fact that the Canadian government is stepping away from small independent production models in agriculture.

Perhaps if that is going to be the policy they can help farmers exit with some dignity and maybe their house.

In P.E.I. alone, in the last several months producers accounted for some 2,500 sows that went out of business. That is the equivalent of 80,000 hogs. This industry is in trouble, yet there is not a word in the speech about the hog industry and hog production.

There is not a word about beef either in the Speech from the Throne. Beef producers find themselves in the situation where they are receiving around \$900 when they were receiving \$1,400.

I would love to get into the government's failure in terms of coming up with a safety net, but let me conclude this way.

The throne speech sets out the government's vision for the near term future of our country. There are only 60 words in the speech that are devoted to the government's vision for an industry that provides the food we eat each and every day. Only 60 words have been given to the industry that provides jobs and sustains communities. The Conservatives spend more time attacking a marketing institution than talking about a vision that would put income and returns in the pocket of farmers.

The throne speech is absolutely unacceptable. The government is an abject failure in terms of what it is doing, or not doing, for the farm community.

The Address

• (1305)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by identifying the absolute hypocrisy in the member's speech. I am offended and so are the producers in my riding of Peterborough, who wholeheartedly rejected his government's vision of agriculture. That was the government of the CAIS program. That government was so complicit on supply management that it allowed milk protein concentrates to escalate in the country. It allowed butter oils to come into our country. It took away 15% of the dairy market in our country and there was not a word from that government.

The Conservative government has moved on compositional standards for cheese. We have moved on article 28 to protect supply management.

The Liberals were also complicit on BSE. When we saw it breakout in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom, what did the Liberals do to protect Canadian farmers? Nothing. BSE absolutely decimated the beef industry in our country and that government wears it because it was complicit to it.

I have heard enough about the Wheat Board. Sixty-three per cent of farmers said that they wanted a choice and the Liberal Party said they should not have one. Those farmers will render their decision on the Liberal Party at some point in the not too distant future.

Our government will take no lessons from the former government on agriculture because it decimated agriculture in our country. This government is providing some of the best times for agriculture that our country has seen in decades. I am proud of it.

I would love to hear him comment on some of that.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member seems to be the attack dog for the Conservative Party these days. All he needs to do is look in the mirror. That member stood on the stage and said, "the CAIS program would be destroyed", that the Conservatives would end the CAIS program.

What did the Conservatives do? They changed the name. AgriStability is the new CAIS program. They have failed to change it. The former minister of agriculture, the one who was fired for failing to meet the mission of the Prime Minister in getting rid of the Wheat Board, went out to farm community in Ontario. Ontario farmers want business risk management. They want companion programs. They want regional flexibility. What did the minister from the Conservative Government of Canada say to them, "absolutely no".

That member does not represent farmers in his riding. He is applauding the moves of his government. I know there is only one minister in that government and that is the Prime Minister. The member is like many of the rest, a trained seal sitting in the back corner to take his direction from the PMO.

It is time he stood up for farmers in his riding and for farmers in Ontario and demanded business risk programming for those farmers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. There is still two and a half minutes left for hon. member's questions and comments period. I am having a great deal of difficulty hearing both the question and the answer.

I will go to the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood for another question or comment.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very quick question for the hon. member. It says in the throne speech:

Together with our Government's strong support for Canada's supply-managed system, these approaches will deliver stable, predictable and bankable support for farm families.

Is there a more silly statement in the throne speech?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, it is one of the silliest statements in the throne speech. The fact is we have to look at what the government says and what it does.

I have outlined from the previous throne speech how the government failed absolutely to meet the needs of the farm community. We do not expect any better from this throne speech.

We know the government took \$246 million out of the pockets of farmers on the family farm options program. By undermining the Canadian Wheat Board, we know the Conservatives are trying to take \$655 million, which the Wheat Board maximizes in returns back to Canadian farmers.

Who will make that gain? It will be the grain trade in the United States, the corporate grain sector. Is that who members on the other side really want to represent, the corporate grain trade, rather than the primary producers of our country who are suffering?

We cannot believe those words.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all four political parties have different sentiments regarding the Speech from the Throne. Canadians have said, overwhelmingly, that they do not want an election. The Liberal Party understands this and we will continue to make the government work, despite obvious Conservative attempts to orchestrate its own defeat.

Ontarians went to the polls less than two weeks ago. Saskatchewan will be voting in two weeks time and Newfoundlanders voted just two weeks ago today. Canadians are justifiably tired of elections and they want to see this Parliament work.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne and to voice some of my concerns with it, concerns on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Brant.

I will deal with the manufacturing sector. Although it was mentioned, albeit briefly, along with the forestry, fisheries and tourism sectors, I was troubled by the Prime Minister's failure to mention any specifics regarding a plan to support Canada's ever important manufacturing sector. As manufacturing jobs are being lost in Ontario and elsewhere across Canada, the Conservative government is doing virtually nothing to stop this very significant job loss crisis. I am fearful that the government does not fully comprehend the consequences of its inaction.

The Address

Canada has lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs since 2002 and real output in manufacturing is declining, not just employment. For instance, value added GDP is below its year 2000 peak. Some argue that manufacturing is simply becoming more efficient and that is why it is shedding jobs. In reality the entire sector is shrinking.

As a country, Canada is especially sensitive to exchange rate concerns since fully 90% of our exports go to the United States. We are thus much more vulnerable than Europe, Japan, China and India to changes in the international value of the U.S. dollar. With our dollar now at par with the U.S. dollar, the government must come to understand that reliance on a weak Canadian dollar is not a strategy. It is certainly not an effective strategy with respect to preserving Canada's manufacturing sector.

A manufacturing sector under pressure clearly affects the 2.1 million Canadians who work in the sector as well as their families. Job loss in this critical sector affects the millions more jobs that depend on manufacturing as the engine of our economy, especially in Ontario.

In my riding of Brant, with a population of some 130,000 individuals, the manufacturing sector is represented by six of the top ten employers. Therefore, I urge the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Industry to at least match what the Ontario Liberals are doing for the manufacturing sector.

Premier McGuinty's Liberals put together a \$500 million package that attracted over \$7 billion worth of new investment in the auto sector. The Ontario government also improved the tax credit available to businesses, which take on the important task of training of future skilled workers. This incentive is designed to reduce training costs in an effort to get more young people into skilled trade apprenticeship programs. Education sources confirm that students are lining up to enter the skilled trades, but have been unable to secure training positions for the essential hands-on portion of their programs.

Clearly the Ontario government is helping out.

How should the federal government? For starters, the federal government could adopt the 22 recommendations made by the House of Commons industry committee, including the key recommendation of a five year window for writing off capital investments at an accelerated rate.

● (1310)

The purpose of that window obviously is to encourage investment in the equipment needed to regain and enhance Canada's competitiveness. Instead, the Minister of Finance has reduced that window to just two years, not enough time for businesses to properly plan and three years less than the all-party committee itself recommended.

While Canada's manufacturing sector clearly struggles, the booming oil sands industry continues to enjoy a much more generous accelerated capital cost allowance, an advantage which will continue at least for the oil sands until 2015.

Many business leaders have justifiably called for an extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance for the manufacturing and processing industries. This is especially true with the Canadian

dollar at par. It has never been more affordable for Canadian businesses to invest in new machinery and equipment.

Canada needs to create more investment, to create rising living standards, to create the jobs of tomorrow in the Canada of today, to create a competitive tax system, to create a true Canadian corporate advantage.

I was also bothered to hear virtually nothing in the Speech from the Throne about poverty. We need a plan to fight poverty. Poverty today for many Canadians is a reality, a reality that mocks the prosperity known by most Canadians. Today in Canada more than half a million of our senior citizens live in poverty.

The men and women who built this country deserve much better. Pension splitting I concede is of some assistance for seniors with partners, but what about those seniors without partners? What about the hundreds of thousands of single seniors? There is no mention whatsoever in the throne speech of anything that will help single seniors.

What about the disabled? It is to Canada's shame that over 50% of disabled individuals cannot find employment. These are individuals who through no fault of their own were born visually impaired, born hard of hearing, born physically disabled. Surely in arguably the fairest, freest, finest country on earth everyone without exception deserves a chance, deserves an opportunity, deserves the affirmation and the self-esteem which accompanies a job, which accompanies a place in the workforce.

For Canadians who do not face physical challenges, the unemployment rate is around 6% or 7%. For Canadians with disabilities, the unemployment rate is in excess of 50%. This is shameful. There is no mention in the throne speech about incentives for corporations or businesses to hire individuals with disabilities.

I commend the Minister of Finance for a provision with respect to severely disabled children, but those are the children. What about disabled adults in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s who want to work but have no opportunities presented to them? I think it is time with a \$14 billion surplus that this country come to the aid of those individuals who have disabilities.

I appreciated this opportunity to speak in the debate on the Speech from the Throne.

● (1315)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to poverty in his speech. I would like him to comment on a specific population that is affected by poverty: our seniors.

Guaranteed income supplement recipients who are getting the maximum benefit are living under the poverty line. The current Conservative government, which has been in power since 2006, has given no real indication, either in the throne speech or in its actions, that it intends to address this dramatic situation.

The Address

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. The premise of her question is that governments have a responsibility to incrementally, slowly but surely, narrow the gap between those who have and those who have not.

There are many seniors who have not. They have not enough and they have no opportunity, because of their age, to better their situation. They have left the workforce on a permanent basis. I agree with the member that there has been no provision for seniors for many months.

Again, with the \$14 billion surplus available to the Minister of Finance and the government, more could and certainly should be done for Canada's seniors.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are many seniors who are having difficulty finding money to buy prescription drugs. These seniors are having difficulty finding affordable home care, finding high quality services so they can stay in their homes. Some of them have difficulty in paying nursing homes that have decent nursing care.

The member talked about the importance of narrowing the prosperity gap, the gap between those who are rich and those who are having difficulty making ends meet. However, I noticed the Liberals' record while they were in government that there was a huge tax cut of \$100 billion which started in 2000. Each year since then, until 2006, there is almost \$50 billion to \$54 billion in tax cuts. This means that Canada has fewer financial resources to invest in seniors to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. The prosperity gap continues to grow.

How would the member justify that kind of huge corporate tax cut? I recently heard the Liberal leader saying that it is the direction in which he would like to take Canada.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Speaker, something that often escapes members of the New Democratic Party is that business creates wealth. The private sector goes a long way toward creating wealth. At times the member and her colleagues rather forget that simple lesson of economics.

The Liberal Party wishes to foster a competitive business climate in this country that will assist every single Canadian.

If the member wants to go back 10 years and talk about the Liberal record when the Liberals were in power, that is her prerogative, but frankly, we prefer as a party to look to the future. We prefer to move forward and not replay the past.

[Translation]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and speak concerning the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

[English]

As the Speech from the Throne made clear, the Government of Canada will continue to build a better Canada by focusing on five clear priorities: first, strengthening Canada's sovereignty and place in the world; second, building a stronger federation; third, providing

effective economic leadership; fourth, continuing to tackle crime; and finally, improving our environment.

Our government will continue to provide Canadians with the economic leadership they want and deserve. That leadership has delivered practical and positive results. Today, after 21 months of Conservative government, our economy is strong and our finances are healthy. We have the right long term economic plan for Canada, called Advantage Canada, a plan that will give us the means to deliver on all of our commitments set out in the Speech from the Throne.

After 21 months, by any measure our economic and fiscal fundamentals are the strongest they have been in a generation. Canadians are enjoying the second longest period of economic expansion in Canadian history. Canada's unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in 33 years and the share of adult Canadians participating in the workforce is at a record high. In fact, since our government took office, employment has increased by more than 590,000 jobs, with employment up in every province in Canada. Indeed, Canada is one of the few countries with a public pension system that is financially sustainable.

This past weekend, I met with my G-7 finance minister counterparts in Washington. While we have much in common, Canada stands alone in one key respect. We are the only G-7 country with budget surpluses and a falling debt burden. That is something of which all Canadians can be proud.

There are many reasons why our country is doing so well: strong consumer demand and employment growth; record high commodity prices; near record corporate profits, which have boosted investment; low stable inflation; and a shrinking tax burden. I will have more to say about the state of the Canadian economy shortly when I release the fall economic and fiscal update.

Thanks to our strong economic and fiscal fundamentals, we have what it takes to deal with any existing or new challenges to the nation's future prosperity. One such challenge is the potential for weaker growth in the United States and overseas as the United States housing market continues to contract and recent turbulence in global financial markets continues.

Another challenge, of course, is the rapid appreciation of the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis the U.S. currency. On the one hand, our stronger dollar should lower costs for imported machinery and equipment for businesses, and it should also reduce prices for consumer goods. On the other hand, we recognize it has been a real challenge for the manufacturing, forestry and other exporting sectors.

Finally, Canada is on the verge of a demographic change with the rapid aging of our population. This issue will affect all levels of government as the share of the working age population begins to decline.

While challenges are out there, they are not insurmountable. Private sector forecasters expect continued economic growth over the next two years. What does that mean for the government's finances? It means government revenues should remain strong and government finances healthy. It means we can continue to eliminate debt, reduce taxes and invest in the priorities of Canadians.

The Address

We live in an exciting, changing, challenging world, a world where people, jobs and investment move more rapidly across the globe than ever before. It is a world Canada is more than capable of taking on.

Our government recognized early on that building an even greater country for our children and grandchildren requires a solid plan, a plan to create jobs, keep unemployment low, reduce taxes, reward hard work and help people get ahead. That is why in November 2006 we unveiled our long term economic plan, Advantage Canada, a plan to make Canada a world leader for today's generation and for generations to come.

• (1325)

Advantage Canada focuses on creating five key advantages: first, a fiscal advantage eliminating Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation; second, a tax advantage reducing taxes for all Canadians and establishing the lowest tax rate on new business investment in the G-7; third, an entrepreneurial advantage creating a business environment that unlocks private investment by reducing taxes, reducing unnecessary regulation, reducing red tape; fourth, a knowledge advantage creating the best educated, most skilled, most flexible workforce in the world; and fifth, an infrastructure advantage building modern infrastructure to ensure the seamless flow of people, goods and services.

Advantage Canada was designed not only to provide our country with a clear long term economic vision, but also the ability to adjust to ever changing global realities. It is an ambitious plan. Just as important, it is a practical one.

This government has not allowed Advantage Canada to become another document accumulating dust on a shelf. Over the last 21 months we have been creating an environment for further investment by reducing taxes significantly for individuals, families and business, a \$41 billion reduction over three years and by moving Canada's overall tax rate on new business investment from third highest to second lowest in the G-7 by 2011.

We released a plan to create a Canadian advantage in global capital markets, a plan designed to achieve increased protection and income for investors, better jobs, more investment and prosperity. We set out a global commerce strategy. This is a new course for Canada's engagement in commercial relations worldwide and we released a new science and technology plan to guide future government decision making.

After years of debate we have restored fiscal balance in Canada. These achievements are clear evidence of a government ready and willing to go a little further and reach a little higher.

On building a fiscal advantage for Canadians we have already made a significant down payment that any homeowner can appreciate. We have reduced the federal debt by more than \$27 billion over the past two years or more than \$1,142 for every man, woman and child in Canada. This is at the same time provincial and territorial governments will have reduced their debt by almost \$40 billion.

What does this mean for Canadians? This means that we are paying off the national mortgage and at the same time reducing taxes even further. Under our tax back guarantee we are giving Canadians

a direct stake and a direct benefit in how we manage government finances on their behalf. We are dedicating all interest savings from the shrinking public debt to further reduce personal income taxes. To date we have provided Canadians with over \$1.5 billion in annual personal income tax relief as a result of our tax back guarantee.

We also intend to focus future federal-provincial discussions on strengthening the economic union by improving regulatory efficiency and removing barriers to internal trade and labour mobility in Canada.

On creating a tax advantage, I have already described the tax back guarantee. We have reduced taxes for Canadians by over \$41 billion over three years and yet that is not enough. Canadians still pay too much tax and deserve to keep more of their hard-earned tax dollars.

We have taken initial steps also to bring forward the working income tax benefit which the official opposition failed to do and this is to help Canadians who are receiving social assistance to get into the workforce and not have all of their benefits clawed back so that it is not worthwhile for someone to enter the workforce in Canada. We need people to enter the workforce. We have labour shortfalls across Canada and this is a good way of moving forward on that agenda.

The entrepreneurial advantage is important. Reducing red tape is very important. We need to support the RCMP and industries, as we have indicated in the Speech from the Throne. Also requiring assistance are the forestry industry and of course the automotive industry which is facing some manufacturing challenges as are other manufacturing industries, particularly in Quebec and Ontario.

We have accomplished a great deal in the first 21 months. Of course there is more to do. That is why we have the five new clear priorities that will enable us to build a legacy of peace and prosperity.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised by what the Minister of Finance said. The throne speech contains absolutely nothing for the manufacturing industry or the forestry industry in particular.

I would remind the minister that since April 1, 2005, 21,000 workers who depended on forestry for their livelihood—including plant workers, forestry workers, machinists and truckers—have lost their jobs and 156 plants have closed.

The Address

The situation throughout Quebec is catastrophic. Many towns are threatened, and many regions are in difficulty because of the forestry crisis. What is more, the federal government has cut \$68 million from the budget of the Economic Development Agency of Canada, money that was to go to help communities in difficulty.

Will the Minister of Finance promise to reinvest massively in the Economic Development Agency of Canada and help affected communities? Absolutely nothing has been done to date and absolutely nothing will be done in the future, judging by the throne speech. The government claims that it is sensitive to this issue, but it has not announced any real measures.

•(1335)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the member opposite knows, the unemployment rate in Canada is the lowest it has been in more than a generation. It is the lowest it has been in 33 years.

It is true that there have been losses in the manufacturing sector, particularly in central Canada. Fortunately, those folks who are losing their jobs are largely being able to obtain new employment, good jobs by the way, in the service sector. Indeed, this is part of what has happened internationally in terms of the developed countries having strongly growing service sectors.

Having said that, regarding the forestry sector and other manufacturing sectors, in the last budget we brought in a very large, accelerated capital cost allowance provision, estimated to cost about \$1.3 billion. This is to permit our manufacturers to get brand new machinery and equipment over two years and write it off over that period of time. That is the way we are going to keep manufacturing strong in Canada: by moving up the scale and making sure that our manufacturers have the best and most productive technology.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members of the House might know the story of old King Canute, who hundreds of years ago took his throne to the beach, ordered the tides not to rise and his feet got wet.

I would submit that the minister is Canada's new King Canute. He goes to bankers and says, "Let the bank rates come down", and the bankers say, "Get lost, king". Then he goes to the retailers and says, "Let the prices come down", and the retailers say, "Get lost, king".

The point is that the minister is engaging in blatant posturing in matters over which he has achieved nothing and has no leverage. Is he not embarrassed at this blatant political posturing?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I knew the member for Markham—Unionville was the president of the GST club. I did not know his contemporary was King Canute, but I guess he has been having informed discussions with that person.

I congratulate him and his leader for their persistence in raising the GST. They want to get that GST up. His leader has called it wasteful that we are reducing the GST. They want to raise taxes for Canadians by \$12 billion, led by the finance critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, and the Leader of the Opposition. These are the people who are asking Canadians for some credibility. They want

to raise their taxes by \$12 billion, something they think is a good thing to do. I do not think Canadians agree with them.

I am very proud of the fact that ATM users in Canada, seniors, students and people with disabilities, all got positive responses from the banks in Canada. I know the member for Markham—Unionville does not care about those people. We accomplished that. The Liberals did nothing, which is what they usually do.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noted that the minister talked about reducing the deficit by \$24 billion. What he did not talk about was the social deficit that he has increased in this country.

I want to know about the deficit of 200,000 homeless Canadians. I want to know about the deficit where there are no additional child care spaces. I want to know about the deficit where 1.6 million children live in poverty in this country. I would also like to know about the \$100 billion municipal infrastructure deficit, the loss of 300,000 jobs, and the additional 33,000 jobs that we are going to lose because of this Korean free trade deal.

I want to know what the minister is going to do about the social deficit the government has created?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Minister of Finance has approximately 30 seconds to respond.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the WITB program, not only because it is my riding of Whitby—Oshawa, but it is the working income tax benefit.

I do not know why the NDP votes against it. The New Democrats say they care about working people. They say they care about people getting engaged in the workforce. Here is a government program and initiative that helps people on social assistance come into the workforce and they are against it.

They talk about caring, but when it comes to actually taking action that helps real people in Canada get to work and support their families, they vote against it.

•(1340)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I notice that the hon. Minister of Finance only used 10 minutes of his allotted 20 minute time slot. Was it his intention to share his time?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Yes, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker—

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member for Mississauga South on a point of order.

The Address

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not mind if the finance minister would like to maybe finish his time, but there are House rules about the splitting of time particularly if the member does not give notice at the beginning of the speech. The Chair has occasionally asked during the middle of the speech, but after we have had questions and comments, I believe the rule is clear. If you could please check with the table, I believe the time for that slot has expired.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I think we could solve the dilemma here by just being collegial, as we like to be in a minority Parliament. I would suggest that you simply ask for unanimous consent that the request to share the time be granted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. Minister of Finance have the unanimous consent of the House to share his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to speak in support of the 2007 Speech from the Throne. From the moment the speech started, I knew that it was a defining moment for not only our government, but also all Canadians. And I was not disappointed with the vision this government has for Canada's future.

Canadians have every reason to be proud of their country and of what we have accomplished. We have worked together to build a nation that serves as model for the rest of the world. Advantage Canada, our government's long-term economic plan, is based on sound fiscal management. Canadians now want a government that will help them build on this heritage, a government that sets clear objectives and that gets real results.

To meet those expectations, our government set out in the Speech from the Throne, its vision of a Canada based on the following five priorities: strengthening Canada's sovereignty and place in the world; strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions; providing effective economic leadership for a prosperous future; tackling crime and strengthening the security of Canadians; improving the environment and the health of Canadians. In the final analysis, Canadians want a government that will be accountable for its actions and their results. They want a government that gives priority to Canadians and their families.

Today, Canadians are holding on to a bigger share of their income because we have reduced taxes, including income taxes. Families have a real choice in terms of day care thanks to the universal child care benefit. Canadians can now count on a government that is determined to help them receive the medical care they need more quickly, and a government that is tackling crime and strengthening the security of our cities.

All of these matters are of great importance to Canadians. That is why they elected our government: to improve conditions for them and their families. Canadians want a government that gets concrete results. Thanks to the dynamic leadership of the Prime Minister, our government is getting those results. The economic and fiscal update

this fall will spell out our progress toward achieving those objectives.

Let us stop for a moment to reflect on some of the initiatives launched by our government to show how we are investing in our families. In terms of taxation, for example, we have delivered or announced tax reductions amounting to more than \$41 billion over three years for Canadian companies and individuals. The family is the basic unit of our society and our government will continue to support our families and help them to achieve their dreams of a better and more secure future.

One of the first measures taken by our government in its first budget was to honour our promise to reduce the GST. We immediately reduced it to 6%, which was an important step because it really was a reduction with general application. It affects all Canadians, whether individuals or families. In the Speech from the Throne last Tuesday, the government announced that it will deliver the second part of its election promise and will reduce the GST to 5%. Our government keeps its promises.

In the 2006 budget, we also introduced the universal child care benefit to provide support for families.

• (1345)

This plan is giving families the resources to make the choices that will enable them to balance work and family as they see fit, regardless of where they live, their particular circumstances or their preferences.

With Advantage Canada, the government has committed to working with the provinces and territories to do away with the social security trap by implementing the working income tax benefit to make work more profitable for low- and middle-income Canadians.

The working income tax benefit is designed to make work more lucrative and attractive for approximately 1.2 million Canadians who are already part of the workforce and to encourage them to keep working. Moreover, we expect that the working income tax benefit will encourage about 60,000 more people to join the workforce.

In Budget 2007, the government followed up on the group's recommendations by announcing a new registered disability savings plan to help parents save money to ensure the financial security of their severely disabled children. This plan, the first of its kind in Canada, will ensure the financial security of disabled children, improve their quality of life, and bring peace of mind to their parents.

The tax fairness plan allows pension income splitting for pensioners. This initiative will give families a greater incentive to save and invest their money to ensure their financial independence following retirement.

The Address

As I said earlier, our government will continue to invest in our families and our future. As we said in the Speech from the Throne, we are committed to helping those who want to escape the hardships of homelessness and poverty. As you know, the new homelessness partnering strategy came into effect on April 1, 2007. The strategy's \$269.9 million over two years will promote new structures and support measures to help the homeless and people at risk create a better, safer future for themselves.

We have accomplished great things, but we still have a lot to do. Our government believes that families, individuals and businesses are still paying too much tax.

● (1350)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my hon. colleague's speech. I know he is the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière in Quebec, a region that was affected by the major closures in the manufacturing industry. He is familiar with the reality facing older workers in the Montmagny region, where Whirlpool and other textile companies have closed.

When we passed the first Speech from the Throne after the election, his party accepted one of the Bloc's amendments, which targeted an assistance program for older workers. Last year, in the latest budget, a committee was created in order to eventually establish an income security program for older workers, to help them make it to their retirement. This time, however, there was no mention of this issue in the throne speech.

Some people have been waiting for this program since the last election, for the past year and a half. On many occasions, his colleagues have said that we will eventually see something. In the meantime, people do not have the minimum income they need to get by until their old age pension. Couples are being torn apart and, sadly, some people have even committed suicide.

Can the member explain to me why his government has not shown enough sensitivity to announce, once and for all, an assistance program for older workers? This is a matter of respect for the dignity of these workers who have been supporting their families for the past 30 or 35 years by working for the same company, but who are now forced to rely on social assistance, because of his government's insensitivity.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I take my dear colleague's question as a show of support. Our government is aware of all the problems that can be faced by older workers and we are concerned.

We have already adopted important measures in order to create advantages. At present, Canadians want a government that will help them build on this heritage, a government that will set clear objectives and obtain tangible results.

To meet these expectations, our government announced, in the throne speech, its vision for Canada based on the following five major priorities: strengthening Canada's sovereignty and place in the world, strengthening the federation and our democratic institutions, providing economic leadership for a prosperous future, tackling crime and strengthening the security of Canadians and improving the environment and the health of Canadians.

In the end, Canadians want a government that is proud of its actions and its results.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with regard to tax reductions and decreasing the GST by 1%, these reductions only continue to diminish the government's capacity to invest in measures to resolve the social imbalance and make strategic investments in the economy.

Given the current budget surpluses, has the time not come to adopt a balanced approach and to reinvest in our future?

The people of my riding have given me a very clear message to deliver to Ottawa. They are demanding that the government reinvest in its citizens, in its communities, and in more affordable education and housing. There are still 1.6 million children living in poverty in Canada.

Is it not time to act?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, because the measure to reduce the GST from 7% to 6% and from 6% to 5% is the most practical way to help Canada's poorest families. Often, these families pay no tax. As well, our budget included an incentive to help low-income families stay in the workforce.

● (1355)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

I am happy to speak about the throne speech today as my party's critic on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. I would like to talk mainly about the situation in the forestry industry. In this throne speech, the Conservative government completely ignores the crisis the forestry industry is going through.

In the throne speech, the government only briefly mentions the challenges facing an industry that has existed for more than a century in Quebec, perhaps because the crisis does not affect Alberta's interests. In Quebec, the whole economy is being affected by the problems in the forestry industry. Entire regions are suffering because of job losses, unemployment and plant closures.

In my riding, Trois-Rivières, the Kruger paper mill had to close temporarily, laying off 1,000 workers. Many plants north of La Tuque, in Saint-Michel-des-Saints and elsewhere have also been affected. These plants cannot count on the federal government to address the problem, which requires a reorganization of the regional economy.

One of the non-negotiable demands the Bloc Québécois made as a condition of its support for the throne speech was that the federal government introduce tax measures to support the regions of Quebec affected by the forestry crisis.

Statements by Members

This means that the federal government will have to fix some of the mistakes it has made. We all remember its refusal to help the forest industry throughout the entire softwood lumber dispute and the major effects this had that are still being felt today. An economic upswing in many parts of Quebec has long been hampered by Ottawa's refusal to act. The Bloc Québécois demands an end to this Conservative ideology of laissez-faire. The Conservative government must realize the urgency of the situation, act responsibly, and take the necessary action to turn the situation around.

The Bloc Québécois has insisted on a clear mention in the Speech from the Throne of fiscal measures to help the regions affected by the crisis in the forest industry. However, there are no specific measures in this speech to help workers, companies and regions affected by this crisis. Although the government says it is very concerned, the Prime Minister has not provided any solutions or taken any steps to help the industry recover, not to mention any programs to help workers.

The government even has the crust to boast about what it has done to support the industry and the people working in it. There is no truth to any of it. The only thing the government has done is cut the community assistance programs and leave the workers who lost their jobs at the mercy of the crisis. The only promise in this speech is that the government will continue doing nothing to offset the effects of the crisis in the forest industry.

We in the Bloc have proposed a number of measures. One of them, for example, is to bring back the fund to diversify forest economies that was eliminated by the Conservatives, although the management of this fund would be turned over to local stakeholders. The Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec did away with this fund on the excuse that it was not being used properly.

Instead of relaxing Ottawa's inappropriate and bureaucratic criteria, decentralizing the program, and making the regions responsible for managing it in accordance with their own needs, the minister simply eliminated the program, thereby depriving the regions that needed it most in order to diversify their economies. Like a lot of federal programs, this fund was more suited to meeting Ottawa's objectives than the real needs of the regions affected by the crisis.

For these reasons, the Bloc Québécois wants the fund brought back, although the management of it should be turned over to local stakeholders. It is local people, as we have always said, who know what is needed. They are best placed to determine who needs this fund, why they need it, and how to get the regions out of the economic quagmire in which they find themselves.

The second measure would set up a loan and loan-guarantee program to help finance investment in production equipment. There is nothing about this in the Speech from the Throne. The federal government has done nothing to help the industry caught up in the softwood lumber crisis.

●(1400)

The Bloc Québécois has been constantly asking the government for many years—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I must interrupt the hon. member for Trois-Rivières. She will be able to resume her speech later for five minutes in order to finish it.

It is time now for statements by members. The hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac has the floor.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

YOUNG LEADERS IN RURAL CANADA AWARDS

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the Secretary of State (Agriculture) announced the recipients of the Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards.

[*English*]

The winner of the leadership award for outstanding contribution to a rural community is Meghan Detheridge of Sydney, Nova Scotia, who raised over \$200,000 for a local world-class skateboard park.

[*Translation*]

The winner of the partnership award for developing and emphasizing community collaboration, is one of my constituents, François St-Amand, from St. Andrews, New Brunswick, who worked hard to make the school a part of the community and helped build a local park, open a free child care centre and develop an after-school program.

[*English*]

It is inspiring to have such motivated individuals who are committed to improving the lives of rural citizens and I am pleased to stand here today to recognize the achievement of these fine young Canadians. These young people, like our government, believe in getting things done for rural Canadians. I congratulate them and say bravo.

* * *

EUNICE GRAYSON

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to pay tribute to Eunice Grayson, an extraordinary volunteer, visionary and community leader. Sadly, last week Eunice left us, passing away peacefully at her home.

In our community, Eunice was best known for pioneering the Learning Enrichment Foundation. As the LEF's founding executive director, Eunice worked tirelessly to ensure that new and less fortunate members of our community had access to job training, language classes, child care, skills improvement and, above all, hope.

Today, the Learning Enrichment Foundation is a nationally recognized leader in the holistic approach to community economic development.

Eunice was a kind and caring soul, a citizen I was proud to represent in this House and a lady I was fortunate enough to count as a friend.

Eunice was born with the maiden name Service, a most fitting name for she gave so much of herself for the benefit of the less fortunate in our community. Her service, her sacrifice and her name will be fondly remembered in York South—Weston.

I know the hon. members of this House will join me in celebrating the remarkable life of Eunice and extending condolences to her family on her passing.

* * *

[Translation]

MUSICAN AWARD

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on October 13, Bernard Hébert, a music teacher at École polyvalente Nicolas-Gatineau, was presented with the MusiCan Teacher of the Year Award by Céline Dion in Las Vegas. Mr. Hébert is the first francophone teacher to receive this award.

The award came as no surprise to the administrators at École polyvalente Nicolas-Gatineau. They were the ones who nominated Mr. Hébert to MusiCan last year in recognition of his 32 years teaching music.

The mission of MusiCan, which was created by the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, is to ensure that young people have access to a comprehensive music program through their school system.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I would like to congratulate Bernard Hébert for this award, which recognizes the passion for teaching music that he maintains to this day.

* * *

[English]

LORD SELKIRK BOY SCOUT PIPE BAND

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recently attended the 50th anniversary reunion of Winnipeg's Lord Selkirk Boy Scout Pipe Band. It was a great event but, as an alumni, the best part was the fact that the founding pipe major and instructor, Pipe Major Robert Fraser, was on hand to help us celebrate.

Bob Fraser, originally from Arbroath, Scotland, is still an instructor with the band at 85 years of age and has taught literally hundreds of boys over the years to play the great highland bagpipe, all without any fee ever being charged because, in his view, passing on a culture is something one does for the sheer joy of it.

Bob Fraser also passes on to his students the example of his patience, good humour and all around gentlemanly way of being.

I congratulate the band but, even more so, I send a great big thanks to Bob Fraser. *Lang may his lum reek.*

* * *

CANADIAN FERTILIZER INSTITUTE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to welcome members of the Canadian Fertilizer Institute as they gather in Ottawa this week.

Statements by Members

This industry employs some 12,000 people and contributes \$7 billion a year to Canada's economy. We provide 12% of the world's fertilizer materials and export to more than 50 countries.

The fertilizer industry helps farmers provide safe and nutritious food to the world's growing population. Fertilizers have enabled farmers to triple crop production in the past four decades.

The industry can also take pride in its environmental record by reducing emission levels 10% while it increased total production by 39% since 1993. Increasing fertilizer use means more carbon dioxide is taken from the atmosphere by plant growth.

Surely, the Canadian fertilizer industry rates among the most efficient in the world.

I encourage all my colleagues to learn more about this essential industry while Ottawa is honoured to host the Canadian Fertilizer Institute.

* * *

● (1405)

YORK REGIONAL POLICE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently the York Regional Police received the Webber Seavey Award for Quality in Law Enforcement by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

York Regional Police were recognized for their proactive approach in tackling concerns about youth and gang crime. The police agency partnered with community groups, parent associations, faith groups and athletic leagues to create an anti-gang strategy. Working with the community, York Regional Police have implemented new youth programs, offered free transportation to community centres and engaged young police officers in youth mentoring programs. Through this strategy, York Regional Police have significantly reduced the street level crime associated with youth.

I congratulate Chief Armand La Barge and the front line officers for their outstanding leadership. The efforts of the York Regional Police are a model for police agencies across Canada and around the world and demonstrate that the first step in the battle against crime is prevention.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to salute the valiant efforts that Canada's farmers put forth every day to produce the best, healthiest food in the world.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

Canadian agriculture and agri-food drives 8.2% of our GDP, employs about two million Canadians and accounts for \$28 billion of our international trade. That is why agriculture is a priority for this government. Through measures in budget 2006 and budget 2007, a total of \$4.5 billion in new funding is flowing to the agricultural sector.

[Translation]

Our government is listening to farmers and is taking steps to respond to their concerns.

[English]

This government will continue to put farmers first by working toward a stronger, more vibrant farm gate and by helping the sector capture some of the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

* * *

*[Translation]***FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even though the forestry crisis plaguing the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region and a number of other regions in Quebec is far from being resolved, the Conservative government is boasting about its achievements.

Several thousand jobs have now been lost, mainly because of this government's inertia. When the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec cut \$50 million from the diversification fund that would have helped regions affected by the forestry crisis, he exacerbated the decline of the industry.

The Bloc Québécois has proposed real solutions to help the industry, such as bringing back a fund to diversify the forestry economy, a loan program for investment in production material, a tax credit to promote business development and an income support program for older workers.

Once again, the Conservative government's inertia is making it clear that the Bloc Québécois has an essential role to play here.

* * *

*[English]***A CAPITAL EXPERIENCE**

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a special group of high school students here today. They are participating in a program I call a "Capital Experience". Each October, two student leaders from each of the seven high schools in my riding come to Ottawa for three days to learn about career opportunities in public life.

They have visited Parliament, the Korean Embassy, Amnesty International, the Department of Foreign Affairs, CHUM studios, the Prime Minister's Office, the Press Gallery and SUMMA Strategies.

I wish to thank those who shared their time with these students. I also thank the businesses and service clubs who sponsored them.

Today I welcome to Parliament: Cathryn Woodrow and Mac Adams from Fenelon Falls; Kassy Smith and Dylan Robichaud from St. Thomas Aquinas; Bethany Snelgrove and William Prentesco from Haliburton; Amanda Franco-Brooks and Monique Elliot from Brock; Rebecca Reeds and Meaghan Williams from I.E. Weldon; Amber Flynn and Nathan Dinnick from Crestwood; and Andrea Hawkridge from Lakefield.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing these young people seated in the gallery today all the best as they make decisions regarding their future careers.

* * *

*[Translation]***KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS**

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year, the Knights of Columbus are celebrating their 125th anniversary. At the same time, Aylmer Council 5281 of the Knights of Columbus is marking its 45th anniversary and Saint-Jean-Bosco Council 12189 in Hull is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

I am pleased to commend the contributions made by the Knights of Columbus to the greater human family, and particularly to the Hull-Aylmer area.

Humbly and unassumingly, the Knights of Columbus perform acts of great generosity. They epitomize respect, dignity and selflessness through their daily activities.

The Knights of Columbus fulfill their commitment to the community brilliantly, and provide help and support to so many of their fellow citizens. They are carrying on a long tradition of charitable work and activities.

The members are passing on an important lesson of brotherhood through the ages. I would like to express my warmest thanks to all Knights of Columbus members.

* * *

● (1410)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne sets our government's directions for the new session and reflects the concerns of the Quebec nation, including the desire to put a stop to crime and make communities safer.

Bill C-2, which tackles violent crime, includes measures that were examined in depth during the last session: minimum sentences for offences involving firearms; raising the age of consent from 14 to 16; declaration of dangerous offenders; reverse onus in cases of firearm-related offences; and drug-impaired driving.

Why is the Bloc planning to vote against these measures? Luckily, the Bloc does nothing but talk and cannot come to power. It would seem the Bloc would protect criminals rather than honest people.

Statements by Members

[English]

CORPORATE TAX CUTS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$60 billion is a very stark figure. It is a lot of money. That sum, \$60 billion, has been given in corporate tax cuts to huge corporations, like big banks, since 2000.

I fail to understand why banks that made \$19 billion in profits last year will get even more tax breaks according to the Conservatives' throne speech. In all, by 2011 there will be a 10 point drop in the federal corporate tax rate since 2001.

The Liberals and Conservatives give tax breaks to the richest Canadians, but there is nothing for affordable child care. There is nothing to hire more nurses and doctors. There is nothing to invest in our cities, our artists and to improve our public transit.

Just for this year without the big corporate tax cuts, Canada would have had \$12.7 billion to invest in ordinary Canadians. To give even more corporate tax cuts after the billions in tax giveaways is insulting to the two-thirds of Canadians who say they are not benefiting from the economic growth. It is wrong and it is unfair.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans seems to be missing the point when it comes to trawlers and quotas in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. He said yesterday about the quotas, "whether they catch it in a dory or in the *Queen Mary*, it does not make any difference".

The current uproar in P.E.I. is not related to the quotas. Everybody knows the quotas have not been changed. The uproar is over the use of this specific type of fishing gear which has proven destructive to stocks in other areas.

The minister knows full well that this type of gear has never been used in the gulf for this very reason. Local fishermen are concerned about the safety of the herring and bycatch stocks and have questioned the research methods used by DFO to estimate the health of the stocks.

Until we can be assured that midwater trawlers will not decimate the herring industry, it is best to err on the side of caution, which is what DFO is supposed to do.

If the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans thinks that jigging from a dory is no different from dragging a net the size of five football fields through the ocean, he is obviously very dismissive of the valid concerns of people who make their livings from the sea.

* * *

[Translation]

LOUISE ROBERT BEAUDIN AND MARIE-JOSÉE CLOUTIER

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today in this House to acknowledge the remarkable work of a farmer in my riding. Louise Robert Beaudin was named "woman farmer of the year" at the 11th annual Val-Jean farm women's union gala on October 6.

Louise Robert Beaudin is the sole proprietor of L.R.B, a large-scale farm in Saint-Jacques-le-Mineur, and she manages the fields, the finances, the land clearing and a number of other jobs. Louise is passionate about farming and she has my deep admiration and sincere congratulations.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Marie-Josée Cloutier on winning the scholarship for excellence in training at the same gala.

These two exceptional women represented the region of Val-Jean at the Saturne gala of the Fédération des agricultrices du Québec on October 20.

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[English]

MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Speech from the Throne made scant mention of the manufacturing sector and no mention at all of the auto sector. I am fearful that the Conservative government does not fully comprehend the consequences of its inaction with respect to these sectors.

Canada has lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs since 2002. According to research conducted by the Canadian Auto Workers, 30,000 more manufacturing jobs will be lost if Canada enters into a free trade agreement with Korea.

The Liberal Party will not support a Canada-Korea free trade agreement unless it eliminates existing trade barriers and provides true free market access to the Korean market.

A future Liberal government would be committed to a multilateral approach to free trade and would put Canada's long term economic interests first, including the interests of our very vital manufacturing sector.

* * *

● (1415)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government understands that modern infrastructure is vital for economic growth, increased productivity and improved competitiveness.

Working with the provinces, territories and municipalities, we are taking concrete steps to renew Canada's infrastructure.

As outlined in the throne speech, we are making the largest federal infrastructure investment in Canada's history through our Building Canada initiative. This massive federal investment will help build better roads, bridges, water systems, public transit and international gateways.

Oral Questions

This will directly benefit the Niagara region and all Canadians through shorter commutes and more competitive businesses. In fact, representatives of the Niagara region are here in Ottawa today to talk about improving Canada's borders and talk about our gateway to the United States and to the world.

We are listening and ready to work with communities across Canada, including the Niagara region, to renew and build a world-class infrastructure to promote economic growth.

We are getting the job done. We are bringing Niagara issues to Ottawa. Niagara is ready to act.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada has ruled that the Conservatives broke the law. Individuals implicated in the scheme are now MPs, cabinet ministers and senior advisers to the Conservative government.

The question remains about the Prime Minister himself. What did he know about this scheme and when did he know it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has responded to these accusations on many occasions.

Clearly, the Leader of the Opposition knows that he makes such allegations in this chamber under the protection of parliamentary privilege. I encourage him to have the courage of his convictions. If he believes what he has said, he should make these accusations outside the chamber where those whom he is libelling and slandering have recourse to the courts to hold him responsible for—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We will have some order. We are on to the next question now and the Leader of the Opposition has the floor. There will be order, please.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows very well that we have a press release that said exactly what I just said. It was a decision that has been ruled on by Elections Canada. We did not invent it.

The law has been broken. What does the Prime Minister know about this?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not realize a Liberal news release was the final word on the law.

We happen to believe that our election financing activities are entirely legal. We know they are because they are what the law permits and they are consistent with the practices of other political parties in Canada.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter.

Elections Canada found that the Conservatives broke the law and tried to bilk taxpayers for more money than they were entitled to and that they exceeded their spending limits during the last election. We said so publicly and we will say it again outside.

I am asking the Prime Minister to explain himself. What did he know?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to bilking taxpayers for money they want to spend on political campaigns, there is a pretty good public record on that. It was investigated by the Gomery Commission, which made some pretty conclusive findings: \$40 million missing through Liberal Party coffers.

The difference in our activities are entirely legal. We continue to practise legal politics and we will continue to do that in the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have already named the people involved outside the House. Elections Canada has already named the people involved outside the House. Even Conservative candidates have named the people involved outside the House. That is not the issue.

Why is the government not telling the truth inside the House?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we tell the truth inside the House and outside the House. We tell Canadians what we will do and then we do it.

On the matter of accountability, our record is clear and our election financing activities are entirely legal. We know they are legal because they are what the law permits and they will continue to follow the law in the future.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada has ruled on this matter. Election finance laws are there to ensure that no party has a money advantage.

The Conservatives sought that money advantage. They transferred federal money straight to ridings and demanded that it be paid right back, all to play fast and loose with the rules. People employed by the government were involved in this scheme.

Why will the Prime Minister not admit to Canadians that the party spent more than its limit and did indirectly what the Canada Elections Act prohibits directly?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did no such thing. What we did was engage in financing activities in our campaigns that fully followed the law. That is what we have done in the past. That is what we will do in the future.

* * *

[Translation]

CHARTER OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage said that the Bloc was picking a fight by suggesting that the Canadian Labour Code should respect Bill 101, that we were interfering with language issues and that the federal government is promoting bilingualism.

Is the government not interfering with language issues by promoting bilingualism in Quebec and by picking a fight with Quebec, where most people support Bill 101?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has its own language legislation, and the country has its Official Languages Act. Our government is committed to promoting both official languages in Canada, and the Bloc is desperately trying to create conflict between Quebec and the federal government.

I would like the leader of the Bloc to tell us if he supports the new Quebec identity bill introduced by his colleague, Pauline Marois, leader of the Parti québécois.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to become a Canadian citizen, one must speak either English or French, but to become a citizen of Quebec, one must speak French. This is in line with the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, which predates the federal charter. Since they are talking about two classes of citizens, I would point out that the federal government is creating two classes of workers: those who have the right to work in French under Bill 101 and those who cannot because the federal government refuses to recognize Bill 101.

Is that not creating two classes of workers?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following is an excerpt from the Bloc Québécois' website.

[English]

Please note that this section is not a full translation of the Bloc Québécois Web site. In the weeks and months ahead, we will add the most important and most frequently consulted Bloc Québécois documents. Thank you for your understanding and enjoy the site.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour claims that the Bloc Québécois is spoiling for a fight when it demands equal treatment, in terms of language, for workers subject to the Quebec Labour Code and workers subject to the Canada Labour Code. Contrary to what the minister says, the Canada Labour Code can be amended. All that is lacking is the political will to do so.

Will the minister acknowledge that the only problem is that the Conservatives lack the political will to respect French as the language of work in Quebec?

● (1425)

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister and our government have said clearly that the French language is one of our two official languages. We respect the French language and its importance to Quebec. That said, we are going to continue working in our area of jurisdiction, which is Canada, and in Canada, we promote both official languages.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, the official language is French.

The Minister of Labour claimed that French was already the language of work in the banks in his area. If this is so, what is preventing him from giving all workers in Quebec the same right as other people to work in French, by amending the Canada Labour Code so that Bill 101 also applies to workers in sectors under federal jurisdiction? Why not amend the Canada Labour Code to reflect what is already happening?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that Quebecers have no problem working in their own language in Quebec. Bill 101, which was introduced by the Government of Quebec, is in effect. Our role is to enable all Canadian workers to work in both official languages.

* * *

BUDGET STATEMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Conservatives are leading Canada down the wrong road. And now the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing has condemned this government, saying, "I am very disturbed by the housing situation in Canada."

The Prime Minister does not have his priorities right. For example, we learned today that the government will present a mini-budget with large tax cuts for big business.

Is the Prime Minister going to table a mini-budget, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget will be presented in the spring, as is the usual practice for this House and this government.

Furthermore, it is no secret that this government will cut taxes for all Canadian citizens.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that big corporate tax cuts are not going to fix the housing crisis, that is for sure. They are not going to repair the crumbling infrastructure of our cities, that is for sure. They are not going to close the prosperity gap that is affecting hard-working families or help anybody else.

Oral Questions

The fact is, with unprecedented surpluses, the Prime Minister should be investing in the needs of working families, not giving big corporations more tax cuts. They have enough already.

Will the Prime Minister understand this basic proposition and start working for working families, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what this government understands, unlike the NDP, is they do not want the government to spend Canada into oblivion. What they expect the government to do is use its surpluses to pay down debt, to invest in key programs and also to reduce taxes. We intend to pursue all those priorities.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we asked if five participants in the Conservative \$1.2 million election scam were rewarded with federal jobs, but the list does not stop there.

Neil Drabkin is now chief of staff to the public safety minister and Howard Bruce is now on the Transportation Appeal Tribunal. Both these men and the ministers who hired them were named in the election scam.

Are Canadians supposed to believe that this is just a coincidence?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the same answer as before. There has been no change. We always follow the law. We have in the past and we will in the future.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not the opinion of Elections Canada. These are serious matters. These men channelled \$60,000 through the “in-and-out” scheme and were appointed to important posts.

Andrew House, Conservative candidate in Halifax is currently the Director of communications for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages. He will stand as a Conservative candidate again. The minister and her employee participated in the “in-and-out” scheme.

Are we to believe that this is just another coincidence?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has her facts wrong. She has her conclusions wrong. We followed the law. We followed the election financing law. In fact, our practices are similar to those of other parties.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the abuse of our electoral system, the Prime Minister refuses to come clean.

We know the key architect of this electoral laundromat is Mike Donison, the former executive director of the Conservative Party. Instead of being punished for his role in that scheme, Mr. Donison

was rewarded with a job in the government House leader's office. He is being paid by the same taxpayers he is found to have tried to rip off.

My question is very simple. Will Mr. Donison step aside until Elections Canada decides what punishment should be administered?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is punishing is that the Liberals still have nothing to talk about, so I am left with the same answer. Our election financing activities are entirely legal. We look carefully at the act, we follow the act and we will do so in the future.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to be the only person who still believes that answer. The architect of this election scandal is none other than Mike Donison, former Executive Director of the Conservative Party. Rather than being punished for his involvement in the scandal, Mr. Donison was rewarded with a job in the minister's office which is being paid for by the very taxpayers he tried to dupe.

The question is simple. Will the government act responsibly and remove Mr. Donison from his position until Elections Canada decides what his punishment will be?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is the same. All our financing activities follow the law.

However, it is interesting that the Liberal Party thought so much of its leader's stirring response, his alternate throne speech this weekend, that I have not heard a single question on it yet.

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[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for Status of Women made some mean comments when she was threatening and blackmailing women's groups.

Michèle Asselin, the president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, is right to wonder whether the minister's intention is to muzzle women by threatening to take away financial support.

Will the minister admit that her blackmailing is harmful and will she apologize to all women for her comments which, face it, were disparaging and insulting?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the right to criticize the policies of a government is fundamental to our democracy. Every person has the right to express their opinion. The government has a responsibility to set the record straight and defend its initiatives.

The hon. member for Westmount is asking for an apology, but I think she is the one who should apologize for voting against our 2007 budget, when we granted additional funding for women.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for seniors in Quebec made comments similar to those by the minister responsible for the status of women when she said, "We give you money and you do nothing but complain."

Instead of chattering on about inappropriate comments, will the minister follow the Quebec minister's example and apologize to women?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the hon. Bloc member who should apologize. She knows full well that our government has an excellent record when it comes to women's rights. We have increased the budget for Status of Women Canada's programming by 42%. But the hon. Bloc member says nothing about that. The real difference between our government and the Bloc Québécois is that while we can increase the budget for women, the only thing the Bloc can do is increase the volume on the microphone.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade is currently negotiating free trade agreements with 28 countries. Canada has a trade deficit with these countries, in particular with South Korea.

How can the minister rush into signing a free trade agreement while ignoring the study released by the CAW this morning, which shows that more than 30,000 jobs could be lost in Canada, including 8,000 in Quebec? Should saving these jobs not be a major concern for the minister?

•(1435)

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is fully committed to free and open markets and to providing Canadian companies with access to foreign markets. Without free trade, the Canadian economy would be in much tougher shape than it is today.

Yes, we are negotiating with Korea. No, we do not have a free trade agreement yet with Korea. I can assure the hon. member that the government would not enter into a free trade agreement with Korea or any other country unless there were substantial benefits to Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Bank of Canada said that the Canadian dollar's climb is unjustified. He merely said what everyone knows: while Alberta is enjoying the oil and gas boom, the manufacturing industry in Quebec and Ontario is struggling.

Oral Questions

Of the 22 recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, the government has implemented only one of them, and only partially.

What is the minister waiting for to introduce refundable tax credits and loan guarantees, and to make significant federal investments in research and development? These are all measures that could help the manufacturing industry in a concrete way.

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no question about it. The Canadian dollar is showing strength, in part reflecting the great strength of the Canadian economy. After 21 months of Conservative government, we have a very strong economy.

We have the lowest unemployment rate in 33 years. We have the largest number of Canadians in the history of Canada working in Canada, both men and women. It is a strong economy.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is another day and another crisis of accountability for the ethically challenged government. Private U.S. security firms operating in combat zones have raised some very serious questions about whether or not NATO countries can be held accountable by local authorities if laws are broken.

The government has signed a contract to pay Saladin Security in Afghanistan, but Canadians have no way of knowing who will be held responsible if something goes wrong. Why? Because the contract is being kept secret. When will the government stop its pattern of secrecy and table the contract?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, clearly it is not a secret. The hon. member read about it in the paper today, so it is not a secret.

As we have seen on a number of other occasions, private security firms have been used from time to time depending on the issue and on the type of training required. That is standard practice. It has happened under the previous government.

We are very judicious when we enter into these contracts.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is prepared to commit our soldiers to combat missions until 2011, but it has to hire a mercenary company to protect our embassy in Kabul.

One might wonder why the Conservative government is associated with Saladin Security, a company of mercenaries specifically known for certain clandestine operations. This is not clear.

Why are the Conservatives interested in hiring mercenaries? Why can our soldiers not protect our embassy and its staff?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is alleging facts that are simply not true.

The reality is this: we have a contract system and we use it. We have followed all the procedures. We are following the same procedures in all embassies, both in that country and around the world.

The hon. member for Bourassa is trying to distort reality. But the reality is simple: our government has standards and procedures that it follows for all embassies in all countries.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said the government's position against the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people is incomprehensible and an astonishing reversal of Liberal efforts to support the declaration.

Like an astrologer, the Prime Minister claims to be guided by the North Star. Will he admit that on this issue he is indeed like the North Star: cold, unmovable, distant and not too bright?

• (1440)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know exactly what that member thinks about human rights for first nations.

After 30 years of waiting for first nations to have human rights like anyone else, like the hon. member has, do we know what she said in committee when the Liberals delayed this bill in the last Parliament? She said that they have “waited 30 years, what difference does a number of months more make...”, six months, ten months, a year, I do not see what the difference is.

The difference is that it is time first nations had human rights on reserve and we are going to deliver that to them.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Assembly of First Nations, overcrowding in first nations—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre has the floor. We do not want to have a yelling match. The hon. member has the floor and we will hear her question.

Hon. Anita Neville: The apology should come from over there, Mr. Speaker.

According to the Assembly of First Nations, overcrowding in first nations homes is almost double the Canadian rate. Aboriginal peoples are living in homes without hot or even cold running water or flush toilets. Does the government not think it is a human rights issue?

The government's approach to the UN declaration is the same as its approach to housing for aboriginal Canadians. It is meanspirited.

Is this what the government thinks is a shining example for the world to follow?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know what a shining example is to follow and that is to allow first nations to have the same rights as the member opposite who just raised that question. It is to have the same rights. In the last Parliament, we introduced legislation to do that. For 90 days that party over there held up that legislation and would not let it through.

It is time for first nations to have human rights. It is time they were covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act. We expect that member and the rest of those people over there to support human rights for first nations. The time has come.

* * *

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in the Senate the Minister of Justice will be introducing legislation to reinstate important anti-terrorism provisions of the Anti-terrorism Act.

[Translation]

It is important that we have at our disposal all the tools we need to ensure the security of Canadians.

[English]

Can the minister tell the House why he has chosen to introduce the bill in the Senate as opposed to this House?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed as part of its anti-terrorism strategy to reintroducing these two fundamental provisions to the Anti-terrorism Act. We may remember that these were the provisions turned down by the opposition last year, but we are committed to giving law enforcement agencies the tools they need to fight terrorism in this country.

I know that the justice committee is going to be very busy this fall, so I think it is very appropriate that this be introduced in the Senate. The bottom line is that we will not give up the fight against terrorism in this country.

* * *

SECURITY CERTIFICATES

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, eight months after security certificates were struck down by the Supreme Court, the Conservatives are taking another shot at it, but tinkering with a fundamentally flawed idea is not going to make it any better. If a person plots a terrorist attack in Canada, he or she should be tried, convicted, and jailed in Canada, not suddenly deported to another country.

Why is the government choosing to fight terrorism with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and not the Criminal Code of Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are collectively astonished at the lack of understanding the member has just demonstrated. The Minister of Justice has been very clear about the ATA provisions. They have nothing to do with deportation.

If she wants to try to readjust and make the question a little more direct, with common sense, maybe we could handle it. People are deported when they are deemed to be inadmissible to come into this country. We are certainly going to maintain that particular process.

• (1445)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, security certificates are also a serious violation of our rights and freedoms. Yesterday the Conservatives tabled special advocate legislation, but the public safety committee heard extensive testimony earlier this year that the system has serious problems in places such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The minister knows this, so why is the minister proposing something that we already know does not work in other countries?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is the issue of security certificates, which we dealt with yesterday, and there is the area of the provisions in the Anti-terrorism Act, which the Minister of Justice is dealing with today.

The particular provisions we dealt with yesterday were at the request of the Supreme Court. We have followed those very carefully. We have drafted the legislation very carefully. It is not precisely as the information from other countries. As a matter of fact, we have looked at other countries to make sure that what we have done is going to meet the demands of the Supreme Court.

We are also pleased that the Liberals have indicated, at least thus far, that they are going to support us on this.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, changes to the Canada Elections Act have resulted in more than one million rural Canadians losing the right to vote in the next election. Twenty-five per cent of voters in Newfoundland and Labrador, 30% in Saskatchewan, 30% in the Northwest Territories and a whopping 80% in Nunavut will lose their right to vote.

What will the government do to fix this?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question raised by the member is a legitimate and serious question. We are of course concerned. We want to ensure that everybody's right to vote is protected.

I have had an opportunity to discuss this matter with the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. I am confident that, should we have an electoral event before we can correct it in another fashion, he is prepared to use his adaptation power to ensure that no Canadian loses the right to vote.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to accentuate the point. I thank the hon. minister for his response, but the government and indeed

this Parliament have a responsibility to fix this. All Canadians have the right to vote. It is unacceptable to have such a large portion of the population unable to vote because of a glitch in the amended elections act.

Rural Canadians do deserve better. This is a serious issue.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of members of the House who may not be familiar with the situation, the issue is one of addresses that are post office boxes where there are no municipal addresses for individuals. In an effort to put through Bill C-31, all parties in this House supported amendments to tighten up the identification—

An hon. member: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: All parties but for the NDP, I should add. That is fair.

They supported elements to ensure that we had integrity in the electoral process. This element was missed. I suspect that all parties will want to enthusiastically support efforts to correct this deficiency. In any event, we are confident that if there is an electoral event on the horizon no one will lose the right to vote.

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LUMBER INDUSTRY

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that Nova Scotia is poised to become the latest victim in the flawed softwood lumber agreement.

It was bad enough that the Conservative government left \$1 billion in the hands of the U.S. government and its lobbyists. It was bad enough that it negotiated higher duties and quotas for Canadian companies. Now it has become apparent that the forestry program initiated by any provincial government will be sued by the United States.

Will the minister tell us whose side he is on and whose interest he represents?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be congratulating the government for putting in place the softwood lumber agreement because what he is pointing to is the very protectionist group that repeatedly, for years and decades, brought actions under chapter 19 of NAFTA against the Canadian industry. Those allegations were always unfounded.

The allegations that are being made today are unfounded but the softwood lumber agreement protects our industry against trade actions of that kind in addition to putting over \$5 billion back in the pockets of Canadian companies.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot trust the minister and we cannot trust the government. We have an industry in crisis and thousands of jobs on the line and the minister decided to leave \$1 billion with the United States.

Oral Questions

In the absence of federal leadership, any provincial government that tries to work with the forestry industry has come to the harsh realization that it needs to vet its forestry policies with Washington.

The minister has compromised our sovereignty. Why has he put the jobs of American lobbyists ahead of hard-working Canadians?

• (1450)

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of major forest companies out there today would probably be in bankruptcy were it not for the timely refund under the softwood lumber agreement.

The provisions in the softwood lumber agreement are far better, far more flexible and protect Canadian forest policies much better than anything that party could have ever achieved.

* * *

[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unemployment is reaching record highs in the Nord-du-Québec region but the Breakwater mining company has applied to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for 47 permits in order to recruit workers abroad, although unemployed forestry workers are available.

How can the minister justify issuing these 47 permits when the unemployment rate is so high and workers in the area are asking for nothing more than to be employed and receive the necessary training?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we make judgments regarding temporary foreign worker permits, these judgments are made on the basis of labour market surveys. The fact is that in Quebec, up to July, 70,000 new jobs had been created.

Thousands and thousands of jobs are available through the province. We are enjoying some of the most outstanding labour market growth in the history of the country, including in Quebec.

I want to quote from an economist from the Laurentian Bank who said, "Not only is the quantity [of jobs] there, but the quality is there too". He was referring to 70,000 jobs, mostly in hospitality, retail and construction, sending the jobless rate to a record low in July.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, seasonal workers in 21 regions of Canada will miss out on five weeks of employment insurance benefits if the government does nothing. In fact, the current pilot project will come to an end on December 9.

In June 2006, the then Minister of Human Resources and Social Development granted an initial extension.

Will the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development make this pilot project a permanent measure to help get seasonal workers out of the black hole they find themselves in year after year?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have great sympathy for people who are caught in situations like that where there is nothing but seasonal work. We are gripped with this issue but I want to point out to my friend that we are taking many steps to ensure workers have options, including the targeted initiative for older workers which is now underway in Quebec. There are nine different projects.

On top of that, we have announced \$3 billion in new initiatives to provide training across the country over the next five years. We are ensuring that people do have options to get back into the workforce.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the American secure flight program, Canadian airlines will be required to provide personal information on passengers who are not even flying to the U.S. This violation of privacy is without precedents.

Who would want this kind of information in the hands of the Bush administration?

Why has the government done absolutely nothing to protect the rights of Canadians? Whatever happened to standing up for Canada?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Let me remind the members of the House, Mr. Speaker, that this is a proposed new U.S. regulation. Our government has been working with the U.S. to minimize the impact on air travellers. So far, we have been able to ensure that almost 80% of flights will not be captured by the new U.S. law.

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FISHING INDUSTRY

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fishing industry remains a very important aspect of the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. The government is committed to protecting and enhancing Canadian fisheries, especially to ending foreign overfishing in international waters off the province of Newfoundland.

Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans update the House on how he has kept his promise to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and respond to the outrageous claim that NAFO reform would undermine Canada's sovereignty in our own waters?

*Oral Questions***CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD**

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of us remember a very short time ago when Canadian Coast Guard boats were tied up at the wharves because they could not afford fuel when the foreign fleets were ravaging our fish stocks.

That is no longer the case. Our boats are out on surveillance missions. We have no more foreign overfishing because we changed NAFO as we said we would.

This year we cemented these changes in the new convention, the new convention that protects our stocks but protects our sovereignty now and forever.

* * *

● (1455)

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to trade and the manufacturing crisis, the government is taking Canada in the wrong direction. The latest example is the unfair trade deal the government is signing with South Korea.

Last year, Korea sold \$1.7 billion in auto products to Canada. Canada sold a puny \$11 million in trade to Korea; a breathtaking trade deficit the government only wants to make worse.

When will the government put the brakes on a bad trade deal and start standing up for our manufacturing jobs once and for all?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess I will repeat the question back to the hon. member of the NDP. When will the NDP understand that trade is the lifeblood of the Canadian economy?

We do not have a free trade agreement with Korea. We are negotiating with a number of countries. We are negotiating through the World Trade Organization. We are trying to level the playing field for Canadian exporters. We want Canada to be strong. We want to be a good exporter. Our jobs and our futures depend on those things and not on the kind of protectionism that the NDP is advocating.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in spite of that misinformation, the government is clearly going ahead with its so-called free trade deal with South Korea that is neither free nor fair.

When will the Prime Minister honour his election promise, send the proposed agreement to a committee for a full debate and bring it before the House for a vote by parliamentarians or, better yet, when will he come to his senses and get rid of this trade deal that will only hurt Canadian manufacturing jobs?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when there is a free trade agreement, it will come before the House, be viewed by the House and voted on by the House. Therefore, I candidly do not know what the hon. member is talking about.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, respect for the law is a core fundamental Canadian principle and the Prime Minister has violated that principle.

Last July, the government was found guilty by the federal court of attempting to illegally take farmers' marketing rights through the Canadian Wheat Board away.

The previous minister was fired for having failed in the Prime Minister's mission to destroy the board. Worse, the Prime Minister's statements following the court decision shows absolute contempt for the court.

Will the current minister just do what is right and abide by the federal court's decision?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do have the right of appeal on that and we have announced that.

I, for one, as a western Canadian farmer, cannot understand the unhealthy obsession of the former minister from Malpeque. I can pledge to the people of Malpeque that after the next election they will be rid of that one-trick pony.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, counterfeiting and piracy pose an ever-increasing threat to the growth of the knowledge economy and affect consumers and business in Canada and abroad.

Could the Minister of International Trade say what the government is doing in the fight against piracy and counterfeiting on the international stage?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am getting a lot of business today and I would like to thank the hon. member for Peterborough for his question. He is quite right. Intellectual property theft is a particularly pernicious form of piracy. It hurts creators and innovators. It puts consumers in danger and it supports organized crime.

I am, therefore, pleased to announce today that Canada, along with Japan, the United States, the European Union and Switzerland are entering into negotiations to develop an anti-counterfeiting trade agreement that will be a model of intellectual property protection for the world.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the throne speech does not address the issue of poverty, particularly that of the elderly. At present, recipients of the maximum guaranteed income supplement live in poverty with \$13,600 per year, which is below the low-income threshold, a euphemism for the poverty line. Not only does the government have the means to help seniors by providing a decent pension, it has the obligation and the responsibility to do so.

When will the government tackle the poverty of seniors and review the guaranteed income supplement in order to, among other things, improve this benefit substantially?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about the plight of seniors and anyone who is struggling to get by and that is why we have moved to put in place a minister in charge of seniors, the hon. Marjorie LeBreton.

We have also put in place a seniors' panel that will look at seniors' issues and make recommendations to the government. We also have an expert panel on older workers that will provide us with insights on how to help older workers so they can have enough income to allow them to get through their senior years.

However, the one thing we will never do is cut \$25 billion out of the social safety net like the Liberal government did.

* * *

[Translation]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENT PROGRAM

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development stated that he made changes to the summer career placement program because he did not want American multinationals such as Wal-Mart benefiting from the program. He is right. Some Wal-Marts did take advantage of the program, but not in Quebec.

Having denounced this state of affairs, can he explain the fact that at least one of the Wal-Marts that benefited from this program is located in his riding?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because large companies around the country got this kind of funding that we moved to end that sort of support.

Our concern is to ensure that not for profits and the public sector benefit, and we want to ensure it is done in a transparent manner, which is why we put some conditions in place so that MPs could not unduly influence where that funding went.

However, I can assure all members that the one thing we will never do is allow individuals to funnel money to their friends, which is what happened under the previous government. We will not do that.

BORDER SECURITY

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government has learned nothing from the Maher Arar fiasco.

Retired U.S. colonel, Ann Wright, and CodePink co-founder, Medea Benjamin, were blocked at Canada's border because they appeared on an FBI watch list. Their crime was peaceful protest, time-honoured civil disobedience, in opposition to the Iraqi war.

Why is the Prime Minister hiding behind the FBI to ban respected U.S. citizens from entering our country?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the exercise of our sovereign rights, we have very distinct guidelines in terms of who may come into the country and who may not. We exercise those vigorously for the protection and for the interests of Canada, and we will continue to do that.

* * *

[Translation]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that Michael Ignatieff, the hon. member for the electoral district of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, has been appointed to the Board of Internal Economy to replace Lucienne Robillard, the hon. member for the electoral district of Westmount—Ville-Marie, for the purposes and under the provisions of the act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act, Chapter 32, Statutes of Canada, 1997.

* * *

• (1505)

[English]

PRIVILEGE**ALLEGED LEAK OF THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. House leader for the official opposition on October 16, 2007, concerning disclosure to the media of details of the Speech from the Throne prior to its reading by Her Excellency the Governor General to both Houses of Parliament.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the House Leader for the Official Opposition for bringing this matter to the attention of the House, as well as the hon. government House leader for his contribution on this question.

[English]

The House leader for the official opposition, in raising the matter, pointed out that copies of the Speech from the Throne were made available to the media before Her Excellency read the speech in the Senate chamber. The government House leader also expressed his concern about this situation, which he described as troubling.

The Address

[Translation]

I, too, view such matters seriously, as I know all honourable members do. The premature release of important documents, such as the Speech from the Throne or the Budget, runs contrary to our practices.

[English]

In this particular situation, however, there seems to be some disagreement about the responsibility for this leak. I must add, too, that even if undisputed facts were provided in this specific case, the Chair can find no procedural authority for the claim that the premature disclosure of the Speech from the Throne constitutes a breach of the privileges of the members of this House.

In reference to the secrecy of the budget, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states at page 753: “Speakers of the Canadian House have maintained that secrecy is a matter of parliamentary convention, rather than one of privilege”.

I would suggest to the House that the same is true with regard to throne speeches. I therefore must rule that no breach of privilege has occurred in the present case.

Once again, I would like to thank the hon. opposition House leader for going to the trouble of raising this matter.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[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.

The Speaker: Resuming debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. The hon. member for Trois-Rivières has five minutes to finish her remarks. She has the floor.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when we left off before question period, I was talking about one of the Bloc Québécois' suggestions, which was to implement a program of loans and loan guarantees to help fund investments in production equipment. During the lengthy softwood lumber crisis, the Bloc Québécois repeatedly asked the government to give loan guarantees. But the government never helped the softwood lumber companies. Today we can see the sad results.

Since April 1, 2005, 21,000 workers who depended on forestry for their livelihood—including plant workers, forestry workers, machinists and truckers—have lost their jobs and 156 plants have closed. Our regions in Quebec have been very hard hit. It is unbelievable.

During this time, many companies have not been able to invest the money they need to upgrade their machinery and perform on par with their competitors. The government must abandon its laissez-faire approach and help fund investments in production equipment.

We are also suggesting numerous labour-related measures. For example, we are proposing that the government provide incentives for skilled workers to settle in the regions by offering, as the

Government of Quebec does, a refundable tax credit of up to \$8,000 to any young graduate who settles in a resource region and takes a job in this field. Another measure promotes job creation in resource regions and gives secondary and tertiary processing companies in these regions a tax credit equivalent to 30% of the increase in their payroll.

Another measure promotes the development of SME manufacturers in resource regions by offering them a tax break equivalent to 50% of their income tax. It is essential that the government use tax measures to stimulate the creation and development of processing businesses in resource regions. Measures such as this would make it more attractive for skilled workers to settle in areas affected by the forestry crisis.

The federal government must follow the example of the Government of Quebec and promote the labour market to these future workers. Populations are dwindling in our regions and urgent action is needed. Federal corporate income tax is twice as high as the Quebec tax rate and there is no such measure at the federal level. Support from Quebec cannot achieve the maximum effect until Ottawa adapts its taxation to the needs of the forestry industry.

Yet, the government did not announce any specific tax measures in the throne speech. It simply repeats that tax cuts will solve everything. However, tax cuts for businesses that have no profits are completely useless. There is nothing concrete in the throne speech.

As a final point, I would like to talk about research and development. Tax credits for research and development must be improved by transferring them into refundable tax credits, which would be beneficial for all companies that engage in research and development activities, including those that are not earning any profits, as I was saying earlier.

The budget for the industrial research assistance program, or IRAP, must be increased significantly. IRAP is managed by the National Research Council Canada. It is receiving money, but not nearly enough. Through that program, Ottawa must invest in the development of new products, in order to later reap the benefits of the royalties when the product is put on the market.

We must also ensure that the future Canadian wood fibre centre, a new federal research centre announced during the last budget, is established in a forestry region in Quebec.

The government is responsible for stimulating the research and development of new products. Tax credits alone will not do it. There is not enough support for research and development within businesses. Quebec, in particular, is suffering.

We believe it is important for the government to make a commitment and to invest, and we saw no indication of this in the throne speech. It must bring back a fund to diversify the forestry economy, to be managed by local players. However, it must also adapt federal taxation in order to stimulate job creation.

The Address

• (1510)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, today I will discuss my new responsibilities—

The Speaker: Excuse me. I apologize for interrupting the honourable member for Ottawa—Vanier, but I did not see the honourable member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. Does she wish to deliver her speech now? Actually, it is the Bloc Québécois' turn. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot should therefore have the floor.

Pardon me, but the honourable member for Ottawa—Vanier may continue. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot will have the floor after that.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

• (1515)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I will focus on my new responsibilities as the official opposition's heritage and official languages critic.

I will share my time with the member for Mississauga—Erindale.

I believe that the Conservative government should offer a coherent vision of cultural life in Canada, a vision that does not neglect our cultural industries, our artistic institutions, our museums, our artists or our public broadcaster.

[English]

The Conservatives did not do that. In the throne speech there was mention of finally acting on copyright, but there were no details as to content or timing. Legislation had been promised before June 2006 on this matter and then before Christmas 2006. Now, 18 months later, we may get this legislation.

When the minister spoke yesterday, many were hoping to hear a few details on that and her thoughts on a number of other important dossiers in the matters of heritage. Yesterday there was not a word. There was not a word about our public broadcaster, not a word about reassuring Canadians as to whether or not the Reform dissenting opinion of the Lincoln report in 2003 still holds, which would have privatized CBC. There was not a word from the minister on that.

There was not a word about a museums policy. There was not a word about the museums assistance program. The Canadian Museums Association had been given a commitment that a policy would be forthcoming before Christmas 2006. Christmas came and went and it did not get that policy. Yesterday there was not a word.

The Prime Minister announced that the Government of Canada would finance the operational costs of the new human rights museum in Winnipeg, which is fine, but there is still a question mark as to whether or not the \$22 million will be coming from an existing envelope or whether the envelope overall will be increased. My information is that it is from the existing envelope, therefore choking off the existing museums, so much so that they have to do fundraising, as has been reported, to make acquisitions. There was not a word about all of this.

There was also not a word about increasing the museums assistance program. In the last election the Conservatives promised to actually increase the funding to small museums across the country.

Lo and behold, what they did instead was the opposite. They reduced the museums assistance program. There was not a word about that.

There was not a word about the exhibition transportation services for museums and galleries, which is very useful to the smaller galleries and museums. This will expire at the end of March 2008. There was not a word about that.

There was not a word about the portrait gallery. Many people have been asking about that. What is the policy framework within which the government will be making the decision as to where the portrait gallery should be located?

There was not a word about the television fund. Will it ever be A-based? Will it be indexed? What about funding for Telefilm and the National Film Board? Will they be increased? Will they be indexed? There was not a word.

There was not a word about festivals. There was not a word about where the minister is vis-à-vis the CRTC and Canadian content and foreign ownership restrictions.

Right now we have a situation where the government has, by executive fiat, which comes from the industry department and not from the heritage department, directed the CRTC essentially to let market forces dominate. Is the minister's silence consent as to this direction for Canadian cultural industries, Canadian television and film content? If it is, perhaps she should have said so yesterday.

[Translation]

Canada's cultural and artistic communities have not been given enough information. They do not know what to expect from the Conservative government. This is not unlike what happened when the federal government copied the Liberal Party's promise during the last election campaign to double funding for the Council for the Arts. As it turns out, that is not at all what the government has done.

The minister talked exclusively about official languages earlier, and that is fine, but she could have mentioned her other portfolio: Canadian Heritage.

With respect to official languages, she congratulated herself on having signed service and education agreements with all of the provinces. I should hope so, because by the time the government came to power, those agreements had already been negotiated and confirmed. All she had to do was sign them. The Conservatives can go ahead and take all the credit, but they really should give credit where credit is due.

The minister said that she met with the ministers responsible for la Francophonie a month ago. However, she failed to mention that these very ministers issued a press release demanding that the federal government renew the action plan that was introduced by its predecessor in 2003.

The Address

Let us talk about this plan. This begs a fundamental question: does the Conservative government intend to renew the plan? It found all manner of ways to avoid this word, avoid this specific commitment. What the linguistic minority communities across the country are asking for, and what the ministers responsible for la Francophonie across the country asked for, is that the action plan be renewed. In the Speech from the Throne, there is not a single occurrence of the word “renewal”. The government has chosen its words carefully.

The minister wanted to focus on the issue of official languages; we were hoping she would, because it is not clear. Would the plan be renewed for one year, two years, five years? It is not clear. How much money would be allocated? Not a word. Are we talking about broadening this action plan? A promise was made after many consultations with the communities. It was a matter of broadening the plan to incorporate programs for young people, women, seniors, culture and international issues. Not a word.

She did not talk about the setbacks we have had under her government either; the cancellation of the court challenges program, for example. As for the Official Languages Secretariat, which was a branch of the Privy Council, the government decided to transfer it to Canadian Heritage, when we know full well that a secretariat located in a central agency has a lot more influence and a greater ability to take action.

Were it not for the existence of this secretariat at the Privy Council when I was minister responsible for official languages, we would not have succeeded in getting language clauses in the early childhood agreements with every province. What did this government do? It relieved the Privy Council of its role in official languages and gave that role to Canadian Heritage. The communities are having a hard time getting their bearings. The minister could have said a few words about this, but she chose not to say a word.

As for the new round of budget cuts just starting, which her department is subject to, would the action plan for official languages be protected from these cuts this time? Not a word.

As for the Department of National Defence in this struggle to promote linguistic duality, and we totally agree that it is the role of the Government of Canada to ensure that the Official Languages Act is respected across the country, there is not a word. National Defence has given up and there is not a word on this from the government.

Nor was anything said about one of the Prime Minister's first actions when he came to power, informing us that he intended to cancel all early childhood agreements—the very agreements that had been negotiated and that communities were celebrating from one end of the country to the other. It is a major setback for these communities. The minister did not say one word about this.

There is not one word about the fact that, after they were elected, the Conservatives decided that the Commissioner of Official Languages, an officer of this House, would no longer report to the Prime Minister but would report to another minister. Previous governments had indicated the importance they attributed to the issue of linguistic duality and the official languages. They said that, in terms of the government, the Commissioner of Official Languages reported to the Prime Minister. In terms of his mandate, he obviously reports to the House of Commons, as he should.

However, even more disturbing, there is not a word about Bill S-3. When in opposition, his government supported the bill, which dealt with the last amendments to the Official Languages Act made in November 2005, when everyone was celebrating.

• (1520)

Where are the plans that were to come out of the application of Bill S-3? Where is the regulatory framework? Where are the consultations that will result in the regulations? Where is the cabinet committee on official languages, the ad hoc committee that has not met, as far as I know, for 18 months? What is the minister doing about these matters?

All I can do, as did the Commissioner for Official Languages in his first report, is criticize the Prime Minister and his government for not having backed up these lovely words with concrete action.

[*English*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague on an excellent speech. I really do hope that members on the government side took note of his speech. I know the former defence minister has, because all of us in the House could learn quite a bit from the hon. member's speech. He brought to light some serious omissions in the Speech from the Throne, omissions that deal with culture, the very essence of the fabric that is Canada, the definition of its heart and soul.

I want to ask my hon. colleague if he could expand on the repercussions of such omissions to Canadian society.

• (1525)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I should first of all correct my hon. colleague in that I was never minister of defence. I had the honour of being associate minister of defence and my colleague, Mr. Graham, who is no longer in Parliament, had asked me to look into the official languages application in defence.

The answer to the question is to be found in what others have said. When we look at the concerns expressed by ACTRA, by the Canadian Conference of the Arts and by la Fédération culturelle canadienne française following the Speech from the Throne, we see they have some grave concerns as to the absence of anything to deal with culture writ large, our cultural industries in the Speech from the Throne.

Yes, they acknowledge there is mention of copyright legislation which we have been waiting now for 18 months, either in industry or in heritage, as my colleague over there from Edmonton knows. The absence of where the government wishes to take or not to take Canada's cultural concerns is very much something that frightens people. There are a number of signals that have emanated in the past, as I mentioned one, from the Reform Party in its dissenting opinion on the Clifford Lincoln report about the role of a public broadcaster, wishing for the privatization of CBC. That has never been denied by the current government.

The Address

There are a number of concerns out there which the government had an opportunity to address in the Speech from the Throne and it chose not to. The question is still very valid: Is there something that the Conservatives do not wish to tell us? Perhaps in questions in the House or perhaps even better in committee, we can get some answers to these questions. They are fundamental to the well-being of Canadian identity in a continent where we are dominated by our neighbours from the south.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on what the hon. member opposite was talking about with respect to copyright legislation. As he said, it was mentioned in the throne speech, so it will be a priority for the government this fall going forward.

He obviously knows that in a minority government situation like this it will require at least two parties if not more to come to a consensus on this issue. I am wondering perhaps if he would enlighten the House about some of the specifics that he and his party would like to see in such copyright legislation. Bill C-60 was introduced in the last session, but perhaps he could identify some of the specifics that he, as the critic, and his party would like to see in any such copyright legislation this fall.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, by the very nature of a minority Parliament, it is for the government to consult first and foremost. The government should reach out not only to the opposition parties, but it should include the opposition parties and reach out in terms of what our expectations are. Before that, it should reach out to the industry, and not just the industry side of that, because there is industry and there is heritage. There has forever been a bit of a dichotomy in heritage.

My colleague was not here during the last round of modernization of the Copyright Act which I think was Bill C-32 in the 35th Parliament. That is how far back it goes. It was complex and difficult. Compromises had to be worked out even in a majority Parliament. Imagine that.

My hon. colleague's question regarding a minority Parliament is that much more relevant. At the base of it all to ensure success first and foremost are consultations that are respectful and that lead to perhaps compromised positions which everyone can live with. I assure him and his minister that we in the official opposition are quite prepared to play ball in that field.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order, please. Before the speech from the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, I wanted to give the floor to another member, but she is not here. I would like to give the floor to the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for her maiden speech in the House. A member from the Liberal Party will then have the floor.

• (1530)

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to once again thank the constituents in my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. They elected me on September 17 with a very clear mandate: defend their interests and demand that the government meet the five conditions of the Bloc Québécois.

We are against the Speech from the Throne. We think it represents another missed opportunity for the Conservative government to meet

the repeated demands of Quebec, for which the Bloc Québécois set out five conditions. In other cases, the Conservative government is refusing to respond to demands based on unanimous motions from the Quebec National Assembly.

My colleagues who spoke earlier explained very well the reasons my party is against the Speech from the Throne. Nothing in this speech gives me a reason to tell my constituents in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot that their demands have been met and this is what I am going to speak about.

First, on the issue of Canada's current combat mission in Afghanistan, it is completely unacceptable for the government to extend the mission until 2011. More and more people are saying that resources that should be invested in humanitarian aid and reconstruction are being invested instead in combat forces and that rather than being considered as allies by the Afghans, our soldiers are making enemies of them. It is reported that poppy production has never been healthier in Afghanistan. This proves that the mission objectives have not been met.

I am tempted to draw a parallel with the problems associated with marijuana production in my region. When a population is faced with the consequences of drug trafficking, there is only one way to fight the problem, and that is to involve the people, as the Bloc Québécois members have succeeded in doing in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, with the help of law enforcement authorities. Have our soldiers in Afghanistan succeeded in making the Afghan people their allies? The answer is no.

I personally know some of the soldiers from my region who are serving on this mission. I believe that they deserve our admiration because they are bravely risking their lives to defend the lives of others. But at the same time, at the very least, our soldiers need to feel that they are taking part in a mission that is really helping the Afghan people. That is why we must tell NATO now that the current mission will end in February 2009.

Second, the Conservative government is proposing to limit federal spending power only for new shared-cost programs, with the right to opt out with "reasonable compensation". This proposal calls to mind the proposed social union, which makes it unacceptable to Quebec for a number of reasons. I will mention only two.

The first reason is simply that the government is not proposing to eliminate federal spending power, but limit it. Quebecers agree that federal spending power must be eliminated. Quebec has been challenging that power for over half a century. Even after his government was elected, the Prime Minister repeatedly stated that he and his party would oppose federal spending power. Our party asked that the federal government promise to stop spending altogether in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. The throne speech does not come anywhere near that.

The second reason is that the Conservative government claims that it is responding to our demands, but in reality, it is referring to non-existent spending.

The Address

•(1535)

Indeed, the government wants to limit use of the federal spending power only in the case of shared cost programs. The fact is, most federal spending in areas of Quebec jurisdiction is not for shared cost programs, and there are fewer and fewer programs of this nature.

What we have seen in recent months under the Conservative government have been transfers that are conditional on federal priorities and therefore constitute interference, pure and simple, such as the new Canadian Mental Health Commission or the cervical cancer vaccination program. The federal steamroller continues to interfere in provincial jurisdictions. Clearly, the recognition of Quebec as a nation within a united Canada has in no way changed the federal government's desire to interfere.

Let us now discuss the Bloc Québécois' third condition, which involved specific measures to support the workers, businesses and regions suffering from the manufacturing crisis and the forestry crisis. With the help of people from the field, the Bloc Québécois had proposed some measures to modernize and revive the forest economy, thereby supporting the workers affected by the crisis.

My colleagues have probably already mentioned this, but it is worth saying again: 21,000 of Quebec's forestry workers have lost their jobs since April 1, 2005, and no fewer than 156 mills have ceased operations. The rising Canadian dollar has not helped things at all.

People sometimes forget that the crisis in the forestry industry can affect regions whose economies are not resource-based. For example, in my riding, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, a heavy machinery manufacturer that supplied the forestry sector had to close its doors in 2006, forcing a lot of people to look for new jobs.

The rising dollar also led to the closure of two pork processing plants in my riding. Once again, many jobs were lost.

I am sure that my colleagues know just how hard it can be for a worker in his or her fifties to find another job, especially when several workers lose their jobs at the same time. We were hoping that the Conservative government would help these workers by creating an income support program for workers aged 55 to 64 who cannot be retrained and who were victims of massive layoffs, a program that would have helped them bridge the gap between employment insurance and their pension fund, as proposed by the Bloc Québécois.

We were also hoping that the Conservative government would use this opportunity to restore everything the Liberals cut from the employment insurance program. This would have given most unemployed people the benefits they are due for having contributed, along with their employers, to a fund that belongs to them. After all, the Prime Minister, too, used to criticize the Liberal decision to dip into the employment insurance fund.

Instead, we got nothing. Too bad for older workers and for forestry regions in dire straits. The Bloc Québécois thinks that is unacceptable.

I would now like to address the Bloc Québécois' fourth condition: respecting Canada's commitments under the Kyoto accord by

adopting a territorial approach that would recognize Quebec's compliance with the Kyoto targets.

The throne speech contained no surprises in that regard. There was nothing in it that would be good for Quebec or for sustainable development in general. My colleagues have already said a lot about this, so I will just add that the Conservative government is still trying to fool the public by choosing intensity targets over real results.

They have a lot of nerve, saying they want greenhouse gas emissions to increase at a slower rate.

•(1540)

The Bloc Québécois' fifth condition was that the government make a firm commitment to defending the supply-managed system for agriculture. We know how important this is to the producers of milk, poultry and eggs, products that supply a livelihood for many farm families in Quebec.

In the throne speech, the Conservatives only mention the "government's strong support" for supply management. This is a very half-hearted statement especially when we think of the statements by the Minister of International Trade. At a time when the concept of food sovereignty is increasingly taking hold of citizens in Quebec and elsewhere in the world, it is unacceptable that the Canadian government is not taking responsibility for defending supply management.

I could also have talked about the Conservative approach to justice, the creation of a single securities commission, proposals in the throne speech that run counter to the Quebec consensus or recognition of the primacy of the French language in Quebec, of which there is no mention in the throne speech, but I will stop there. I believe that there are enough reasons for us to vote against this throne speech.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure the House would want to join with me in congratulating the hon. member on her first speech in the House of Commons.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Abbotsford.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I by welcoming the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot to this august chamber. I hope she has as much satisfaction in serving her constituency as I have had in my first 20 months in the House.

As time goes by, she will notice there are many opinions floating around this chamber and, as she knows, opinions are, at the very heart, subjective. They are our own feelings about different issues. However, from time to time, all of us make statements that allege certain facts. She made one of those, and I think she may be incorrect and I want to challenge her on that.

She had suggested that in Canada's role in Afghanistan, in trying to rebuild and reconstruct a fledgling democracy in Afghanistan, somehow Canada had failed to turn the Afghan people into allies of ours.

The Address

In fact, a recent poll last week indicated that a huge majority of the Afghan people were not only very aware of the role Canada plays in Afghanistan, but in fact support Canada's role there and want our armed forces to remain engaged in providing security and protection to the people of Afghanistan.

In light of that poll, which was done by a very prestigious Canadian polling organization, could she explain how she then would allege that the Afghan people were not allies of Canada? From my view, it is very clear—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāï Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, I would say to my colleague opposite that Canadian soldiers presently in Afghanistan are on a combat mission. The Bloc Québécois believes that it is very important to advise NATO that we will withdraw from this mission in February 2009 at the latest.

I find it difficult to understand that the throne speech talks about extending this mission without discussing it in committee. In addition, when I stated that we should be allies of the Afghan people, I believe that one of the things that they expect from Canada is that we be effectively involved in the reconstruction of their country.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on her first speech in the House and look forward to many more good speeches like that.

I would like to ask the hon. member what she would like to see in the throne speech regarding the environment?

As we know, the previous government had a green plan. The present government cut over 100 items. There was support for solar energy, wind energy, biodiesel, carbon sequestration, clean coal, cutting auto emissions and large final emitters. There were many projects. Some that the government cut were brought back, such as EnerGuide, but with less money and it is less effective.

Does the hon. member think that the throne speech was adequate in relation to the environment, and if not, what would she have liked to have seen in the throne speech?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāï Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, by voting against the budget, the Bloc Québécois is opposing the measures announced.

However, I would like to point out that the Liberals are currently helping the government remain in power and, at the same time, are supporting the unacceptable components of the proposals in the throne speech.

The Bloc Québécois has stood up to denounce everything the Conservatives have failed to do with respect to the Kyoto protocol.

[*English*]

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the throne speech today. This is actually a great opportunity to respond to what the Conservative government has outlined for Canadians.

First, I do want to say that it is good to be back in the House of Commons. It is good to be back after so many Canadians have asked us: “Why was Parliament shut down for an additional month? Why were MPs not at their desks, in their offices, and in the chamber doing the work that Canadians expect them to do?”

I will be honest, during the summer I spoke with many of my constituents. I went door to door. I met with them at events, at my office and they all asked me this question. I really did not have any convincing response. I could not explain to them why the Conservatives decided to prorogue Parliament and delay the return of Parliament for an additional month.

If the Conservative government really wanted to do that, why did it not prorogue Parliament during the summer months? The House did not sit for over a month's time, so why did the government not prorogue Parliament during the summer months? No, the Conservatives wanted to delay Parliament. They wanted to lock out MPs from doing their work. They wanted to avoid answering questions about which Canadians expect to hear answers.

Many pundits gave us an answer about why this Conservative government is good at playing political games. It wanted to stop questions. It wanted to avoid questions. It wanted to appear that it had this new agenda. It wanted to create some hype and that is what it is good at: playing political games and posturing. But nothing serious for Canadians. The Conservatives are running on fumes. They have run out of ideas.

I would have expected the throne speech, after that delay, to come up with a new set of ideas, a new vision, an invigorated plan, and some kind of explanation for why the government prorogued Parliament. There was nothing. This was quite a disappointment. We would think that at least the throne speech would address the items that the Conservatives claimed were their priorities. We would think that at least they would have answered questions about their failed promises and their broken promises and unfulfilled promises. There was nothing.

An hon. member: Which ones?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: I am glad an hon. member asks me which ones. Let me begin.

By the way, I did not expect him to address the in and out scheme from Elections Canada. I did not expect that. I understand why the Conservatives would avoid explaining that in the throne speech. Never mind, we will be asking these questions and the Conservatives will have to answer these questions, not just to us and to Elections Canada, but to Canadians who want to know the answer.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Omar Alghabra: I do not mean to get on the nerves of the Conservatives. I am just doing my job here. I hope they can sit down and listen, and answer these questions.

Let us talk about the items that were priorities. The Conservatives falsely claim that they are the champions of accountability.

The Address

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Yes, that is right, falsely claim. I am glad they are applauding. What have they done so far? Where is the public appointment commissioner? They promised to appoint a public appointment commissioner. They have not appointed a public appointment commissioner.

So far the government has appointed more than 2,000 people. Many of them are their friends and supporters. Where is the public appointment commissioner? What did they do the other day? They struck out the word "accountability" from their manuals. Is this what they talk about when they say accountability? Is this what they mean when they say "we are accountable to Canadians". It is very transparent. This was the number one priority for the Conservatives. I would hate to see what they would do if it were not one of their priorities.

We want a public appointment commissioner. We want to make sure that these appointments are held in check and the Conservatives are accountable to Canadians.

Number two, they made a promise, and this is again one of their priorities, on health wait time guarantees. Where is that promise? Constituents in my riding are asking me and saying that health care needs support from the federal government. The federal Conservatives are absent. They said nothing about it in the throne speech. They have done nothing about it so far and they have failed Canadians.

The Conservatives did not explain in the throne speech why they raised income taxes. Why did they not explain why they raised income taxes? They raised income taxes. They reversed decreases that the previous government had implemented in the fall of 2005. That is very shameful.

● (1550)

What is even more shameful is that the Conservatives claimed they were reducing taxes. They are misleading Canadians. They have raised income taxes. All Canadians need to do is look at their income tax return to see that the rates have been raised by .5% from 2005 to 2006. That is shameful.

The Conservatives talk about having safer communities as one of their priorities. They promised to put 2,500 extra police officers on the streets, yet in the last two budgets there has been no fulfillment of that promise. My constituents are asking: if the Conservatives are really serious about crime, why are they not fulfilling that promise, why are they not reforming the judicial process? The Conservatives are just posturing. They are just misleading Canadians.

Let us talk about another priority that the Conservatives had in the last campaign: early learning and childhood education. They promised the creation of 125,000 extra spaces. Where are these spaces? Not a single space has been created.

There have been two budgets and it has been close to two years and they have not only not fulfilled their promise but they are not even talking about it in the throne speech. It is completely absent from the throne speech.

In Mississauga, there are more than 2,000 kids on waiting lists for child care spaces. The government cares nothing about that and has done nothing about that.

Let us talk about the environment. The Conservative government pretends to care about the environment, but what has it done so far? Nothing. It has cancelled Liberal programs, it has misled the public, it has misled the international community, and it has done nothing.

Do members know what the Conservatives are all about? They are about pretend politics. I read a letter in *The Globe and Mail* the other day written by one Canadian who has them figured them out. He wrote that the Conservatives were all about pretend politics and that Canadians were going to pretend to vote for them in the next election.

The Conservatives are all about rhetoric but no action. With regard to the environment, they failed Canadians and they failed the international community while everybody else knows that this is the number one challenge that our planet is facing.

What have the Conservatives done about infrastructure spending? They have done nothing. Mississauga has already been promised by the Prime Minister an additional \$80 million to help in the rapid bus transit project last March. The money has yet to come. Our provincial counterparts have made that pledge and the money is there.

However, the federal government, because there was a risk of an election last spring, has yet to send the money. Many people in Mississauga are waiting for that money. We need infrastructure money. The City of Mississauga has been let down by the Conservative government. Do members know why? Because the Conservatives know they are at odds with the people of Mississauga. They do not care about the people of Mississauga. They do not listen to the needs of the people of Mississauga.

What about immigration? There is not a single word in the throne speech about immigration. Everybody knows that immigration is essential to the success of the future of our country. What did the Conservatives do? They ignored it. They have been ignoring it for the last two years.

They made a promise, by the way, in the last campaign about creating an assessment office for foreign credentials. What have they done? They broke that promise. They looked straight into the face of the Canadian public and said, "Sorry, we can't fulfill that promise". Yet, in last election campaign, they exploited the angst and frustrations of many new Canadians and told them, "Don't worry. We're going to fix it for you. Vote us in." And once they became the government, they have broken that promise shamelessly.

Our economy is facing a huge labour shortage. What is the government doing about it? Nothing.

Since I only have one minute left, let me get down to the point. Let me talk about how difficult it was to decide what to do about the throne speech. I explained quite clearly how the Conservative government has neglected the needs of Canadians. However, we have a priority. We have a responsibility to Canadians.

The Address

•(1555)

It is very tempting to bring the government down today, and I want to go to Canadians and ask them to kick the Conservative government out of office. However, we cannot act irresponsibly like the Conservatives. We have to be responsible, we have to be deliberate in our decision-making process and we have to be thoughtful. We cannot go on a whim of emotions and political posturing.

Since the throne speech has nothing binding to Canadians, we will sit down and wait to see what the Conservatives will do. However, next time there is legislation that we feel is taking Canadians in the wrong direction, we will be sure to hold the government to account and ask Canadians to be the judge.

I wish my colleagues all the best—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I thought that was a nice note, one side of the House wishing the other all the best.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Palliser.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was quite a dissertation from my friend opposite. I found it ironic that he would be wishing everyone luck in their campaigns, as though there would be a campaign in the near future.

Every member in the House knows that the Liberal Party exists only to wield power. That is all the Liberals care about. Everyone knows that if they thought they could win a general election tomorrow, I would be pounding in signs as we speak.

The Liberal position on tax relief, like their stance on most issues, has been less than clear. In 1993 the Liberals promised to scrap the GST. That was in their famous red book. I challenge anyone here to find a red book today because they have burned them all. Now they are opposed to cutting the GST, which the government proposed in the Speech from the Throne. The Leader of the Opposition has even talked about raising the GST.

Why will the Liberal Party not stand behind the government in our effort to lower this excessive and regressive tax?

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my hon. colleague has raised the issue of the GST.

First, the Liberals did not make a promise in the red book, as the hon. member said, but somebody did make a promise. When that promise was not fulfilled, Sheila Copps resigned.

I call on the Prime Minister to resign for breaking the promise on income trusts and let Canadians make their decision.

I call upon the Prime Minister to resign for breaking the promise on the foreign credential legislation.

I call on the Prime Minister to resign for breaking the promise to Atlantic Canadians.

I call on all government members to stand up for the promises you made—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Unfortunately, the member lapsed into the second person.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre on another question or comment.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale for his excellent analysis of the throne speech. It is a shame that he will be unable to give effect to that by having members of his caucus stand up and vote the way they say they believe, but that is another matter.

The issue I want to raise specifically with the hon. member is this. He mentioned a lack of any reference to new Canadians in the throne speech. In Hamilton we continue to have a huge problem with foreign trained professionals being unable to perform the work in the profession for which they are trained. There are far too many. This is not a caricature; this is reality. We have far too many PhDs driving cabs and delivering pizza. Not that it is not honourable work, but we have more important things for them to do.

I would assume the member has similar problems in his community of Mississauga. Perhaps he would like to expand on why he believes, like I, that the government, whatever it is, needs to do a lot more in this area. If we truly want to build our economy and say to the world that Canada is open to having new people join us, then we need to find a way to ensure we are translating their professional skills into jobs in Canada where we need the service and they need the work.

Could the hon. member talk about how it affects his constituents in Mississauga?

•(1600)

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, the issue is a very important one, and I thank my hon. colleague for raising it.

More than 50% of the people of Mississauga were born outside of Canada. Many of them have immigrated here particularly because of their amazing and incredible skills. We have attracted them to Canada so we can utilize those skills.

However, as many economists tell us, we are missing out on much economic activity because we are unable to utilize those skills. We are missing out on \$6 billion a year of economic activity.

What did the Conservatives do in the last campaign? They exploited that frustration. They exploited that angst. They promised they would fix the problem quickly. What have they done? Nothing.

I admit, it is a complex problem. I admit it requires provincial-federal cooperation with post-secondary education and with many government agencies. However, what have the Conservatives done about that? Nothing.

The Conservatives could introduce initiatives that retrain these individuals. They could introduce initiatives in cooperation with assessment agencies or the regulating bodies to ensure they recruit individuals and upgrade or assess their credentials, but they have done nothing. They have created a kiosk that points fingers for individuals and tells them to speak to that individual or that agency. They have not fixed the problem and I am really sorry about that.

The Address

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today. I will be splitting my time with the Minister of National Revenue. Like most Canadians, I like to share with the minister at least once a year when he assesses my taxes. I am sure he will look at my file a little differently now that I am sharing with him.

I was really thrilled to be appointed by the Prime Minister to this role. It is a dream come true at some times. Other times it is more of a nightmare. There are a lot of thorny issues that percolate around the agricultural sector in our great country, Canada.

This is an agricultural day on the Hill. A lot of groups are around the Hill advocating and lobbying and so on. I started out my day at about 7 o'clock this morning with a breakfast with fertilizer groups from across the country. We talked about their future and the role they play in agriculture. It was a great discussion of issues pertinent to them, and I look forward to my next meeting with them as well.

Later today I will meet with the animal nutrition folks. They are working their way through a lot of the glitches that have arisen with respect to imported animal nutrition products and how we are going to come to grips with free and unfettered trade, but still ensuring that the food supply is safe and secure for our pets as well as people. We working toward that end.

Tonight a lot of us will end up with the CAFTA group that is here. At the same time the Canadian Federation of Agriculture is putting on another function as well. There is never any lack of things going on in the agricultural files.

There are a number of things I have been happy to pick up from my predecessor, now the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, who did a fantastic job on this file. We have a saying in agricultural areas that I am basically harrowing the ground that he ploughed on a lot of these issues. I tried using that logic with a member of the media in Ottawa at one time and the person got it backward. The individual was harrowing before ploughing. Out in the real world we do it in the right order and a lot of it has to do with the environment and taking care of that in our charge.

A number of things in the throne speech have been decried by the Liberals. A lot of that may be alligator tears and a bit of an impression that they never really measured up.

There were a number of Liberal throne speeches. They prorogued a number of times and recessed and did all sorts of funny tricks. Most of their throne speeches ended up in the archives because nothing ever came out of them. I never found any mention of agriculture in any Liberal throne speeches. You have been here longer than I have, Mr. Speaker, and I would challenge you to try to remember back over the years any words of encouragement to the agricultural sector in a Liberal throne speech. I could not find any at all.

Then I started to think that maybe the Liberals put it all into their budgets. Maybe that was when they kept their powder dry in the throne speeches and rather than over promise, they would deliver something in their budgets. I started checking those too and other than a trail of tears leading to the vault from Canadian taxpayers, I could not find mention of agriculture in their budgets either.

There was a lot of neglect on the agricultural file over the 13 years the Liberals were in office. My colleague from Prince Edward Island, who is with us here today, is agreeing with me. He is nodding his head. Farmers on the emerald isle are telling him that as well. I am happy to have that support.

I had a great trip out to Prince Edward Island a couple of weeks ago. The member of the agriculture committee from Prince Edward Island followed me around and re-announced my announcements a day later. That is the greatest form of flattery. He is agreeing with everything we are doing. I am certain we will see a lot of support from the member.

I made a mistake in question period. I should have said the former minister, the agricultural brain child from Prince Edward Island. I want to apologize to the rest of the country for mistakenly calling him the minister. Everybody is going to have a late night trying to get to sleep after that one.

A number of great initiatives have been announced in the throne speech that pertain to agriculture. There is mention about interprovincial trade barriers. We all know the cost and the cause of those types of things as we have these little kingdoms across the country. Some of the provinces, specifically British Columbia and Alberta, have come forward with an agreement called TILMA, which gets rid of that boundary when it comes to agricultural products especially. We hear some discussions are happening between Ontario and Quebec. It is all great news.

We need free and unfettered trade among our provinces the same as we are seeking. My seatmate, the Minister of International Trade, was on his feet today a number of times. He talked about bilateral trade agreements, on which we are working. Those are requirements of a trading nation like our country, whether we get everything we are looking for at the WTO in Geneva this go around or not. We are still going to need bilateral trade agreements to build on that foundation or to take the place of that if a deal does not go through. It is not looking good at this point. There are a lot of different interests at play.

● (1605)

Our main trade negotiator, a fellow named Steve Verheul, has done yeoman service. I have a lot of time for Steve as do most farming operations across the country. He has done a tremendous service for Canadian agriculture in carrying that message and that load to the round tables at Geneva. Steve deserves our respect and certainly a bigger pay cheque than we could ever give him.

He does that job. He is the greatest cheerleader for Saskatchewan agriculture, Ontario agriculture, the Maritimes agriculture and Quebec agriculture. Every form of agriculture in the country is being represented equally and robustly by Mr. Verheul at those tables as we could ever imagine. I just cannot comment enough on the great job he has done.

The Address

There are a lot of other things in the throne speech. We reiterate our movement toward free and unfettered trade in the world. We are very close in negotiating some of the trade deals. Some of them we have signed.

I started to check back in history. I wanted to compare our action with what the Liberals did over 13 years and I could not find one action. The member who spoke before me went on and on about what is not in and what is in and how they would do a better job. I guess if we want to compare report cards, that is what the next election will be all about, whenever it comes.

I am happy doing my job. If it comes to pounding campaign signs tomorrow, next spring or next fall or October 2009, when we have actually stipulated the date, I am happy to do that.

However, I am here and I want to govern. I have enjoyed working with my provincial counterparts, teeing off on the great work that the former minister did in Whistler last June, moving forward with "Growing Forward", getting past that old CAIS program, which even the Liberals have said we should have done earlier. We campaigned and made a promise on that. We are following through on this and we are replacing it.

We are coming forward with user friendly products. They are bankable, they are predictable and they are the best of which we can work.

We have had two rounds of discussions with the farm groups. We are looking forward to a third round. I had a conference call with my provincial counterparts last week. I am looking forward to a face to face meeting in mid-November to carry on with the great work the farm lobby has done in building this new generation of products.

Of course we cannot back stop everything we would like to. There are trade rules that curtail us in certain ways. However, we have been very innovative and appreciative of what the farmers have gone through sector by sector.

Talking about innovation, I came to this job with one concrete principle, having been a former producer. My one and only concrete principle is farmers first. Without a robust farm gate, a vibrant farm gate, none of the rest of my portfolio or a lot of other portfolios make any difference at all.

We are about ensuring that farmers can do what they do best, which is to plant those seeds, raise those livestock, grow the vineyards, the orchards and so on, which make this great diverse agricultural sector.

I have stayed with that bedrock principle. I have had great discussions with some of the processing sector, which is also facing some anomalies at this point with the dollar rising as quickly as it has and as dramatically as it has. A lot of that speaks to the robust Canadian economy as a whole. Our American counterparts are slipping a little and they are our major trading partners. Some 85% of what we trade goes back and forth across the border on a daily basis.

We are all about free and unfettered trade, but it is easier to get a piece of steak into Montana than it is to get it from Lloydminster into Alberta. That is how crazy that interprovincial trade stuff is.

We are looking at a lot of those issues, working with our provincial counterparts, building a stronger economy around the farm gate. In the statement my parliamentary secretary made today in the House, his S. O. 31, he talked about the contribution of agriculture to the GDP of our great country. The third largest contributor, some 8% of our GDP, comes right out of that farm gate. If we do not stop and think about the great work the men and women in the farm families are doing across the country every time we sit down to a great meal or a great snack, then we are missing the boat.

There has been a disconnect over the years between the gate to plate analogy. I remember years ago being raised on the farm. There was not a Sunday that I can remember that the aunts, uncles and cousins did not come out from Saskatoon or the cities they lived in and enjoyed a great chicken or beef supper, or a trip to the pasture to check on the cows. Of course we had the good old wiener roast down there.

I do not remember ever losing that disconnect. They were all born in farm families, moved to the city to carry on with a career, but they never lost that analogy. They always came back and remembered that foundation, that anchor, which was what Canada was all about.

I have had a tremendous opportunity to look at the future of agriculture. In my mind it is all about science and technology and it is all about innovation.

●(1610)

I made a comment at the biotech summit a couple of weeks ago. I said that when my grandfather was homesteading, his hands were on the plow and he dressed accordingly. Today, the pioneers for agriculture are wearing lab coats. That has dramatically changed over the last 100 years. Over the next 10 years, I think we will see a paradigm shift in agriculture as we start to look at bigger and better things for our farmers and our farm gate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the presentation given by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, in which he spoke in general terms about his activities within the department. However, I did not hear any convincing arguments concerning the throne speech itself.

As a Bloc Québécois member, I would like to discuss an issue that, I believe, is crucial. Now that Parliament as a whole has recognized Quebec as a nation, I think the government missed out on a good opportunity to make certain gestures after such a fine declaration. This is important to all Canadians, but most of all, to Quebecers.

The Address

I would like to discuss more specifically the federal spending power. For the past 50 years or so, this federal spending power has been denounced in Quebec, by both the Liberal Party in power and the Parti Québécois. The Séguin report, whose author was a Liberal, recommends that, and I quote:

Quebec vigorously reiterates its traditional stance concerning the absence of a constitutional basis for "federal spending power" since this "power" does not respect the division of powers stipulated in the Constitution.

This is merely one element I could mention. Building on the recent recognition of the Quebec nation, the throne speech timidly proposes limiting use of the federal spending power, but only in shared cost programs. Shared cost programs are practically non-existent. Here in this House, the government tends to adopt programs that interfere in provincial jurisdictions, such as the mental health program and the cervical cancer program. Both of these programs involve political interference in the area of health care, which falls under provincial jurisdiction.

• (1615)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but we have to give the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board time to respond.

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what the member opposite was mumbling on about. It would have been a lot easier for him to read the throne speech without his Bloc blinders on. He did end up in health funding.

The member should know that we have replaced the funding that the Liberals clawed out of the health accord and the social transfers. We have replaced that to the provinces with a 3% escalator. It is principally based and it is based on population.

The member also mentioned the mental health and colon cancer announcements that were made. From the best of my recollection, analyzing the media and talking to people across this great country, those types of projects were very well received in Canada and Quebec. Therefore, I am not exactly sure what it is he is complaining about.

We are doing more for the people on the ground than any federal government has ever done. We are doing it from a minority government position, which is exceptionally hard when people are predisposed to breaking up the country as opposed to making it stronger.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food gave a fine speech, gate to plate. They were wonderful words.

However, representing a province of agriculturalist people who are in the hog and beef industries, their concern is that they cannot pay the bills because the price of the product is so low that they cannot make a living.

There are a lot of wonderful things about the farm gate, gate to plate. What can the minister tell the farmers of Prince Edward Island that might give them a little hope that they might be able to stay in business in the beef industry and in the hog industry?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, the hog and livestock industries in Prince Edward Island are an island unto themselves but they face the

same type of situation that the hog and livestock industries face across the country.

It has more to do with the rising cost of the dollar and our input costs. At this point we have not yet seen the benefit of the dollar but I know the Minister of Finance had a meeting today with some of the retail sector asking why we are not seeing that reflected in our purchasing power at this point. I was not privy to the meeting but I know the Minister of Finance would carry that argument very well.

I did have some tremendous meetings with the livestock and hog sectors in Prince Edward Island when I was there talking about the issues pertinent and germane to the Island. We reached a consensus on some issues. There are other issues that they realize, as I do too, that the depth of hurt they are facing is caused a lot by the 13 years of neglect by the Liberal government of the day, to which the member opposite, of course, belonged.

I also look at his counterpart from Prince Edward Island whose only issue I have ever heard raised in the House is the Canadian Wheat Board, which is a western issue. He is so predisposed with the Wheat Board that he has not asked a question about Prince Edward Island in recent memory that I can think of at all. I am not exactly sure why he is dropping the ball on that issue but I guess he will answer to the electorate in Malpeque very soon.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

As the Speech from the Throne states, Canada is the greatest country in the world. With a population of only 33 million, it has a gross national product of approximately \$1,500 billion, and those are real Canadian dollars.

The success of this great economy is the result of hard work and innovation of millions of individual Canadians. Our government wants to build on this success by creating the conditions that encourage both individuals and companies to continue to prosper through strategic investments in the economy and tax relief.

The throne speech reinforces our government's overall approach to growing the Canadian economy. The Advantage Canada plan is at the centre of this sensible approach that ultimately means better paying jobs and solid growth for Canadians. I, like all of us, look forward to the fall economic and fiscal update from the Minister of Finance which will outline the next steps in that plan.

The Address

While we have been in government for only a short time, we as Conservatives have done so much to provide the country with effective economic leadership. At the core of our economic philosophy is the belief that Canadians still pay too much tax. As a consequence, over the past year and a half our government has brought forward and implemented broad based tax relief for individuals, businesses and families. To be exact, we have enacted or announced \$41.5 billion worth of tax cuts for hard-working Canadians since coming to office.

[*Translation*]

Members from the Conservative Party believe that Canadians should be able to rely on an income tax system that rewards those who work hard. As Minister of National Revenue, I am responsible for the CRA and its fiscal policy administration activities. That does not mean just collecting taxes. It also means giving money back to Canadians and their families through a number of sensible benefits programs the government has launched. This makes everyone happy, including the tax man.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The throne speech recognizes middle class Canadians and their families as the bedrock of our workforce. It reminded us that we must understand their priorities and address their concerns if we are to achieve our goal of a more prosperous Canada. As Minister of National Revenue, I fully support this objective.

I would now like to describe how our government turns fiscal policy into monetary reality for Canadian families and the 25 million individual tax filers in this country. Let us look, for example, at the impact of our universal child care benefit. This benefit helps parents of young children balance their work and family lives. It means a family with two children under the age of six receives \$2,400 a year which contributes to a choice in child care. In fact, our government has already distributed \$3 billion in UCCB payments to about 1.5 million Canadian families.

Another good example of how the government is delivering valuable benefits to Canadians and their families is the child disability benefit. This program assists families in caring for children with severe and prolonged impairment in mental or physical functions. The program reported over 53,000 recipients in the last fiscal year, with a total of \$155 million going directly into the hands of caregivers.

Budget 2007 introduced a non-refundable child tax credit for parents. In practical terms, this means that the government will issue a cheque to more than \$3 million Canadian families for up to \$310 for each child under 18.

The child fitness tax credit offers parents an annual tax credit of up to \$500 to help offset fees paid to register their children in eligible physical fitness programs. For instance, a family that pays a total of \$1,500 to register three kids in hockey programs will reduce their taxes owing by \$232. Parents will get this tax credit when they file their 2007 income tax return. Besides helping the pocketbook, it will also help address other critical concerns like childhood obesity.

The list goes on. We are helping Canadians with the cost of post-secondary education through registered education savings plans,

deductions for the cost of textbooks, tax exempt bursaries and scholarships.

Last year, countless Canadians applied for the public transit tax credit and we fully expect these numbers to significantly increase this year. Early indications have shown that it is having a positive impact on public transit ridership. Last year, the Toronto Transit Commission confirmed the credit had resulted in about a 5% increase in sales just months after coming into force.

We are now working with our partners in the provinces and territories to implement a new working income tax benefit. The goal of this benefit is to strengthen incentives for low income Canadians so that they can earn income from work without sacrificing needed social benefits. Once implemented, we estimate that this will help more than one million Canadians and their families to get over the so-called welfare wall.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Those are some examples of how we, the Conservatives, are working to improve the quality of life of Canadians.

The government has shown Canadians that filing their tax return does not necessarily mean they will have less money in their pockets. For many Canadians, it even means they will get money back.

As members of the Conservative Party, we also believe that the government has an important role in creating the appropriate conditions to help Canadian businesses and organizations prosper. We also believe that we can achieve this by using the income tax system to reward hard work, encourage investment and create jobs, and to help Canadian businesses be competitive internationally.

[*English*]

That is why our government has enacted or announced more than \$3.5 billion in tax cuts for business since taking office, cuts that directly impact 1.6 million corporate tax filers throughout Canada. More specifically, our government has introduced the Canada employment tax credit, eliminated the corporate surtax, and increased the taxable income threshold for small businesses and reduced the rate.

We understand that small businesses are essential to economic competitiveness. To this end, we committed to reduce the administrative burden and red tape for business by 20%. In fact, we have already taken steps toward this goal. For instance, the CRA's small business action task force introduced measures to reduce the frequency of tax remittance and filing requirements.

The Address

This means the compliance burden for small businesses is being reduced substantially, on average by about one-third, and by up to 70% for some very small businesses. CRA estimates that 350,000 businesses stand to benefit from these changes.

Expanding online access to tax services is another way we are reducing the burden for businesses. Today, I am pleased to announce the addition of several new features to the CRA's My Business Account suite of electronic services for businesses. Our government continues to deliver on its goal to meet the needs of business taxpayers for faster, secure and expanded online access to tax services. The new My Business Account services are a significant improvement in service delivery and help to reduce red tape.

I should also mention another initiative we have undertaken to improve the situation of the business community. We have updated the Canada-U.S. tax convention to facilitate cross-border investment and commerce. This newly signed agreement protocol represents a major milestone in that its provisions will help facilitate cross-border investment and commerce.

We are modernizing our competition and investment policies to ensure they can attract the kinds of foreign investments that create jobs and opportunities for Canadians and let us compete against the best in the world.

[Translation]

One of the most effective ways for our government to improve the quality of life of our citizens is to reduce taxes.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our government's historically and economically important decision to reduce the GST. A lower GST helps families and businesses. It lets individuals and parents keep their money to meet their needs. It also leaves more money in their pockets for them to use to stimulate our economy, which is good for all businesses.

• (1630)

[English]

Overall, our throne speech is an ambitious agenda to make—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt. The minister never looks up, so I cannot give him any warning. His time expired a minute or so ago already, so if he wants to he could wrap up really quickly.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I have noted throughout my speech today how our government works to turn financial policy into reality for Canadian families and business. We have already made a good start on it. I urge my colleagues on all sides of the House to help us continue this important work by voting for the throne speech.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I and this side of the House, I am sure, would like to congratulate the minister on his new portfolio and wish him well in it.

I suppose it should be obvious that one of the issues the Minister of National Revenue has to deal with is to continue to nurture and revitalize revenues so they can be redistributed for the various programs. The Conference Board of Canada recently did an analysis of the Ontario budget and came to the conclusion that contributions to equalization in fact exceeded the growth and projected growth in

the Ontario economy. That bodes ill for the future of the Confederation in terms of being able to reinvest across this country from sea to sea to sea.

Other than on the area of tax cuts, I would like to know whether the minister, first of all, is going to assess very carefully on an ongoing basis the growth in the Ontario economy and its ability to contribute to equalization. Second, as part of an overall strategy beyond the throne speech, either in a budget or in other announcements, I would like to know whether the government is going to recognize the urgency with respect to manufacturing, in particular in Ontario, and is going to reinvest in strategies that would put the Ontario economy on a very solid and competitive basis as it relates to its responsibilities to contribute to equalization.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, as to looking at the Ontario economy and making certain of the amount of money that is withdrawn from Ontario for other programs in the rest of the country, that is really the finance minister's function.

However, let me just say that our government in the last budget allocated some \$26 billion or \$27 billion to equalization for the provinces. All provinces are not in the same state. Some provinces have small economies and may need more assistance than the larger provinces.

My recollection is that Ontario was being allocated about \$6 billion. My understanding also is that Premier McGuinty was quite satisfied with that allocation. He did not make any complaints about the allocation of the \$6 billion.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member about what strategy his government has for dealing with the manufacturing sector. Our manufacturing trade deficit has grown sixfold in just three years.

In fact, we are having a meltdown in the manufacturing sector. It is the result of a combination of several factors. The high dollar is one factor, but clearly, overwhelming trade imbalances are developing. Aside from exacerbating those imbalances by negotiating a new deal with Korea, what is the hon. member's government doing to restore our manufacturing sector, which is in such a terrible crisis?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, our country and many of the highly industrialized countries are going through a fundamental shift in the economy. That fundamental shift is from traditional manufacturing to service industries. We are not isolated from this general trend in the advanced societies.

As members know, overall employment in our country has been rising steadily. In fact, we have an economy that is admired by all the other G-8 countries. With respect to industries, there are certain industries that are in difficulty while other industries are doing well.

The Address

As we go into the future, we have to find ways to fill niches because we have competition from various countries around the world for various products. We also have to make sure that our consumers in Canada purchase Canadian goods of equal value where possible. Our government is doing what it can to drive that agenda.

• (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Equalization Payments.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with the hon. member for Yukon.

I heard the minister take credit again for things that were done long before the Conservatives were in office. Government members are very good at that. I want to make it very clear that we were the envy of the world long before the current government came in.

Today I would like to talk about the throne speech. I would like to talk about some of the things that are in it and some of the things that are not. I want to assure the House that I will be positive when I find positive things in it, but first I am going to talk about what is missing.

We know the Conservative Party is very big on symbolism. We looked at this speech very carefully and noticed that the cover of the throne speech booklet shows a small child waving a flag but the flag is very blurred, just like the vision the government has for this country. There is not much vision there. It is quite blurred.

I am going to talk about health care, which there is not much mention of in the throne speech, and I am going to talk about the lack of services in my riding. We hear about tax cuts for all Canadians, but we would rather have more services put into the underserved areas of Canada.

The Kenora riding is one of the ridings that has the least amount of services. We have difficulty right in our southern communities of Dryden, Kenora, Ignace, Pickle Lake and Sioux Lookout. They all have their challenges, especially in health care. In many communities such as the community of Dryden, for example, with 8,000 people, people cannot get dialysis. They have to drive and they have to drive a long way. Therefore, a stronger recognition of health care in the throne speech would have been a strong sign to all Canadians, especially in the riding of Kenora.

As for major procedures and significant health care issues, people have to be sent out of their communities to Winnipeg or Thunder Bay. These are long distances, but in small communities we understand that. What we do not understand is a government that does not have a stronger commitment to health care and to making sure that service levels can be raised in all these ridings.

I will speak now about the northern 500 to 700 kilometres of my riding and I will talk about some of the health care issues for first nations that could have been addressed in the throne speech. Right now, many members of the House would not realize that of my 21 fly-in communities, five of them do not have proper health care to any degree. They have a nursing station or unit that basically runs five days a week. Due to weather, we average about three days a week when there is no nurse in the community at all. When these

communities were very small, from 200 to 250 people, that was acceptable, but they have grown. Our populations in the north are increasing.

Let me talk about these communities: Poplar Hill, with Chief Elie Moose; Keewaywin, with Chief Joseph Meekis; Slate Falls, with Chief Glen Whiskeyjack; Muskrat Dam, with Chief Vernon Morris; and North Spirit Lake, with Chief Donald Campbell. All these chiefs fight constantly for health care. They would have taken it as a sign from the government in its throne speech if there were a commitment on a vision for Canada to make sure all Canadians can share some level of health care, but they have nothing. They have nurses who fly in, generally on Monday morning or at noon, and they leave Thursday night or Friday morning because of weather situations.

There is talk about providing tax cuts for Canadians and all these other issues, but let us talk about providing services for the residents in the areas of Canada that need it most. For these communities that do not have nurses from Friday morning to Sunday night, doctors' visits are very rare. Health care could have been addressed in a much broader agenda. I know that health care has slipped from number one on the radar screen for Canadians, but it is still number two, and it should have been identified in the throne speech.

In these fly-in communities in the north, all residents have to travel for even the most minor of procedures. There are issues. Thanks to the former government, we do have technology in the north that could have been used to make sure some services were brought into these isolated places. In fact, with the technology in place in communities such as Sandy Lake and Big Trout Lake we could actually train nurses if there were some support. The residents accept this burden, but they do not understand why we are cutting taxes for some of the most wealthy people in Canada when services are not being provided for them.

There is also the issue of residential schools, an issue inside the throne speech that I applauded. It is closure at last, but only maybe. The action initiated by the previous Liberal government led to this and delays after the election have brought us to this point. I am glad we are here at this point, but it is important that we get it done, that we start the healing process and move on with the apology, which is in this throne speech. We need this to make sure that we actually get this closed out.

I have a couple of comments on the building Canada plan. The speech mentions very clearly the Windsor-Detroit corridor and the Atlantic and Pacific gateways, but it leaves out a large section of Canada, which I happen to live on, and that is the Trans-Canada Highway.

The Address

●(1640)

The Trans-Canada Highway should have gotten something. It is one of the largest transportation networks we have. Any product made in the Kenora riding has to go through one of those gateways to get to one of the southern border points, and it is good to look after those, but what about the Trans-Canada Highway? It travels for 300 miles through my riding, from east to west, and there are many points where it could close down and the network between the east and the west would be cut right off. There could have been some identification about making the Trans-Canada Highway a highway we could be proud of.

There are far too many tragedies, as you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, as I know you travel on that section of highway. There are too many tragedies that could have been averted with some kind of infrastructure program which included the Trans-Canada Highway. If we cannot have pride in our national link, our national highway, what else can we do?

My municipal experience allows me to know that we need a strong, non-partisan infrastructure program. This needs to be led by the municipalities. If the federal and provincial governments get involved and dictate priorities for the municipalities, it does not work. We need to make sure that the people who are using those streets are planning the projects, making sure that they are non-partisan, making sure that they are led by the municipalities so that the projects that actually need to be done are the ones that get done.

On forestry, I will quote directly from the throne speech, where it states, “Key sectors, including forestry”. That is as much wording as forestry got.

In my riding of Kenora, we have lost thousands of jobs. Entire towns have closed. The city of Kenora closed its mill, which not that many years ago had 900 employees. The site is being taken apart as we speak. That happened since the election of the Conservative government.

The throne speech says that the government has taken action to support workers and that it is actually going to cut taxes for all Canadians. Many workers in the Kenora riding do not have jobs. One's tax burden is not too high when one is not working.

Kenora, Dryden and Ignace are all communities that have lost or have downsized plants. Plants in both Kenora and Ignace are totally closed at this point. The Dryden mill, which supported 1,100 inside workers sometime ago, is running with about 500 right now, and it is really a day to day operation.

We have workers who need support. They are going to get a tax cut, but they do not have jobs. That is the kind of challenge they face.

The throne speech contains a lot of great words but we need action. In communities like Red Lake, Pickle Lake and Bending Lake, with the diamonds that are in northern Ontario, there is a lot that can happen.

With respect to the words that are used in the throne speech, “a single window for major project approvals”, we need details. We need to get to the point where there is actually a program, so all parties in this House can take a look at it, see that it fits northern

Ontario or any part of Canada and that it actually provides value on the ground, so we can make sure there are jobs for some of the forestry employees who have lost their jobs.

I am happy to see support in the throne speech for the military. I happened to be very lucky this last summer. I spent a week out in Wainwright, Alberta. It was one of the largest exercises for training of reserve forces. There were more than 1,200 there. I want to point out very clearly that in Wainwright they are training combat soldiers. Our soldiers are combat soldiers. They are able to do many other duties, but they have the pride and determination of the best of Canada and they are the best in the world.

On the environment, northern Ontario will feel the effects of climate change as quickly as anywhere in Canada, including the far north. The 21 fine communities I mentioned earlier are all served by ice roads. We are suffering more and more as the climate continues to warm, and we cannot get the goods in to service these communities.

To give an example, in a community like Keewaywin, when the ice road opens, gas drops in price from \$2.75 a litre to about \$1.25 a litre. We just celebrated Thanksgiving. If a truck can deliver a turkey, it is a reasonable price as it is in the south but turkeys were \$85 to \$95 up there on Thanksgiving weekend. The ice roads are extremely important.

No one but Canada's aboriginals will feel the effects of climate change as painfully as they will. They have lived in that area for thousands of years. They understand the situation. They need to be sure that the Canadian government is going to look after them and treat climate change as a very serious issue that has to be dealt with.

We are prepared. We have heard the throne speech. There are facts in it that we would like to see examined, but we are going to wait for solid facts and solid legislation. We need solid commitments from the Conservative government. We have heard the fancy speeches and there is posturing and rhetoric going on here now. Let us get down to the legislation. Let us get down to serving Canadians. Let us see the meat and potatoes. Let us find out what we are talking about. Let us debate it for all Canadians.

●(1645)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's comments with great interest.

I would like to start with his comments regarding health care. It sounds as though he may need to make a call to Queen's Park. Perhaps Howard Hampton, who also represents that riding, could help him out, or he could call Dalton McGuinty and talk to him about the shortages that are apparently in his riding.

We know that this government has provided record health care funding. We put in an escalator clause as well and provided funding for things like the Canada Health Infoway. Clearly, the problem in his riding did not start here in Ottawa.

He did mention something about infrastructure. I am very proud of the \$37 billion that this government has committed to infrastructure in the Building Canada fund.

The Address

I would like to ask the member very specifically, during the period of time that the former Liberal government was in power, Ontario only received—and it was not a big fund—about 22% of the total infrastructure spending that the government committed. We are actually about 40% of the population and about 42% of the GDP.

Now we have a government that is principled, that has brought in principled equalization formulas and principled transfers to the provinces. I am wondering, now that we are actually going to commit per capita funding to places like Ontario, if the member considers that fair and if that is something he supports. I know I sure do. If we are to have the proper infrastructure that we need in Ontario, specifically in northern Ontario, we need fairer funding. That is what this government has brought forward. I would like to know if the member supports that.

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I have to do is clarify some facts for my hon. colleague across the way. He mentioned health care and that I should call Queen's Park. He should know, and I will inform the House, that 60% of my riding is first nations, dealt with by Health Canada, a federal responsibility, not a provincial responsibility. We are in the process of building a joint federal hospital in Sioux Lookout, which does not happen in a lot of places, but it is happening there.

The federal government has tremendous involvement in health and we need to make sure that it looks at it.

As for the infrastructure program, we can talk about the amounts of money that are put in, but what we really need is an honest infrastructure program that fits the needs of Canadians.

The municipalities are suffering, as the hon. member well knows. They have issues and needs. Infrastructure programs have been taken over by partisan politics. That is not right. These projects should be approved on their merit and value to the communities, whether it is in Ontario or anywhere across Canada.

There is a lot we could do if we have the details and we make sure that partisan politics does not play out, but let us make sure that it is of value to the communities. All the communities need our support.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question about the theme around which he concluded his speech. He suggested that he wanted more meat and potatoes in the Speech from the Throne. He suggested that perhaps that was a way to justify what would appear to be the Liberal decision to complain about the Speech from the Throne and then vote with the Conservatives, or for the Liberals to sit on their duffs and not take a position.

This is about meat and potatoes. This is about food for ordinary Canadians. This is about sustenance. It is about economic security. If the member is not aware of it in his own region, which he should be, I want to remind him about the statistics that came out just last week from Statistics Canada. A new study showed that in fact the rich are getting richer in this country. After two decades of overall economic expansion, the top 5% of earners saw their average income leap from \$133,000 to \$178,000. During the same period, earners in the middle of the pack saw average incomes frozen at \$25,000, with family incomes nudging up slightly from \$42,000 to \$43,000.

What we have tried to do in the House and around the Speech from the Throne is give living proof and testimony to the fact that the gap between the rich and the rest of society is growing. It has to be addressed by the government of the day. The support of the Liberals is needed once and for all on this issue. It is not good enough to simply repeat past mistakes, nor is it good enough to stand up in the House and propose an amendment to the Speech from the Throne that talks about tax—

• (1650)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kenora.

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how much time I have, so I will try to be quick.

The member from the NDP should know that her leader ran out right away and made a big proclamation again in front of all the cameras long before we knew any of the details. We on this side gave the Conservatives a chance to show us what was in the throne speech.

I have identified a number of issues that I feel are of value and that we can actually make work for Canadians, in particular in my part of northern Ontario. There is a lot we can do with that.

What we do not do is engage in political posturing or grandstanding outside the House long before we know the details. We want to make sure that we can actually get some of the work done.

Give us the details. Let us clear up the blurry vision that is in this little picture here and let us provide something to Canadians of which they can be proud.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have done a number of times in the House, I would like to give a balanced presentation and mention some of the things that are good and some of the things that are not so good in the throne speech.

The Liberals, when we were in government, paid unprecedented attention to the north. There was \$120 million as a down payment for the northern strategy. There was \$90 million for economic development. There were four different infrastructure programs. There were lots of exciting initiatives such as the beautiful facility for the Canada Winter Games. From the economic development money we helped out with advertising across Canada, which can still be seen on airplanes, advertising and marketing of the north.

I was excited about the many infrastructure programs such as the recreation centres in Mayo and Marsh Lake. Recently a footbridge was opened at Carcross. With the assistance of that money, a very important road is being built which will go from my area near Copper Ridge and Arkell and Granger down to the highway, which will provide an alternate exit. This initiative has been talked about for years.

When the new Conservative government came in, some of the attention to the north was dropped. There was no mention of the northern strategy for a long time. Northerners convinced the Conservative government that it was very important, and I am excited to see the northern strategy framework finally coming back.

The Address

All the Conservatives did at first was make two promises to northerners, one for icebreakers and the other for a northern port. As everyone knows, the government broke the first of those promises, taking away the tens of millions of dollars that had been promised. We went through two budgets and a throne speech without any mention of the port, so we kept pushing and the government finally mentioned it. Many people decried the lack of consultation on that port and the best location for it. I do hope that port actually comes to fruition.

I have to congratulate the government for mentioning housing for first nations and Inuit people in the throne speech. I have talked about this issue a number of times.

We have talked about a world class Arctic research station, and I am always supportive of that. Fifteen years ago I coined a phrase that we needed more research in the north, for the north and by the north, that we needed more researchers in the north. I decried the lack of scientific infrastructure in the north last summer when I visited Sweden with Arctic parliamentarians and saw how much other countries had. This summer in my article on sovereignty in *The Hill Times* I mentioned that one of the ways to advance sovereignty is by doing more science with both the infrastructure and operation and maintenance in the north. I am delighted to see the proposal for a world class Arctic research station. We have been working for a long time for a northern research station in Whitehorse that would look at climate change at a time when it is so important for the north.

I was happy to see seabed mapping mentioned in the throne speech. Unfortunately, there were not a lot of details. Once again, I am not sure if this is like a number of other items that are in the throne speech that are already being done either by the Conservative government or other governments and are just being reannounced. Seabed mapping was put in place a long time ago by the Liberals.

I am hoping that mention of this means that the Conservatives will accelerate the schedule. The schedule is so tight right now that it is going to end right on the last day. We cannot afford to lose part of Canada if the mapping is slowed down by mechanical failures or the climate. Hopefully this means that the government has accelerated the schedule and the mapping is being done right now.

I was astonished to see the government put the slush boat scandal into the throne speech. That took money away from northerners by replacing icebreakers with patrol boats that can go through one metre of ice when many people know that the ice can be as much as 18 metres thick, including old ice in that area. For a good portion of the year those patrol boats will not be able to patrol the north.

•(1655)

I was delighted that tourism was mentioned in the throne speech but, like a number of other items, there were no details. The jury will need to remain out on that issue.

We all know that during the Conservatives' term they have made some tremendous cuts to tourism. Cuts were made to the tourism marketing funds that were available, taking away the GST rebate, cuts to museums and students. Some of those programs have been reinstated but they still have not reinstated all the GST rebate, for instance, for individuals. That is more important for my riding than

perhaps any riding because it is the largest private sector employer. I am glad that it is there but we will see what it means.

On infrastructure, I will follow up on what my colleague said and what I said earlier today, which is that it is good that infrastructure is there. I am speaking on behalf of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Association of Yukon Communities, the Nunavut Association of Municipalities, the Northwest Territories Association of Communities and all municipalities in Canada when I say that the municipalities must get their fair share and a percentage of the funding they had under the four Liberal infrastructure programs which helped them so much.

As everyone know, we have a skills shortage in the country. I heard about this at length at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce meeting last week. I am delighted that there was money in the budget or discussion in the budget of increasing funds for aboriginal skills training so they can take advantage of opportunities in the north. This is one way of solving the skills shortage.

I would liked to have seen additional emphasis on other ways of solving that problem as well related to immigration, older workers, improving the integration of immigrants into the workforce, integrating disabled people into the workforce and so forth.

I was very happy to see a water strategy, which is very important for Canadians, but once again we will have to wait and see exactly what that means. I would definitely congratulate the Prime Minister and the government for proposing Canadian citizenship in the throne speech for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi which has been unanimously supported by the House. I would also like to thank MPs and senators from all parties who are members of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma and had this on their agenda since May. I am delighted that the government has agreed to granting her honorary Canadian citizenship.

I will now discuss the things that are missing for the balance of my presentation.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: You were doing so well.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I know the member enjoyed that part but I need to talk about the failings and, unfortunately, there are some very substantial failings. I am talking about the big four items of major importance to Canadians. It is almost inconceivable that so many major issues affecting Canada were not addressed.

The Address

The first issue is child care. When the Prime Minister visited my riding, a demonstration was held concerning the fact that the government had cancelled the Liberal child care program. Some media said that the demonstration was the biggest demonstration ever against the Prime Minister. I do not necessarily agree but it was certainly a strong sentiment that Canadians would like a national child care program.

Second, of course, was taking \$5 billion away from our aboriginal people in the Kelowna accord and not replacing it. This is not debatable. Everyone knows what a shame that is, especially when the deal was with the honour of the Crown and not a particular party, but with Canada and the first nations people.

Climate change is a huge issue for the north. More than anywhere else, the effects take place in the north. We certainly need adaptation for the damage that climate change is causing to our infrastructure and to our wildlife. We need to adapt to these things.

When the local environmental organizations explained that over 100 of our programs had been cut, and some of them have been put back but certainly not with as much money or not with as good conditions, such as the EnerGuide program, then it is certainly bad for the people of the north. As I said, it affects them more than anyone else. There is a lack of attention to these greenhouse gases and the investments that we are making in renewable energies, in wind power, in solar power, in large final emitters, in car emissions, in clean coal and in carbon sequestration. Those are areas in which it is important for the government to keep investing.

• (1700)

One of the most bizarre lines in the speech was “middle class Canadians—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The member's time has expired. I might remind hon. members that if you do not look at the Chair I have no way of warning you that your time is expiring. I know it might be tough to look at the Chair in certain circumstances but nevertheless it does help by way of regulating the time.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very encouraged by the hon. member's comments. He started off talking about all the great things in the throne speech. I think that is echoed in Canada. Canadians have picked up on the fact that the throne speech is a very forward looking document. It was a clear statement of where Canada wants to go. It wants to take its place on the world stage. It also wants to grow as a country and provide a great place for Canadians to live.

The member talked about Arctic sovereignty. He supported our initiatives there. He talked about tourism. He talked about infrastructure and supported that. He liked the aboriginal skills training. He liked the water strategy. He also liked the citizenship for Aung San Suu Kyi.

He then got into these big four but he actually never got around to talking about them because, quite frankly, I suspect that he actually really liked the throne speech. Perhaps he should be on this side of the House rather than that side.

After all the plaudits that he gave our throne speech and all the positive comments he made about the throne speech, he and his leader, the Leader of the Liberal Party, have stated that they will sit on their duffs and not even vote. They will not represent their constituents and Canadians across the country and take a position on the throne speech.

Everything the member said seems to indicate that he liked our throne speech, subject to what he calls the big four, which he did not get into in great detail. Why is it that he, his leader and the other members of his party in the House do not have the courage to actually take a position on the throne speech?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member made the assumption that I liked the throne speech. Unfortunately, the reason I did not get to all the missing points was that my timer was broken. I missed most of the second half of my speech.

Just to quickly summarize the things that were missing from the throne speech is medical, which is astounding to the medical community; the implementation of land claims in the north; search and rescue in the north; literacy; speeding up the aboriginal broadcasting funding; ensuring that rural voters without an address can have a vote; and women. We do not want constraints on federal spending powers which are very important for the north. It has nothing for rural health care related to centres of excellence; nothing for competitiveness and productivity; nothing for O & M for rural museums; nothing to speed up border crossings; nothing to help with immigration and the line-ups of refugees; no details on what will happen to the Youth Criminal Justice Act; and no details on the protection of human rights under the anti-terrorism legislation.

We also see no improvement in the northern allowance, which we have asked for so many times and which has not increased in 20 years. In relation to human rights, the speech has nothing on Darfur, the UN aboriginal statement, the court challenges program or law reform.

I think that makes it quite evident as to why someone would not support the throne speech.

• (1705)

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the comments of my colleague from Abbotsford. I noted that the member used words like “delighted” and “very happy” when he was talking about the throne speech. In fact, he even went so far as to congratulate the Prime Minister. Therefore, I will be expecting at least one hon. member on the other side to be voting for the throne speech.

The big three, you said big four but you got to three I think before your time ran out. You mentioned child care, the Kelowna accord and climate change—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must remind the hon. member to address his comments through the Chair.

The Address

Mr. Mike Lake: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. He mentioned child care, the Kelowna accord and climate change. I note that there is a common thread among the three of those issues in that they were all things that the previous Liberal government talked about and then actually did not do anything about. There was no action whatsoever.

Recently I would note that the Leader of the Opposition was musing about corporate taxes, which I found interesting. A lot of people would agree that corporate taxes need to be cut to increase competitiveness in Canada. I am wondering if the—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry but long preambles sometimes get in the way of questions actually being put.

The hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I must remind the member that his party abstained from the budget in 2005, which was much more important.

However, when he is talking about corporate taxes, as members know, the Liberal Party gave the biggest tax cuts in history and they went to individuals, including low income individuals, and corporations.

As for supporting the budget, I think the member should listen to my speech again. I said “delighted” once but there were between 20 and 30 things I was disappointed with. I do not think 20:1 is good support for the throne speech.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me this opportunity. It is a privilege for me to work with you. I commend the people of Elmwood—Transcona for sending you to this place nine times. You are our dean and, as a rookie, I value your wisdom.

[*Translation*]

I am the 18th member to represent the people of Ottawa—Orléans in this House, and I know that my responsibility is as great as the debt I owe to all the constituents, regardless of their political affiliation.

[*English*]

Today, in the debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne, I plan to share with the House my personal story and my hopes for Ottawa—Orléans and for Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to inform you that I plan to share my time with the hon. member for Peterborough.

[*Translation*]

I have known eight of my predecessors, starting with Omer Gour. The one who made the greatest impact on the country was the Right Honourable Jean-Luc Pepin. The one who has had the greatest impact on the disadvantaged is my friend Eugène Bellemare.

[*English*]

My all-time favourite will remain Jean Pigott. An Officer of the Order of Canada, Jean is a model for anyone who seeks to balance duty to country and duty to the people. Her insight is an inspiration to all who know her.

I also wish to thank our colleague from Kingston and the Islands for recommending my name twice to the House for the position of

Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole. Before reaching this recommendation, I know that the Speaker consulted all party leaders.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. members for Laurier—Sainte-Marie and Toronto—Danforth.

[*English*]

I thank the hon. Bill Graham and wish him health and happiness in his retirement. I also thank all hon. members for twice consenting to the Speaker's recommendation about my House duties.

I am aware that I am the first rookie MP to occupy this function and that my 26 predecessors had an average of nine years in the House before being given this trust for impartial service. It is that much more humbling. I also thank the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle for his support.

Although I have often spoken from the Chair in this 39th Parliament, it is the first time that I participate in debate.

As much as Canadian unity has fed the fire of my patriotism since childhood, the people of Ottawa—Orléans have witnessed that I am not a one-trick pony. So, to balance my passion for matters that constitute the cultural makeup of our country, I am focused tirelessly on turning the National Research Council into a pole of attraction for economic development in east end Ottawa.

The key to this came from my friends Bob MacQuarrie and Ken Steele, when 30 years ago they advocated the establishment of a technology transfer centre. In the past 21 months I have been very active in reviving that dream. This goal is realistic and this project can be the most significant element in the transformation of Orléans from a bedroom community to a self-sustaining community where, in addition to sleeping, people work, shop and play.

Some people feed expectations and make empty promises about moving federal jobs to Orléans from elsewhere. That is like robbing Peter to pay Paul. It creates no wealth, except for selected speculators. Economic development is not just a matter of serving the interests of land speculators. It must be based on a web of compatible assets, such as the intellectual property that lies dormant at NRC. Just as Bell Northern Research was a source of spinoffs for economic development in Nepean and Kanata, the NRC must be for North Gloucester and Orléans.

On St. Joseph Boulevard the Government of Canada owns a site of 180 hectares. With Mr. Pepin and the hon. Jean-Jacques Blais, I worked 25 years ago for the revitalization of the Land Engineering Test Establishment. Now, my staff and I provide active support for a national security infrastructure partnership focused in Orléans.

Parking lot 174 must regain its vocation. It must truly become highway 174, a roadway that is equally used in both directions at all times. I said that in my swearing in ceremony 18 months ago. Last Friday, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities turned good intentions into hard cash when he announced an investment of \$40 million to help resolve this issue.

The Address

The poorly designed 417-174 split must be fixed before more traffic is added to the volume, but the most practical solution to traffic congestion is improved public transit. That is why I have worked for three years on the east-west light rail transit environmental assessment committee and my heart is still there.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Public libraries are the most practical and democratic way for Canadians to share knowledge. I had the privilege of working in this area for six years, and I will always have fond memories of it.

[*English*]

While serving on the Ottawa Public Library Board, I was determined to filter access to Internet pornography. Some thought that intellectual freedom was more important than the protection of children and we lost the first vote. Two weeks later we voted again. Now, children in Ottawa no longer have access to Internet pornography.

I am pleased that the House will consider a bill to extend the protection of children against sexual predators by raising the age of consent. We are at the service of families at all stages of life and as such I am glad that pension income can now be split for taxation purposes. This will be a great benefit to retired couples.

I thank the government for its ecoauto rebate program. Before the tabling of budget 2007, I had recommended such a program to the Minister of Finance for energy efficient vehicles. The environment is not just a popular slogan. It is a treasure that we must all protect.

That is why I am fully supportive of Tree Canada. One tree absorbs 800 kilograms of carbon emissions. In my lifetime I have planted 50,000 trees. That is the same as absorbing 40,000 tonnes of CO₂. That is not all. My children are doing it too. My youngest son, Claude, planted 23,000 trees so far. How about that for getting things done?

Since the establishment of the Canada-U.S. Auto Pact, some 45 years ago, this country has progressively reduced international trade barriers. Frankly, it is now time that we pay as much attention to the breaking down of interprovincial trade barriers.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Linguistic duality is an added value for Canada. Here in Ottawa, 120,000 francophones speak French, but did you know that 180,000 anglophones also speak the language of Rabelais? Let us move forward together to promote the positive aspects of our heritage. When the last statement is made, when the last vote is cast, when we return home, we will have a clear conscience and the knowledge that our country is better off.

[*English*]

As we inspire our community leaders that non-partisan service goes further than petty partisanship, we become more effective as servants and we understand better that we are only tenants in this place. The landlords are the electors who temporarily give us their trust.

[*Translation*]

I would like to pay tribute to Team Ottawa-Orléans. There is great talent among the members of its committees, and I am fortunate to receive advice from them. In fact, on January 24, 2006, I moved my office to the same building.

I also organized the first meeting of all the elected officials in Ottawa—Orléans. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my provincial counterpart, Phil McNeely, on being re-elected, Mayor Larry O'Brien, and the four municipal councillors, Rainer Bloess, Michel Bellemare and Rob Jellett, who are all committed to working together to help Ottawa-Orléans flourish.

I would particularly like to highlight the efforts Councillor Bob Monette has made to protect and promote Petrie Island Park.

[*English*]

It has been a privilege for me to participate in this debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne. I look forward to the months ahead as together we implement the elements of the speech.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank my staff, under the capable direction of Ginette Gagnon. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, my wife and social conscience, Anne Pallascio, as well as our four children, Louis, Paul, Claude and Miriam.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to what he called pension income splitting. In fact, it is registered pension income splitting and there is a difference. It means that CPP, OAS and payments out of registered retirement savings plans do not in fact qualify.

The member may be interested to know that only 30% of seniors have registered pension plans and if we take out all of those who do not have a partner to split with and those who already have income at the lowest bracket, below \$37,000, splitting will not benefit them. If we take those out, it turns out, according to the Economic Research Council, that only 12% of seniors will in fact benefit from registered pension income splitting.

The Address

People bought income trusts. The government then taxed the trusts and immediately announced pension income splitting to somehow offset it, but did not realize that the people who bought income trusts were people who did not have pension plans because they needed to buy something that was going to emulate the cashflow that they needed. I refer the member to our speeches that we have been giving on this issue. Would he please correct the record and understand that splitting of registered pension income is not going to help more than 12% of seniors and none of those people—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for his good advice to the House. I am sure that the government will take notice. However, given what else I have said in my speech, I do not intend to respond in a manner that would be considered partisan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans on his political career, which has certainly been quite extensive and always shows his generosity. I would particularly like to congratulate him on all the trees he has planted and encouraged his children to plant.

However, whenever there is talk of the National Research Council, I find that we always come back to the centralizing notions of the federal government, which wants to put research centres in Ontario. That is where they always go and never anywhere else.

I would have liked to hear something in the throne speech or from my colleague regarding the fact that, while the National Research Council is here in Ottawa—we are not against that—we must have other research centres outside Ottawa, particularly in Quebec, where there is a flagrant lack of such research centres compared to the number in Ontario.

I would like him to explain this situation to us.

• (1720)

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague should be pleased to know that the National Research Council exists in all provinces of Canada. That is precisely what bothers me at times. For instance, there are certain marketing operations that would be better established here in Ottawa. They have been moved to other parts of Canada, with managers who have no experience in the business world.

I appreciate the hon. member's comments. I will continue to work on grouping the marketing operations together in one place, specifically in the east end of Ottawa, in order to create a technology transfer centre.

[*English*]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for speaking on behalf of his constituents. I would also like to congratulate him for being a great Liberal because he has been a long-time Liberal. I can tell members that he is also a Liberal now at heart, as well. He has also been kind to me as well many times.

I would ask this hon. member about something that this throne speech has not mentioned, and which another hon. member alluded to earlier, and that is the issue regarding seniors. What does this member feel that the Conservative government should do so that seniors can be taken out of poverty?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to jump into a partisan trap that was set up by my very generous friend.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to add my remarks in support of the Speech from the Throne.

Its theme, its vision and strong leadership sums up this government's commitment to continually aspire to further growth and a higher quality of life. We intend to build upon a proud legacy of peace and prosperity.

Canada is starting from a position of strength. Our economic fundamentals are the strongest they have been in a generation. We are experiencing the second largest period of economic expansion in Canadian history. Business investment is expanding for the fifth consecutive year. Core inflation has remained within our set range of 1% to 3%. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in 33 years, with more Canadians working today than ever before.

Canada is one of the few countries in the world with a sound public pension plan. Canada is also an emerging energy superpower. We have the second largest established petroleum reserves on the planet.

Federal, provincial and territorial governments are all in surplus, and we are on the best fiscal footing of any country in the G-7. In fact, we are the only member of the G-7 with both an ongoing budget surplus and a falling debt burden.

Canada's economy is ranked second among the group of seven nations. Canada is on solid financial footing, but we are mindful of the various challenges and opportunities that confront us.

Today I will highlight some of the key economic initiatives this government is pursuing, particularly those that affect business and Canada's competitiveness on the world stage, in particular, our long term economic plan, "Advantage Canada", a plan designed to ensure that Canada has a modern infrastructure, an innovative and entrepreneurial business environment and a tax system that rewards hard work, all based on the foundation of sound fiscal management.

For example, our government is committed to reduce the federal paper burden on business by 20% by November of 2008. We are modernizing our competition and investment policies to ensure they work better and attract even more foreign investment to create jobs and opportunities for Canadians and let us compete against the best in the world.

Let me now turn to the issue of tax relief. The government believes that Canadian individuals, businesses and families still pay too much tax. Our tax system must reward hard work, encourage investment in job creation and help Canadian businesses compete on the world stage. We are providing tax relief in every way a government collects taxes: consumption taxes, business taxes, excise taxes and, yes, personal taxes, more than \$41 billion in tax relief over three years.

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We know tax competitiveness is critical to our economic success. That is why we are establishing a tax advantage for the benefit of Canadian entrepreneurs. Our government will bring forward a long term plan of broad base tax relief for individuals, businesses and families, including following through on our commitment to a further cut to the GST.

The throne speech also highlights our commitment to support a wide range of economic activity across the country. For example, our government will stand up for Canada's traditional industries, fishery, forestry, manufacturing and tourism. Our government is taking firm action to support workers as these industries adjust to global conditions, and we will continue to do so.

Fluctuations in the value of the Canadian dollar over the past few years, and other challenges, have made it difficult for traditional industries to cope. We have responded to these needs in a host of ways.

For example, the Government of Canada has provided \$400 million over two years to strengthen the long term competitiveness of the forestry sector, to combat the pine beetle infestation and support worker adjustment to ensure that those who depend on forestry can look to a future with confidence.

We have also allowed manufacturing and processing businesses to write off their capital investments in machinery and equipment using a special temporary, two year, 50% straight-line, write-down rate.

I will also say a few words about renewing Canada's infrastructure. Through our building Canada initiative, we are making the largest single federal investment in public infrastructure. When combined with funding under previous initiatives, our government is committing about \$37 billion over seven years for roads, bridges, water systems, public transit and international gateways, infrastructure that Canadians want and that our country needs.

• (1725)

Modern infrastructure supports economic growth and productivity, improves Canada's competitiveness and facilitates the movement of people and goods.

The building Canada plan addresses the issue of the comprehensive program to support our long term growth. We will invest in infrastructure that supports a stronger economy, a cleaner environment and more prosperous, safer communities.

Let me now move on to another key driver of Canada's economic engine. Our mining and resource sectors present extraordinary opportunities across Canada and our government will help seize these opportunities by providing a single window for major program approvals. Our government is investing \$150 million in a new major projects management office to increase the capacity for the approval of mining and energy projects within those federal departments. This office will ensure that regulatory reviews are carried out with greater efficiency and transparency.

This streamlined approach will reduce red tape and improve the overall competitiveness of Canada's resource industries. The government's commitment to provide effective economic leadership

will also address the federal government's responsibility for strengthening Canada's economic union.

Despite the globalization of markets, Canada still has a long way to go to establish free trade among our provinces. It is simply unacceptable that there are fewer internal barriers to trade and mobility in the economic union than there are in Canada. This hurts our competitive position but more important, it is just not the way a country should work. Our government will consider how to use the federal trade and commerce power to make our economic union work better for Canadians.

Canada's prosperity and quality of life depend on our success as a trading country. We have exported goods and services, accounting for more than 36% of the GDP in 2006. More than \$1.9 billion in trade crosses the Canada-U.S. border each day. To ensure efficient transport of goods—

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member will have three minutes left to finish his remarks.

It being 5:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.) moved that Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (residency requirement), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this is the second time we have had second reading, which is a great opportunity for me to respond to some of the misconceptions about the bill.

I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (residency requirement).

Bill C-362 was introduced in the House by me on October 25, 2006, and its aim is as simple as it is important. It would amend the Old Age Security Act to reduce, from 10 years to 3 years, the residency requirement for entitlement to old age security.

I introduced the bill because it would eliminate a grave injustice in Canada's social security system, an injustice presently causing great harm to seniors across Canada and to the families and communities to which they belong.

All Canadians believe that the elimination of poverty, especially among those most vulnerable in our society, should be the top concern of the Government of Canada. I have no doubt for a second that all members of the House recognize in their hearts and minds that the bill deserves our full support.

Private Members' Business

It is my sincere hope we will set aside partisan concerns and work together to improve the well-being of a great many seniors, families and communities all across Canada.

In my remarks today I have three goals. First, I will correct a common misconception about old age security. Then I will identify and clarify the grave injustice that Bill C-362 would eliminate. Finally, I will explain why the bill warrants the support of every member of the House.

Since first tabling Bill C-362, I have received correspondence from a number of Canadians living throughout the country. Most Canadians who take the time to write do so in order to express their support for the bill. However, there are those who write to express their opposition.

After reviewing the correspondence, it has become clear to me that they share in common a misconception about the true nature and the intent of the old age security. Because members of the House may also share this misconception, I would very much like to identify and correct it here and now.

The misconception is this. Some Canadians think old age security was introduced by the Government of Canada as a kind of reward to seniors for their lifetime contribution to Canadian society, to the economy and to their communities. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Old Age Security Act was tabled in the House of Commons in 1951. A careful review of the debate at the time indicates that it was introduced principally as a matter of social justice and was motivated by a genuine concern for the needs and welfare of Canadian senior citizens, whatever their contribution may or may not have been to society.

Furthermore, since 1951, successive Canadian governments, on behalf of all Canadians, have made a number of important changes to old age security, including the introduction of the guaranteed income supplement, inflation protection and a definition of the word "spouse" that recognizes and includes common law partners.

According to Human Resources Development Canada's online history of Canada's public pension system, these changes were motivated by the desire of all Canadians to help those persons and groups most vulnerable to poverty, including women, low income workers and disabled persons. In other words, old age security is not a reward for service rendered. Rather it is motivated by a sense of justice and a recognition that no Canadian, especially seniors, should live in poverty.

The sense of social justice, which motivated old age security, is also reflected in the way the Government of Canada funds the scheme. Unlike the Canada and Quebec pension plans, which are funded by contributions from each person over his or her working life, old age security is presently funded from general tax revenues. This means old age security is funded from the taxes of every person living and working in Canada right now, not 10, not 15, not 20 years ago, regardless of their country of birth.

• (1735)

Furthermore, old age security income is itself subject to tax, so ultimately only those Canadian seniors most in need receive any old

age security income. We fund old age security in this manner because Canadians believe we all have a duty to earmark some of our earnings each year to eliminate poverty among our seniors, whether we have lived here six weeks, six months, six years or 60 years.

Let me say it again so there is no misunderstanding. Old age security is not intended to reward seniors for services rendered; rather, it is intended to ensure Canadian seniors will not live in poverty.

Having now clarified and corrected an important misconception about old age security, I will now identify and clarify the great injustice Bill C-362 is intended to address and remedy.

Presently, the Old Age Security Act requires a person to reside in Canada for 10 years before he or she is entitled to receive old age security. Although the old age security program is intended to act as the cornerstone of Canada's retirement income system, this residency requirement excludes many seniors from its benefits. Indeed, because of a 10 year residency requirement, it is not uncommon for a Canadian senior citizen to go entirely without the benefits of old age security for many years.

In effect, the residency requirement creates two different classes of senior citizens: those who qualify for old age security at 65 and those who do not because they have not lived in Canada for 10 years.

As a result, the residency requirement also creates two different classes of families and communities within Canada. There are those families and communities whose seniors receive the benefits and peace of mind of old age security at age 65, and there are those families and communities that do not and as a result are required to take on a burden of responsibility that other families in Canada are not also expected to bear.

The net result is that the 10 year residency requirement for old age security treats a whole group of Canadians as second class citizens. This, as I am sure we can all agree, is unacceptable.

It should also be noted that the 10 year residency requirement also adds insult to injury by targeting, inadvertently, I think, some of the most economically vulnerable seniors in Canada. As some members of this House know, in some cases seniors can circumvent the 10 year requirement and qualify for old age security if they emigrate from countries that have signed reciprocal social security agreements with the Government of Canada.

These agreements allow for the coordination of the two countries' social security programs. They make the benefits portable between the two countries. They normally exist because both countries provide social security plans with similar benefits. As a result, in many cases the very reason no reciprocal agreement exists between Canada and a particular country is that the other country is unwilling or unable to provide comparable social security.

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This means that those persons who may need old age security the most, because they emigrated from countries with little or no social security, must go without old age security here in Canada even after they have become Canadian citizens. I am sure we can agree that this as well is unacceptable.

To summarize the injustice this is intended to address, there is the fact that the 10 year residency requirement for old age security treats a great many Canadians as second class citizens and denies benefits to those seniors most in need of assistance. If we also recall that poverty is epidemic among our seniors, and especially among women and new Canadians, there is only one sensible and decent conclusion to be drawn: the 10 year residency requirement is unjust and unacceptable and must be changed. That is exactly what this bill aims to do. Canadian citizenship is certainly sufficient to entitle a person to old age security. It takes three years to apply for old age security.

I want to conclude my remarks today by explaining why this bill deserves the support of each and every member of the House.

● (1740)

First and foremost, Bill C-362 deserves the support of every member of the House as a simple matter of decency. However people may choose to make sense of the notion of decency, whether they prefer to talk of a principle of fairness, or equality of opportunity, or the equal dignity of all persons, the underlying sentiment remains the same: a person should not be made worse off than others arbitrarily.

Unquestionably, the 10 year residency requirement arbitrarily prevents a great many senior citizens from receiving old age security benefits. This creates undue and unjust hardship for them, their families and their communities. There is no good reason that justifies the imposition of this harm on so many Canadians. The only truly decent thing to do is reduce this residency requirement to three years, as my bill proposes.

Bill C-362 also deserves the support of every member of the House because of the immeasurable contribution made by seniors across Canada to our families, our communities and our country each and every day.

Seniors, thanks to their lifetime of experience, provide immeasurable support and guidance to us all. Not only do seniors help us to remember and understand our history, our values, and our identity, they very often help alleviate the very real pressures of raising a family in today's fast paced society. There is, for example, no better child care than that provided by a loving grandparent.

However, seniors will not be in any position to offer us guidance, wisdom and support if they themselves are trapped in abject poverty. So by securing the economic well-being of all seniors, ultimately we do a service to all Canadians.

Bill C-362 also deserves the support of every member of the House because in supporting this bill we formally recognize that all Canadian seniors deserve to live their entire lives with a sense of dignity and self-respect. No person, and certainly no member of the House, would ever want to face a choice between abject poverty and a life of absolute dependence on family and friends. By guaranteeing a certain basic level of support for all Canadian seniors, we guarantee a lifetime of dignity and self-respect for all Canadians.

Finally, Bill C-362 deserves the support of every member of the House because Canadians all across the country want us to address the very real injustice faced by so many seniors and their families and communities.

On the whole, Canadians are a decent people. Without exception, whenever possible we strive to do the right thing and to right wrongs whenever we encounter them. To even the most casual observer, the injustice of an arbitrary 10 year residency requirement is a wrong that needs to be corrected.

Finally, in closing, I want to remind members of the House that Canada has been, and always will be a country of immigrants. Even today, Canada has one of the highest per capita rates of immigration in the world, with roughly 17% of our population foreign born and another 30% descended from earlier generations of non-British or non-French immigrants. It should also not be forgotten that the British and the French were themselves immigrants at one time. Moreover, research indicates that within the next 20 years immigration will account for all our net population and labour force growth in Canada.

In my view and the view of a great many Canadians, every single one of our recent immigrants and future citizens deserves a social security net that encompasses a person's entire life. While it is certainly tempting to say that we need to provide this kind of social security as a necessary exercise in marketing, that is, we need to do it if Canada wants to attract and retain the best and brightest immigrants, I think there is a deeper and much more meaningful motivation. We owe it to all Canadians as a matter of decency, the kind of heartfelt decency that motivates and unites every person in this great and caring country of ours.

● (1745)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's proposal. I have a couple of questions for her.

Has this been costed out? What would this cost the treasury?

Also, she says this is such a wonderful idea, but the Liberals say the current law violates the charter. The law was ruled constitutional when the Liberals themselves fought to uphold it. I am interested in why there is this turnabout. It is simply a ploy to try to get immigrant votes on something they voted against before?

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Speaker, I think that comment by the member was really quite beneath him.

However, it did not get to the Supreme Court because this was a court challenge initiated by seniors' groups and, needless to say, they ran out of money. The lawyer who handled the case felt fairly certain that had it reached the Supreme Court it would in fact have been ruled unconstitutional.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member introduced this bill some time ago and I remember that, following his speech, I asked her a question to which she never replied. I wonder if I might have an answer today, now that several months have gone by.

We were speaking of two social classes of seniors—the first class and the second class. The member said she was against making this distinction. Personally, I agree wholeheartedly. However, when Bill C-36 was sent to committee to be studied, the Bloc Québécois proposed an amendment because, despite the tabling of Bill C-362, there was an element of unfairness with respect to new sponsored citizens. When it was being studied in committee, the Bloc Québécois asked that the bill be amended so as not to restrict new citizens' access to old age security on the basis of the sponsor's obligations under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The Liberals voted against that amendment.

I do not know if the member can tell me why the Liberals voted against this amendment because today she is introducing a bill that is oddly reminiscent of what was proposed by the Bloc with regard to Bill C-36.

[English]

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Speaker, I am not totally clear on this, but I believe the member indicated that this was brought before the immigration committee. It is not an immigration matter. It is a human resources issue. Otherwise, I am not aware of Bill C-36.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a little puzzled by this bill. We are talking about rules that were first put in place by a Liberal government. In the member's own admission, she said that the Liberal government basically fought the other side until it ran out of money before the case got to the Supreme Court.

I have a couple of questions. First, we have the most generous immigration system in the entire world and, from my understanding, we have international social security agreements with more countries than any other country in the world.

I want to follow up on my other hon. colleague's question. First, has she costed this out? That would be important to understand. I am sure she has, so I would like to know what the specific numbers are.

Second, the hon. member's party was in government for 13 long years. I am curious about why it did not do anything about this in those 13 years.

• (1750)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. The Liberal government did bring in the Old Age Security Act, with the rules and regulations, in 1951, and I mean gee, just think, it was not perfect then—

Hon. Garth Turner: I do not think he was born then.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: The Liberal government brought it in. The intent of that bill was to alleviate poverty among seniors.

The member asked why the Liberals did not bring this in when they were in government. I do not know, maybe you were not born then either, but in 1993 when the Liberals came to power we were left a horrendous mess to deal with. These things have been on the list.

In 1951—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The time allotted for questions and comments has expired, but it is a good opportunity for me to remind hon. members that it is very

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difficult for the Chair to hear the responses when there is so much back and forth.

I would also remind the member for Brampton West to address comments through the Chair and not directly at other members.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Bill C-362 and the proposed amendments to the old age security program.

All Canadians can be proud of our country's retirement income system. Simply put, it is recognized as one of the best in the world and is emulated by countries looking to set an effective long term public pension system.

The old age security program, along with the Canada pension plan, provides all Canadians with a solid foundation upon which to build their retirement income. Together, Canada's public pensions deliver about \$54 billion in benefits to Canadians each year.

Bill C-362 proposes reducing the minimum residence requirement for old age security benefits from ten to three years. However, I will respectfully disagree with the hon. member for Brampton West on the premise of this bill.

From a public policy perspective, the old age security program is fair and sound. It is the first tier of Canada's retirement income system, serving over four million Canadian seniors every year. The old age security pension is designed as a measure of income security for seniors. It recognizes their valuable contributions to Canadian society, our economy and their community over a lifetime.

Unlike pension plans in most countries, Canada offers, as part of its public pension system, a tier that is fully funded by general tax revenues instead of contributions. Most countries have pension schemes that require years of contributions to qualify for benefits. For example, Japan's seniors must contribute for 25 years to be eligible for a pension. From this standpoint, we can see that Canada's pension plan is exceptionally generous.

Here in Canada, there are none of the restrictions about citizenship or nationality often found in other countries. To gain the right to a lifelong public pension, we ask only that seniors make a reasonable contribution of 10 years to Canadian society.

A number of governments have examined the current old age security residence requirement since it was established in 1977 and they have kept it intact.

In fact, during the last parliament, the Liberal Party voted against the Bloc amendments that could institute these very changes. So, for the Liberals it only became an issue of fairness or respect for new Canadians when this government came to power and they no longer had to worry about the consequences of their actions.

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I believe that the 10-year residence requirement is sound and it is reasonable. It makes no distinction between immigrants who have just arrived in Canada or Canadians who are returning to Canada after living abroad.

Under current rules, a person must live in Canada, after reaching the age of 18, for a total of 40 years to receive a full pension. A person must live in Canada for a minimum of 10 years to receive a partial pension.

Many seniors who qualify for old age security and who have low incomes also receive the guaranteed income supplement, GIS, designed to help Canada's poorest seniors.

Once again, a 10-year rule is a reasonable compromise. It strikes a good balance between the individual's contribution to Canadian society and his or her right to receive a lifelong public pension.

This policy is the result of a longstanding and dynamic conversation with Canadians. Since 1977, the residence requirement for old age security has served countless new Canadians. The program has been there for generations of immigrants who built a new life for themselves and their children in Canada, and this government will ensure it remains that way.

Many of these immigrants come from countries that have signed social security agreements with us, and on the world stage Canada is a leader among countries that have signed social security agreements.

To date, 50 agreements have been signed between Canada and foreign countries. Because of these reciprocal agreements, many newcomers to Canada are able to meet the 10-year residence requirement to receive the old age security pension by using years of residence or contribution in both countries. This means that these seniors may be able to receive benefits from both Canada and their country of origin.

• (1755)

In a nutshell, it means that people who have lived or worked abroad can meet the 10-year residence rule by adding these periods to their Canadian residence. These agreements recognize the contributions people have made in their previous country of residence and allow them to qualify for benefits to which they might not otherwise be entitled.

Canada is continuing to negotiate agreements with countries that share comparable pension systems so that we can improve the access of our growing immigrant communities to pension benefits.

The courts have also considered the residency issue that the bill raises. In two landmark cases they upheld the issue of fairness of our residence provisions for the old age security pension.

One of these legal challenges made it all the way to the Federal Court of Appeal. The 2003 ruling confirmed what most Canadians knew. The 10-year residence rule does not in any way discriminate against Canadians on the grounds of national or ethnic origin as my hon. colleague across the aisle would like us to believe.

I find it interesting that it was the former Liberal government that fought this case in court and yet today the Liberals are claiming the

opposite. Today it has become an issue of discrimination and hypocrisy abounds.

It is no secret that seniors constitute the fastest growing segment of Canada's population. With baby boomers poised to retire in record numbers, our pension costs will skyrocket in years to come. In the next 25 years nearly one in four Canadians will be a senior. With our rapidly aging population, relaxing the residence rule for old age security could have significant fiscal implications to Canada and the public pension program.

In fact, it is estimated that reducing the 10-year rule for old age security to three years would cost Canadians over \$700 million in combined old age security and GIS benefits in the first few years alone. In the long run these costs will surely rise exponentially.

This government has a responsibility to ensure that this program remains for the generation of Canadians to come, including the children and the grandchildren of new Canadians, and that is just what we plan on doing.

Unlike the previous government, which largely ignored seniors issues during the last 13 years in power, this government has taken swift and decisive action on the seniors file. For example, within months of being elected this government improved: seniors' well-being through increased federal representation, including significant investments in programing as well as putting in place real tax relief.

We have created a Secretary of State for Seniors. We have established a National Seniors Council to advise the government on issues of importance to older Canadians. We have committed an additional \$10 million per year to the new horizons for seniors program to encourage seniors to continue their valuable contributions to their communities.

After years of being ignored by the Liberals, seniors, both new to this country and those who have been here their entire lives, can rest assured that Canada's new government is listening to them and delivering results.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is my second opportunity to talk about Bill C-362, which was introduced by my Liberal colleague, and which aims to amend that part of the Old Age Security Act dealing with residency requirements for older immigrants.

Bill C-362 would reduce from 10 years to three years the residency requirement for entitlement to a partial monthly old age security pension.

The bill is a very simple one, so I do not understand why the Conservative Party is against it. How could they possibly oppose it? The current 10-year requirement is unfair to recent immigrants who are seniors, because they have limited access to old age security benefits. The only amendment this bill calls for is to change all instances of “ten years” in the act to “three years”. The definition of “specially qualified individual”, which indicates the number of years of residency required for an individual to be entitled to benefits, would be amended to read “three years”. When the Conservative Party says that the government has been very generous toward seniors, I have to wonder what it is talking about.

It is clear to the Bloc Québécois that Bill C-362 would give recent immigrants who are seniors easier access to the old age security program. Quality of life for seniors often depends on the care they receive. Quality of life also depends on their income, and recent immigrants are entitled to their dignity too. The Conservative Party does not seem to recognize that.

It is clear that Bill C-362 introduces amendments to the Old Age Security Act that do not encroach on Quebec's jurisdiction. That is why the Bloc Québécois supports the principle underlying this bill.

I would now like to remind the members about what the Bloc Québécois has done for seniors over the past years. In May I began travelling around Quebec, and I realized that seniors are vulnerable, poor and getting poorer. Over the past few years, we, the Bloc Québécois, have found that seniors, who are among the poorest members of our society, have always borne the brunt of the federal government's cuts to transfer payments. Quality of life for seniors has been hit hard.

That is why the Bloc Québécois has long been highly critical of the inconsistencies in the federal guaranteed income supplement program, which provides additional revenue for older people on limited incomes. If we wanted to do them justice, we would have to increase the guaranteed income supplement today by \$106 a month just to reach the low income threshold.

Bill C-36, which was given royal assent last May 7, partly solved some of the problems with program accessibility, although without resolving the full retroactivity issue. The Bloc Québécois wanted to see full retroactivity, but that was not included in Bill C-36. It provided only 11 months of retroactivity.

Bill C-36 made other changes to the Old Age Security Act, including ongoing renewal of the guaranteed income supplement, the clarity of the act, simplified income reporting for seniors and couples; and the consistency of benefit entitlements.

There was also a proposal to make common amendments to the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act. These provisions dealt with electronic services, the charging of interest, and information sharing. There was still one controversial issue surrounding accessibility, and the Bloc Québécois opposed the expansion of the limits on new Canadian citizens who had immigrated.

In the Bloc's view—and apparently now in the view of the Liberal Party as well—there cannot be different classes of Canadian citizens, regardless of how they arrived. All Canadian citizens should be entitled to the guaranteed income supplement. Some sections of

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the legislation were problematic because they created different classes of citizens—for example, a person who has a sponsorship agreement still in effect under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. These sections excluded new Canadian citizens who were still being sponsored.

The Bloc Québécois wanted the committee to amend the bill so as not to let the obligations incumbent upon sponsors under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act limit the eligibility of new citizens for old age security.

● (1805)

In the Bloc's view, when a person becomes a Canadian citizen, his sponsorship agreement should automatically be terminated.

The sponsor's obligations generally take effect as soon as the person being sponsored obtains permanent resident status and conclude at the end of the sponsorship period. This can be very long in some cases—as many as 10 years—and the problem needed fixing. Under the bill, the agreement could not be terminated, even through the obtaining of Canadian citizenship. It could not be terminated by separation, divorce, or moving to another province. It remained in effect even if the sponsor's financial situation took a turn for the worse.

I should point out that the Liberal Party voted against this Bloc proposal last February. Today we are dealing with a matter similar to the debate on Bill C-36, which received royal assent last May. Bill C-362 does not deal with new sponsored arrivals but with other categories of new arrivals who are not sponsored.

The proposed amendments are minor. It is impossible to be against them, but we need to go much further.

Because of globalization and the fact that we live in a global environment, the Bloc Québécois thinks that Canada must be flexible about citizenship and the services offered to newcomers. Given the increase in exchanges between countries, there should be mechanisms in place to allow for greater human mobility, in addition to the measures already in place to help the disadvantaged, including seniors, of course.

The Bloc Québécois' position is as follows. We are aware that Bill C-362 will make it easier for recent immigrants who are seniors to access old age security benefits. As I said earlier, since seniors' quality of life often depends on the care they can receive, this quality of life is dictated by their income. Newcomers also have a right to dignity.

Private Members' Business

In closing, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle of this bill. Nonetheless, I want to point out that there is still a lot of work to do. It is deplorable that in all these years the Liberal and Conservative governments have abandoned, muzzled and ignored seniors, the most vulnerable people in our society. The Liberals were the first to close their eyes to this category of disadvantaged people, choosing instead to allow capital to be sheltered in tax havens, to lower the debt and cut funding from Quebec and the provinces. Then the Conservatives chose to cut taxes instead of providing immediate support to the workers who helped build today's society.

Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois is here to ensure that our seniors have a voice in the government. Thanks to our many appearances in the House, in committee and in the media, the Bloc Québécois has managed to keep the attention on a group of people who have been dropped from the government's priorities. Seniors who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, but without full retroactivity because of various governmental errors, are a good example.

The Bloc Québécois will continue to fight the federal government in order to bring justice to those who enabled Quebecers and Canadians to become the people they are today.

[English]

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support Bill C-362.

I think the reasons for us to give this positive consideration are many but I will use the reasons that I see within my own community to talk about this.

When a person becomes a citizen in this country it means something. I go to citizenship swearing-ins on a regular basis and I see the great pride and excitement on the faces of people who are becoming citizens. Whether they are 12 or 60 years old, it means something in their hearts and souls when they become Canadian citizens. They are proud and they want to contribute to their communities for what they see as a privilege and an honour of becoming Canadian citizens.

The other thing that it means is that there is an equality of access to the services and supports that are available to all citizens in our country. That is what citizenship means or that is part of what comes with the privileges of being a citizen, but there are responsibilities as well. I want to talk about both of those things today.

One of the privileges that people hope for when they become citizens is that they can live very differently, or maybe in the same way as in their country of birth, but for many people they want to live a life filled with dignity, self-respect and pride. In order for that to happen, there needs to be a way for dignity and self-respect to take place.

The granting of OAS to citizens who have been here three years as opposed to the current ten years is a compromise from when this whole debate began but it is something that we should consider strongly.

The fact is that someone could come to this country and perhaps could become a citizen two years later. They could work in the workforce for a few years, usually not able to contribute to anything, and then become 65, a senior or an elder, and then could be told that

they must wait another seven years. It may not matter that they are a citizen, that they were in the workforce or that they paid taxes while in the workforce. It would not matter that their sons and daughters were paying taxes. They would not be able to receive OAS for 10 years. I do not know how that reinforces dignity, respect or pride.

Someone earlier said that it was about dignity and self-respect when one is an elder. For the elders I talk to, pride is certainly equal if not more important because many of the seniors in their countries of origin had the place of respect and honour in their families. They then come to a country where they have no money, are usually totally dependent on someone else and there's no other way for them to have income so they can ride a bus, get to the park and do those things that seniors might want to do together. The resources may be available for some but for others they may not.

• (1810)

The denying of OAS to seniors based on a 10 year residency is unreasonable and goes against all those things that we believe should be accessible to a citizen, which is equality and access to supports.

The immigrants in the community in which I live take very seriously the responsibility part of citizenship. In no way do they take citizenship for granted. In point of fact, in my community of Surrey North and in the city of Surrey, immigrants do many things that other people would actually need to be paid to do.

I will give some examples to the House that may be illustrative. The seniors I know serve free food at lunchtime to anyone who wishes to come to their temple or their place of worship and receive it. The person does not have to be of that country of origin. They can be anyone who needs food at lunchtime and they serve that food. If they did not do that, people might go without.

Some of the elders in the community are very active in organizing blood donor clinics. We all know that with every holiday there is an urgent appeal on the radio or in the newspaper saying that blood is needed with the a holiday weekend coming up. I do not think many of us in this House would not know someone who has benefited from a blood transfusion. The elders are incredibly active in organizing those blood donor clinics, getting people to them, working in partnership with the Red Cross to ensure they happen, perhaps providing the venue, providing all the external support that might be needed and getting the word out throughout the entire community that this is happening. The turnout is tremendous.

The blood does not only go to immigrants. It goes to everyone. It saves everyone's life. It is not labelled, "Collected by immigrants, to be used by immigrants". Everyone benefits from that.

Private Members' Business

Many elders in my community provide very needed translation services. These are translation services that otherwise would probably need to be paid for, for those people who are just learning their additional language. The phrase, "English as a second language" is a very North American phrase because for most people who come from other countries they already speak two or three languages and this might be their third, fourth or fifth language. The elders provide translation services for hospitals, social services agencies and sometimes for government agencies that otherwise would not be available. They are contributing. They feel that responsibility to contribute, not just the privilege of being a citizen but the responsibility of giving back.

Every time there is an event in my community, immigrants from all countries participate in very significant ways.

As well, the sons and daughters or other immigrants who have come to Surrey are perhaps the biggest economic driver in Surrey. There are probably more new businesses started by immigrants in Surrey. It is an enormous economic driver. It produces tax revenue that everyone benefits from. Why should the elders, who have taken out citizenship because they are proud of it and are contributing back, not be able to benefit from that?

I heard someone earlier say that people contribute to pensions. This is not a pension. If it were a case of people contributing to a pension we would not have so many women, Caucasian women included, living in poverty. They have no pension plan because they did not work outside the home for wages. I am sorry, that is a side issue that I could not resist.

• (1815)

In closing, these people take their privileges of citizenship seriously, but they also take the responsibility seriously. They are citizens and they should have access to the OAS in the three years, as recommended by this bill.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today in support of my colleague from Brampton West, and in support of thousands of wonderful seniors in our country.

If we would all work with the same passion and same commitment as the hon. member for Brampton West, we would never have to worry about our seniors being left behind. Her dedication to society's most vulnerable is inspiring and should serve as a model to all of us in the House, contrary to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, who does not understand the basic principle of this bill. She kept on talking about the pensions. In fact, it is an old age security benefit.

Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, is a long overdue change to our social vision of our elderly. The present requirement is that seniors from certain countries live here for 10 years before they are eligible for even partial payments, which will help to keep them out of poverty.

Ten years is a long time. We require only three years for someone to become a full citizen of the country. Why then do we make some seniors suffer through another seven more years of hardship while they wait to be eligible for old age security? To make matters even

worse, this long time does not even apply fairly for all Canadian seniors.

This does not fit with our fundamental Canadian values and belief in equality for all our citizens. It makes things harder for seniors who come from poorer countries, who do not have social security and who get no protection from poverty here as well. They have come to our country to get better lives and help build a better and stronger Canada.

It is sad that these seniors, the ones who are the most vulnerable to poverty, are the ones who suffer the most from the 10 year wait. This inequality between the seniors in our country is unjust and we must work together to level the playing field and protect not just some of our seniors from poverty, but all seniors.

I cannot help but feel frustrated when members from the Conservative Party say that only those who have been here 10 years deserve security, that only those who have been here 10 years have done anything worthwhile for our country. This is a gross misunderstanding of the valuable role our parents and grandparents play in today's Canadian society.

Earlier the member for Surrey North mentioned many reasons for both parents and grandparents to be productive. These seniors are productive members of our great society, and I cannot find a better example than my own parents. They have come to this country, are staying in my home and are helping my wife and I raise three beautiful children.

My family is not alone in this. When the government decided real child care was not a priority, many families had to scramble and rely upon extended relatives as caregivers. However, these caregivers, our grandfathers and grandmothers, have even less support than child care workers.

The Conservative government wants it both ways. It wants to take away real choice for our families on child care and then it wants families to bear the weight for old age security. The Prime Minister's agenda is clear: limit the options for the young and the old.

• (1820)

It is not enough to trash the future; they are also dishonouring our past.

Our seniors cannot be productive if they have to worry about how they will eat each day. There are thousands of seniors in our communities that the old age security would take out of poverty. It would allow them to concentrate on how to strengthen our families and communities.

I have had several meetings with seniors in my riding of Newton—North Delta, in Surrey and the Delta area, groups like the Kennedy House Seniors' Centre. They have told me first-hand about how hard it is for our elderly citizens to survive from day to day. This has also come up at monthly meetings and lunches that I have hosted for some of the seniors in my riding.

Adjournment Proceedings

My community is telling me that we need to do more to help keep our parents and grandparents out of poverty. It is not right that the Conservative government finishes each year with huge surpluses and does nothing to help those seniors who suffer and need the most.

It is not the first time the Conservative government has failed our seniors. It began when the Conservative Prime Minister flip-flopped on income trusts and ruined the retirement savings of thousands of seniors across the country. It got worse when the Conservative government raised taxes for the lowest income bracket in its first budget. Despite a \$13 billion surplus, the Conservative Prime Minister decided to pay for the GST cut and military spending by targeting the most vulnerable elderly in our society.

Now the minority Conservative government is failing us again by refusing to help the hundreds of thousands of seniors, many of whom have lived in the country for years, to get the old age security benefits they deserve.

This is not acceptable in a progressive society like Canada. I plead with the members opposite to see reason and join with my colleague from Brampton West in taking real steps to protect our seniors from the hardship of poverty. Members should not let their credibility be further ruined by once again choosing partisanship over principles.

It was the Liberal Party that established the old age security in 1952, the Canada pension plan in 1966 and the guaranteed income supplement in 1967. We brought the Canada pension plan back on a strong financial footing in 1998 for the next 50 years. In 2005 we pumped \$2.7 billion into the guaranteed income supplement to help our low income elderly.

We have put our money where our mouth is and have stood up for Canada's most vulnerable.

If three years is enough time to contribute enough to our country to earn citizenship, then three years should be enough to earn the right not to fear living out our golden years in poverty. We cannot continue with a system that has some seniors receiving financial security to stay out of poverty within a year of entering our country and the others having to wait 10 years, based on the country from where they came.

I urge all members of the House of Commons to support the bill. The time has come to put aside our partisanship and work together on this issue so Canadian seniors will not ever live in poverty.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there agreement to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance will be responding. I am very glad to hear that, because I know that if I ask a reasonable question I will get a reasonable answer.

My question is a follow-up from a previous question. At that time, I was trying to point out to everyone in the House that we are trying to understand the new Atlantic accord deal but it is difficult without a written agreement that we can check.

I pointed out and read from an article in the *Halifax Daily News*, saying that its interpretation of the agreement, based on the information available, was that the province will give up "all claim to all entitlements guaranteed in the Atlantic Accord". I had planned to read from another article in the *Chronicle-Herald*, which basically said the opposite, but today there is a newer one that is even more the opposite.

I read these just to point out how confusing it is for those of us in Nova Scotia who are trying to understand this agreement and want to support it. We hope we can support it. We hope it is a good deal.

One newspaper, based on the information available, says that we lose everything in the Atlantic accord, while *The Hill Times* of October 22 states that "amendments will be introduced to reverse the amendments made to the Atlantic Accord in the 2007 budget". That is everything we ever asked for. That is exactly what we want. That is exactly what we all have been asking for in Nova Scotia: that the amendments be reversed.

That is what *The Hill Times* article says, but the other article says its interpretation is that "the province...gives up all claim to all entitlements guaranteed in the Atlantic Accord". We could not have two more opposite interpretations of the agreement. One says we lose everything, while another says we get everything back. I called both journalists. They are both well respected and they both said they wrote their articles based on the information they had available.

The problem is that there is no written agreement. I hope that soon we can have a written agreement, because we want to support this deal if it is a good deal. Again, though, one newspaper says we lose everything under the Atlantic accord and the other says we get everything.

I hope the most recent one in the *The Hill Times* is right. It says that "amendments will be introduced to reverse the amendments made to the Atlantic Accord in the 2007 budget". That is all we have ever found fault with. The 2007 budget amended the Atlantic accord and changed the most important aspect of it, which is the way one calculates the payment of the Atlantic accord. The Atlantic accord said it will be based on the equalization formula that exists at the time the payment is calculated and the budget says that from now on the payment will be calculated based on the previous formula. It is a fundamental change.

If this newspaper article is right, then I will be really happy and I will go away. I hope it is right, but the other article says we lose everything under the deal. Does the parliamentary secretary know which of these media reports is right? He may not have seen *The Hill Times* article, but if he has, is it right? I hope it is. If there is no written agreement, is there a plan to bring one in soon, even before the legislation for the amendments comes in?

• (1830)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House in response to the question by the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

On October 10 the Prime Minister and Premier Danny MacDonald announced an agreement which resolves Nova Scotia's concerns related to recent changes to the equalization program by ensuring that the province will receive at least the full benefits it expected to receive from its accord at the time it was signed in 2005. Formal letters have been exchanged between the federal finance minister and the Nova Scotia finance minister outlining the details regarding our recent agreement on the accord.

The October 10 announcement builds on measures introduced in budget 2007 which set out a new equalization program that applies equally to all provinces, while respecting existing agreements with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have consistently said there was room for flexibility in smoothing the transition to the new principles based equalization program. The federal government is providing Nova Scotia a cumulative best of guarantee to ease its transition to the new equalization system by guaranteeing that the province will do at least as well on a cumulative basis as it would have done under the formula in place at the time of the 2005 accord. With this guarantee, Nova Scotia no longer has to be concerned about the risk of opting into the new equalization formula too early and forgoing any potential benefits of the previous formula.

How much Nova Scotia may stand to gain from this agreement will clearly depend on a variety of factors, such as economic growth, tax revenues, population, and revenues from natural resources, including oil and gas.

We can, however, guarantee that under this agreement Nova Scotia will receive all the benefits it expected to receive at the time it signed the 2005 accord, and possibly more under the new equalization formula. In fact, for the 2007-08 year alone, the new formula is giving \$95 million more in equalization and offshore offsets to Nova Scotia, which the province can use to invest in its priorities.

The equalization changes agreed to will require amendments to the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act. We hope to introduce these changes as soon as possible as part of the Budget Implementation Act.

In addition, the agreement with Nova Scotia seeks to resolve long outstanding issues with respect to crown share adjustment payments by launching an independent panel to find an approach that is agreeable to both governments.

Adjournment Proceedings

I am pleased that our discussions have come to a successful conclusion. This underlines the capacity of our respective governments to work together. To quote Premier Rodney MacDonald:

These two announcements...at last fulfill the long-standing federal commitment to enable Nova Scotia to become principal beneficiary of our offshore revenues.

• (1835)

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary raised a whole bunch of questions with his answer and I only have a minute. First of all, I think the member referred to the premier as Danny MacDonald and I think he should be referred to as Rodney MacDonald.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned that the new program is to apply equally to all provinces. Another journalist in the *Chronicle Herald* said that based on what he read, his interpretation was that the government would bring in legislation to change the equalization formula and give Nova Scotia a unique formula different than all the provinces. It says that it is different than all the programs available to all the other provinces.

That is the problem with not having a written agreement. There are three different newspaper articles by three professional journalists that take different positions than the parliamentary secretary has outlined.

The article in *The Hill Times* says that the intention is clearly to have these amendments included in the next budget implementation act. Budget implementation acts usually come in in March. Is that when we can expect this legislation?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the hon. member, I do stand corrected if I referred to the premier by the wrong first name. It is indeed Premier Rodney MacDonald to whom I was referring.

I listened carefully to the member opposite. I am somewhat surprised that he failed to acknowledge the very successful efforts of the hon. Minister of National Defence and the hon. member for South Shore—St. Margaret's, who worked together with the Prime Minister and Premier Rodney MacDonald to advance this file to where it is today. I am pleased that we have come to a successful arrangement with Nova Scotia.

The economy is strong in Nova Scotia. In its most recent budget, the province projected a surplus of \$118 million in 2007-08 due in part to increased funding from the federal government. According to the latest estimates from the Conference Board of Canada, Halifax's economy will experience strong growth in the service sector and a rebound in the manufacturing sector.

In addition, in August 2007, Nova Scotia's labour force participation rate of 64%—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:36 p.m.)

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