



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 013 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 1, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 1, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of the comprehensive effort to inform parliamentarians and Canadians on the government's performance, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, on behalf of departments and agencies, their 90 performance reports for 2006-07.

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CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (expanded voting opportunities) and to make a consequential amendment to the Referendum Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-55 was at the time of prorogation.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-55 was at the time of prorogation of the 1st session of the 39th Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made on Thursday, October 25, 2007, the bill is deemed read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

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

* * *

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Hon. Gary Lunn (for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to a special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-57 was at the time of prorogation.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-57 was at the time of prorogation of the 1st session of the 39th Parliament. Accordingly, pursuant to order made Thursday, October 25, the bill is deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

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

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PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, and on behalf of the hundreds of seniors who visited Parliament Hill yesterday, I present this income trust broken promise petition. The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he had promised never to tax income trusts but that 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, most of whom were seniors.

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

Business of Supply

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from residents of New Denver, British Columbia, with regard to the error that Statistics Canada made in its calculation of the consumer price index. The petitioners say that it has resulted in an error Canada's inflation numbers for whose benefits are tied into this, including recipients of the Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

The petitioners ask the Parliament of Canada to take full responsibility for this error and take the required steps to repay every Canadian who was shortchanged by a government program because of the miscalculation of the CPI.

• (1005)

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to help highlight the continuing issues surrounding the refugee system in Canada and to join with petitioners from Citizens for Public Justice in calling for enhancements to Canada's refugee system. The Canadian Council for Refugees quite rightly notes that the Conservatives' failure to appoint or reappoint 46 of the 127 members to the Immigration and Refugee Board means that the refugee system is stretched way beyond its limits.

I table this petition that calls upon the government to take action on the refugee file or to at least do its job and ensure that IRB has the people to do the job.

DNA DATA BANK

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition on behalf of Mary Mason and Donna Dixon, who have worked hard in Hamilton searching for their son and grandson, Billy Mason, who has been missing for two years. They hit a wall when they found that there was no DNA data bank for them to be able to compare some articles of clothing that have been found.

This has been under study since 2005. This petition of 6,600 names is demanding that the federal government get the job done on behalf of Canadians.

PASSPORTS

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I have a petition for the House that is signed by 4,000 people in Sault Ste. Marie and environs. It brings to the attention of the government the fact that there is no passport office anywhere in northeastern Ontario, which means that citizens of northeastern Ontario, who pay taxes like everybody else, only have access to a full passport office, particularly in instances of emergencies, if they drive some eight hours either to Toronto or Thunder Bay. This usually requires them to stay overnight, which brings added expense with it.

The Seniors Health Advisory Committee carried out a very extensive canvass of the community, spending literally months in many of the malls and public areas gathering these names and talking to people. The 4,000 people who signed this petition want the government to understand that they will not be treated like second class citizens. They need and want a full-fledged passport office in Sault Ste. Marie, which is a border community, to serve all of

northeastern Ontario. Otherwise, they are not getting the service that everybody else in Canada, particularly in the larger centres, takes for granted.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.) moved:

That, taking into account the reports produced by the Standing Committee on Status of Women on the need for pay equity and the lack of economic security for women, the House call upon the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Canada and present this strategy to the House by February 1, 2008.

She said: It is a pleasure for me today to support this motion and put it forward. The Status of Women committee has done a great deal of very hard work in this area in preparing the reports on economic security and pay equity.

I should like to say that I am splitting my time with the hon. member for Don Valley East.

Women have much to be concerned about with the direction in which the government is going, however, as women are not even mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, not at all, or in Tuesday's financial update.

No women's issues are being addressed by the Conservative government. It seems to be following an ideological path that is totally contrary to women's needs. For instance, it has shut down 12 out of 16 Status of Women regional offices in this country. There is no funding for equality-seeking organizations. In fact, the equality provisions have been eliminated from the mandate of the Status of Women Canada program.

There is no funding for groups that conduct research and advocacy work on behalf of women, but if people are lobbying the government on defence contracts they can get \$500,000 from the Government of Canada to research and lobby. How sad is that? People can get money to lobby the government on defence contracts, but they cannot for research or lobbying the government to assist women in this country.

Business of Supply

It is very sad indeed that the government is shutting out women who are fighting for the government to make changes in policies that affect them negatively, such as amendments to the employment insurance and pension system and structures, child care, et cetera.

The Conservative Party's Tom Flanagan has said that it is all part of the Prime Minister's long term plan to eradicate these so-called "Liberal outsider" groups. That may be true, but the reality is that organizations such as the National Association of Women and the Law, which have for decades worked hard to ensure women's equality in this country, are shutting their doors. Women's voices are being shut down in this country as we speak.

Meanwhile, we saw the government do a little bit of a trick in the last financial update. In the last budget, the Conservatives increased taxes from 15% to 15.5%. The other day they lowered taxes from 15.5% to 15%, to essentially where the Liberals were two years ago, so we are not moving ahead yet. They are playing a little game of "stay in your place", which affects women very directly because of the disparity in income in this country.

The government is ignoring the vast poverty gap that exists in this country, especially for women, as well as infrastructure in our cities, lack of child care, and the list goes on. In fact, the GST cut will benefit no one and will not address the poverty gap in this country at all.

Countries with strong economies invest in research and innovation, human capital such as education, training and literacy, and physical infrastructure for our cities. These countries invest in health care and the environment. These countries realize the importance of social investments, something the government just does not seem to get.

We have significant challenges in addressing the gender differences in low income rates, particularly as they affect single senior women, single parent families headed by women, and women with disabilities. The committee paid close attention to women belonging to vulnerable groups in society, such as immigrant women, rural women, aboriginal women, women with disabilities, senior women and single mothers. One-fifth of immigrants who arrived in Canada in the 1990s faced chronic low income, a rate 2.5 times higher than that of persons born in Canada.

The financial economic update does not talk at all about any gender based analysis that was done in the mini-budget. It says nothing about it. In the Speech from the Throne, there was no gender based analysis that I am aware of, yet we as the Liberal government had set that kind of standard in the 2004 and 2005 budgets. The gender based analyses were done and we were hoping the current government would continue, because that is how we can see how policies affect women in this country.

For instance, on pay equity, the average income for all employed women is just under \$25,000. That is only 64% of that of their male colleagues. The average income for full time employed women is \$36,500, only 71% of that of male colleagues. In 2003, women accounted for 53% of all Canadians classified as low income.

The current system is broken. We need proactive pay equity legislation, but the government has said no to women. In its official response so far to the standing committee, the government has said

no, yet Quebec and Ontario have legislation that is working very well. The Government of Canada should catch up and move on, but the Conservative government is following some sort of other agenda that I cannot understand.

● (1010)

Early learning and child care goes to the heart of women's economic security. The government's so-called child care program, which is the \$1,200, is an income supplement. It is a joke as far as child care goes because it does not create one child care space, does not allow women to re-enter the workforce, does not give Canadians a choice and it sure does not promote women's economic security. In fact, not only does it not do any of those things, but the \$1,200 is taxed in the hands of the recipients and, therefore, they do not receive the full amount. They may receive \$500 a year but that does absolutely nothing to assist women in their situations and families in general.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2001 the poverty rate of single mothers was 42.4%. This is compared to single fathers at 19.3% and 9.5% for couples with children. This means that over one million women with children are living in poverty and that is not acceptable. These issues are magnified for women in rural areas who do not have access to child care, to training and education, to transportation or affordable housing. For new immigrant women, some of whom do not speak either of the official languages and whose credentials are not recognized in Canada, it is even more critical.

The government is not paying attention to women at all. All of the conditions and issues I mentioned need to be addressed but the organizations that would be speaking on behalf of women are being shut down.

Another example is affordable housing. According to Statistics Canada, in 2003, 72% of senior women who rented were considered to have housing affordability problems. Similarly, 42% of renters, families headed by female lone parents, and 38% of unattached female renters had housing affordability problems.

Instead of trying to help women with housing affordability problems, the Conservatives cut \$700 million from affordable housing funding. They slashed \$45 million from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This is so sad that it is actually pathetic. The housing crisis in this country is enormous. Homelessness is a major issue and yet the government has no plan whatsoever to address that issue, which again goes to the economic security of women.

Business of Supply

The child tax benefit, which was established by the Liberal government, was cut by the current government. The young child supplement was cut in the government's previous budget and has not been replaced. It has not increased the child benefit at all throughout its term. That should go to \$5,000 in order to assist families with children because the \$1,200 just does not cut it. I challenge the government to do that because that goes to the heart of eradicating child poverty and it would also address women's economic security.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recommended that federal financial support for early learning and child care should be equivalent to 1% of the GDP. The government to date has not created one child care space. It is relying on the private sector. More recently, we saw a report from the businesses in the country that have said that they are not interested in child care because it is not their job and they do not want to get into it. The government has been relying on that kind of hope for the last two and a half years or so and I think it is time it got off that road and got onto addressing the real needs of women.

Time poverty is one thing that affects women's economic security very drastically. What do I mean by that? Women are in and out of the labour force because women are the ones who are looking after the children. In most cases, women are the ones who are looking after elderly parents or members of the family who are ill. They lose jobs and, in many cases, they lose income, they lose the ability to pay into pensions and they lose promotions. They lose a great deal.

Eighty per cent of caregiving is being done by women. The caregivers of today will be the poorer seniors of tomorrow because we have no national caregiver strategy program at all to deal with women's economic security and women's position in our society. I challenge the government to do that at least.

Those are only some of the things. I have not even addressed the issue of violence against women or seniors' poverty, most of whom are women. These are critical issues that the government needs to address. I would ask that it to at least look at developing a strategy and to look at the recommendations made by the standing committee on those issues and come back to the House with some good directions for the future of women because women in Canada deserve it and are waiting for answers from the government.

• (1015)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the committee on the work it did in preparing the report, which I believe was completed in May. The hon. member was a member of that committee and it covered a wide range of important topics.

In her presentation, I do not think the member referred to the issue of maternity leave. The committee made a recommendation to expand maternity leave to two years. I would like her to comment on how the committee arrived at that issue.

In my riding, which includes mainly small communities and towns, a couple of towns have a population of about 130,000 but most of them are very small places, and a lot of small businesses engage women and men. For women or men to take maternity leave in those particular places, I am told that they need to train people. It is tough to get people to work on a contract basis for two years.

When women, or men, come back after two years, they need to be retrained because a lot happens in two years.

There is no question that children need assistance in those early months and years, but the question I have for the member is whether the committee considered the balance that is required, particularly for small businesses, not the big governments of Canada and the provinces, the large municipalities and the large companies, but small businesses.

• (1020)

Hon. Maria Minna: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the committee did consider that. In fact, we had rural women presenting to the committee when we did this work. We did not just speak to representatives from large cities.

Two years is not that long. First, the time can be shared between the mother and the father of the child. It does not just have to be the mother, which is the example used in this case. Second, small businesses can train and create more jobs for other employees.

When we first introduced the one year, there was a great deal of hue and cry at the time too because people felt that small businesses and other businesses could not handle it. It seems to me that they have been able to deal with it.

At the very minimum, the government should be looking at enriching the income of parents on parental leave in order to make it possible for them to stay at home.

We are trying to create an environment where women in particular, who tend to be the majority of the caregivers, but men as well in this case, are given an opportunity to be with their children and, at the same time, maintain their jobs in their place of employment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech because what she is articulating is the growing prosperity gap we are seeing in our country. Working families and particularly working women are falling through the cracks because the programs they need are not in place.

Whenever we raise these issues in the House, I am concerned because there is a credibility gap as much as a prosperity gap. The credibility gap is when politicians say one thing and do another. For example, 25% of the women's programs were cut by the Liberal government in the 1990s and \$25 billion was cut in transfer payments to the provinces to help social assistance and health.

Now we are seeing a so-called mini-budget that will have a dramatic impact on the ability, over the next five to ten years, of the federal government to provide services.

At this point, what kind of country and what kind of vision does the member have for Canada? I do not think anybody would credit that people should be paid to sit on their hands when it comes time to stand up for the kind of vision she has for this country. Either the member has a vision like the Conservatives, who are sucking the fiscal capacity out of the federal government's ability to support the kind of programs that she said she supports, or she needs to have the courage of her convictions to stand up and say no, and to stand up to the government. However, sitting on her hands is not—

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Beaches—East York briefly.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I think the hon. member likes to talk out of both sides of his mouth. With respect, it was the hon. member's party that put the Conservatives where they are today. It was with that party's motion that killed the Kelowna accord, which hurt a lot of native communities; that killed the early education and child care program; that killed the affordable housing program; and the list goes on.

Frankly, I do not need any lessons from the member over there because it was his party that put the government where it is.

The parental leave program was put in by the Liberal government. The charter challenge program was reinstated by the Liberal government after it was cancelled by the previous Conservative government. The 10-year affordable—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry but this debate will have to resume in some other context. The hon. member for Don Valley East.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand in support of the motion calling upon the government to improve the economic security of women.

This week the Conservatives released a mini-budget in their economic statement that was not only short on substance, but also lacked any mention of women whatsoever.

As chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, the committee spent a great deal of time and effort trying to get the federal government to pay more attention to the economic security of women.

As a matter of fact, the committee published an extensive report that covered detailed studies on the status of vulnerable groups that included rural women, aboriginal women, women with disabilities, senior women and single mothers.

The committee held 18 meetings with departmental officials, individuals, professional organizations, researchers and groups representing the interests of women from across Canada. Regardless of their background or point of view, all the witnesses told the committee that a comprehensive strategy was required to address the economic security of women.

One might ask why we would focus on the economic security of women in Canada. It is simply because that is what equality is all about.

While there have been significant improvements for low income women in Canada in recent years, a witness representing Social Development Canada indicated:

...we still have significant challenges in addressing the gender differences in low income rates, particularly as they affect single senior women, single-parent families headed by women, and women with disabilities.

For example, in 2001, close to two million women or 13% of all women in Canada had a disability.

Furthermore, the likelihood of women having a disability increases with age. Seventy-two percent of the women aged 85

and over had a disability, compared to 50% of women aged 75 to 84, and just 32% of women aged 65 to 74.

In addition, just over 800,000, or close to 7% of women aged 15 and over, had a severe or very severe disability. Furthermore, senior women over the age of 65 are still more likely than men to have low incomes. There are a multitude of reasons for this. Prime among them is the fact that far more women than men are likely to change their work arrangements to care for others. This will naturally have an impact on their present and future economic circumstances.

In Canada, the majority of single parent families are headed by women and, according to Statistics Canada, the poverty rate among single mothers under 65 years of age was a staggering 42.4%. That is nearly half. In addition, the majority of women who find themselves in these circumstances tend to be aboriginal, immigrant and disabled women.

The committee also heard that women are far more likely than men to take time off work to care for children and they are economically vulnerable following unexpected life events, such as the death of a spouse, disability or breakdown of a relationship. The committee heard that it is very difficult for a women who suddenly finds herself as the lone breadwinner to re-enter the job market.

For newcomers to Canada, these difficulties can be bewildering. AWIC Community & Social Services suggested that the inability to function in either official language can represent a major barrier to breaking out of the cycle of poverty.

AWIC suggests that language programs could greatly resolve problems of exploitation, long term dependency on social welfare, lack of participation in the labour market and even social isolation.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women listened to Canadians but I am afraid the Conservatives have shut their ears.

Women need basic programs such as child care, but one of the first acts of the government was to axe the national child care and early learning strategy after many long years of negotiations with the provinces and territories.

● (1025)

The previous Liberal government made great strides by doubling the length of paid maternity leave from six months to a year under the employment insurance program.

The Liberals also brought in the compassionate care program that allows Canadians the opportunity to take time off from work to care for sick loved ones, something which the committee recommends should be extended further.

Yet, what has been the response of the Conservative government? It brought in \$1 billion worth of cuts to social programs at a time when it was hauling in billions in federal surpluses. The government has deceived Canadians by implementing drastic cuts to the Status of Women, closing regional offices, laying off staff, and changing the mandate of that organization so that advocacy is no longer permitted.

Business of Supply

To be precise, in September 2006 the Conservatives announced that the budget of the Status of Women would be decreased by \$5 million. In October 2006 the Minister of Canadian Heritage would be implementing \$5 million in savings through “greater efficiencies in the administrative operations of the Status of Women”. On November 29, 2006 the minister announced that 12 of the 16 regional offices would be shut down, in effect denying women access to critical resources across the entire country.

In response, the Conservative government has attempted to play a shell game with the budget numbers and claims that it has somehow increased funding, that is, after implementing drastic budget cuts that eliminate the ability of Status of Women to play an advocacy role and fund independent policy research, it somehow reinvests the money in terms of administrative efficiencies.

In Canada today women still earn only 70% of what their male counterparts do, and yet the Conservatives have yet to mention pay equity once in either a Speech from the Throne, the budget, or the fiscal update.

It is time for the Conservative government to abandon its fascination with calling an election and begin to focus on what Canadians sent parliamentarians to Ottawa to do in the first place. They want this Parliament to work toward a better Canada and a brighter future for women in society. For women's economic security to be enhanced, for a strategy to be implemented, women need advocacy, women need equality.

What is the government afraid of? Why is it afraid of giving equality to 52% of the population who turn out to be voters as well?

• (1030)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make the hon. member aware of a couple of items.

This week we unveiled the government's fiscal update. There were a number of measures in that update which significantly reduce the federal tax burden on Canadians, especially low income Canadians. I would ask the member to consider that a single mother with two children and an income of around \$40,000 is now paying \$1,000 less tax than she did when the Liberal government was in power. That is a very significant amount of tax dollars.

On top of that, this government has done something that the Liberal government did not do in its first 11 years in power, which is to invest substantially in affordable housing. In fact, there were no Liberal programs, as noted by the NDP member, for affordable housing whatsoever between the years 1993 and 2004.

The Liberals also significantly cut money for things like post-secondary education and health care, which we know is very important to women.

When we talk about equality, let us talk about people, let us not just talk about one group versus another group. Let us talk about equality for everyone in Canada because that is what Canadians want. When we look at people and only see people, not gender, not race, that is when we will have true equality.

I would like the member's thoughts.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the misperception that the Conservatives normally have.

They increased the income tax in budget 2006 from 15% to 15.5%, and that is the biggest problem with the Conservatives. They do not know math. They have been the worst economic managers. They created billions of dollars in debt. They made us a third world country.

If we go from 15.5% to 15%, and come back to the Liberal rate, which was the rate for low income families, the Conservatives have done nothing. In fact, they decreased the personal exemption and they have now increased it back to what the budget was in 2005.

It is critically important to eliminate this shell game because that is what women are watching. They are not stupid. They know exactly what the Conservatives are doing.

In terms of social housing, they eliminated the social housing program. They eliminated funding to any social programs. They cut \$1 billion.

I do not know which book the member is reading, but he should really reread the budget and do a comparison on budgets before making statements like that.

• (1035)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just the other night, I was reading my favourite piece of environmentally sustainable newsprint, the Liberal red book, because this is the only government document I have ever known that never had to be reprinted a whole bunch of times. The Liberals just changed the cover.

In the 1993 red book, the Liberals promised 150,000 new child care spaces and they never delivered. When those government members were on their death bed and more worried about their own jobs than actually delivering for people, they put all the failed promises into the famous Liberal death bed pinata and smashed the promises of the Liberal red book across Canada. Then they think people are silly and stupid enough to believe they actually delivered when they did not deliver.

However, I am not asking about the past. I am asking about the present. The fact is that the government has announced major changes to the fiscal capacity of the government that will be laid out in the mini-budget over the next five years which will drastically impact the ability to deliver anything like a national child care service, yet the member sat on her hands yesterday. She does not have the courage of her convictions. She did nothing. She sat still.

How is it, first of all, that she can stand in this House and talk about all these wonderful programs that the Liberals would bring in, when they sat back and are allowing this vision of the country that they know will strip the capacity of the federal government?

Second, how can she accept a cheque for not doing any work when Canadians are asking someone to stand up to the Harper government?

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay that he is not supposed to refer to anyone by name, or for that matter the government by the name of the Prime Minister.

The hon. member for Don Valley East.

Business of Supply

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his passion, but it is really misplaced.

The NDP never has to worry about being government, so it can be as crazy as possible. In 1993 the Liberals inherited a bankrupt country. When a government inherits a bankrupt country, the first thing is to get economic sustainability so people can have jobs. People have to have jobs. If they do not have jobs, they do not know how to pay for things.

In 1993, yes, there was a Liberal red book. Government has to work with the provinces and territories. Once we worked with the provinces and territories for the early learning and child care strategy, why did your leader go and support the new Conservative government—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps we will end things there. The hon. member should not speak in the second person, and time has expired for questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House today to discuss the economic security of women.

Today, more than ever, women in Canada are seizing opportunities and pursuing their dreams. If we look at women in the armed forces, women in post-secondary education, women in the professions, women in the business world, women who stay at home to raise children, women in almost all sectors of activity, we see that they are excelling, making contributions and achieving their personal objectives and their potential. And the number of women doing so is growing.

The participation rate of women in the labour force has increased, going from 57% in 1996 to 62% in 2006.

Furthermore, studies show that female entrepreneurs are making significant contributions to Canada's economy. In the last 15 years, the number of self-employed female workers increased by 50%. The number of businesses run by women has a growth rate that is 60% higher than that of businesses run by men.

But we can do better. Women's labour force participation rates are still considerably lower than men's. The number of women sitting in Parliament is still around 20%, far below the critical mass of about 30%.

Women are over-represented in some groups, particularly those with low incomes, a trend that has not changed in the last decade.

Each of these situations is made worse in the case of women facing multiple disadvantages because of a combination of gender and other factors such as age, race, religion or disability.

That is why we have chosen to make women's economic security and the elimination of violence against women key priorities, specifically by targeting vulnerable groups of women such as visible minority women, immigrants, seniors and aboriginal women. Each of those groups is at higher risk of economic insecurity and violence.

As was recently announced in the government's response to the report by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of helping women and men balance work and family responsibilities, and of assisting vulnerable groups in achieving greater economic independence and security.

We are therefore taking action, in the form of a wide range of initiatives that will help women to take advantage of opportunities and meet the challenges they face in Canada today.

For example, our government is taking measures to enhance the economic security of women, by modernizing federal labour standards, expanding business opportunities for women, supporting a balance between work and family, improving job opportunities for vulnerable groups, raising the standard of living among older Canadians, and offering affordable housing and reducing the incidence of low incomes among Canadians.

As well, the recent throne speech included a number of strategies that will benefit women and enhance their economic security. I will name a few.

A commitment to a proud and sovereign Canada means that women will be assured of a place where they can raise their families, participate fully in public life, make a contribution and achieve their dreams.

By refocusing our attention on Canada's North, we will be stimulating economic and social development, and this will provide direct benefits for the women who live there.

By supporting international trade, we will be creating new opportunities for women entrepreneurs and helping to create jobs for women and men.

By facilitating free trade among the provinces and territories, we will be creating new opportunities for women entrepreneurs and helping to create jobs for women and men.

Advantage Canada, the goal of which is to have better paid jobs and solid growth for Canadians, will benefit working women and their families.

● (1040)

[*English*]

May I remind my hon. colleagues that the women's program in Status of Women Canada's budget sits at \$15.3 million this year. This is a budget increase of 42%, the highest it has ever been. I would also remind my hon. colleagues opposite that they voted against the budget that made this happen.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

On October 11, 2007, I announced that 60 projects had been selected to receive funding totalling almost \$8 million through the women's program of Status of Women Canada. This historic funding will strengthen the independence of women and girls across the country. Many of the projects will contribute to improving the economic security of women. Overall, some 260,000 women all across Canada will benefit from these 60 projects.

Here are some examples. In the Atlantic region, the result of one project will be a strategic model for mentoring and intergenerational consultation dealing with the obstacles faced by younger and older women who live in official language minority communities.

A project in the Ontario region will enable the development of tools, training, mentoring and networking programs for aboriginal women, immigrants, older women and members of racial minorities, who are trying to establish their own businesses based on "microskills".

In the western and northern regions, there is a project to develop a program that community groups and governments can use to support female sex-trade workers during their transition to a new life.

These initiatives focusing on the economic security of women will provide meaningful results for women and girls today and in the future. They will bring about real and lasting change. They represent a rapid increase in opportunities for women and girls to participate in the life of their communities and their country, and to enjoy a life that offers financial security and freedom from want.

• (1045)

[English]

I want to highlight for members some of what this government has done in the past 21 months.

We increased the funding to the women's program, which includes the women's community fund, and we added the women's partnership fund to include the private sector.

We created projects for the official languages minority women's organization. We provided: almost \$24,000 to Vision Femmes Beauce-Sartigan to promote women's entrepreneurship; almost \$50,000 to support Prince George New Hope Society to help women starting new lives; \$110,000 to the Second Story Women's Centre for training workshops in Nova Scotia; \$165,000 for art projects aimed at improving the lives of at risk women and girls; \$85,000 to the Single Women in Motherhood Training Program Inc.; \$200,000 to the Saint John chapter of the Urban Core Support Network; almost \$60,000 to the Arising Women Place for the project independent women; over \$185,000 to the West Central Women's Resource Centre for its multi-year women's economic security and housing project; and \$300,000 to the Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council.

Violence against women and girls is a major concern to Canadians. The reintroduction of legislation to tackle violent crime is good news for women and girls. The tackling violent crime bill fulfills the expectations of Canadian women for strong measures to ensure they are protected from violent crime and from predators.

These are just a few examples of the concrete projects that this government is funding in its strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Canada.

[Translation]

At a time when we are turning our vision toward the future and working to ensure that Canada continues to be one of the most prosperous countries in the world, we must increase the participation of women in the work force and support their career choices.

An enormous wave of aging is about to be felt by Canadian society, and we will see the population pyramid flip over. During the next two decades, it is predicted that the ratio of older persons to active workers in Canada will increase by 20%. Many more Canadians will be over 65 years old and an even greater number will be over 75. Most of those people will be women.

Just as the huge cohort of the baby boom generation defined our national life for several decades, this new trend in population aging will affect the future of Canada. As Canada's population grows older, women will play an even more important role in contributing to our economy and society, and they must—

* * *

[English]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am told that there is some problem with the translation, i.e., there is no translation. I am wondering if we should suspend the House until such time as the translation problem is solved. We will suspend the House to the call of the Chair until the translation services have returned. There is obviously a problem that needs to be solved, so the House can consider itself suspended until we solve the problem.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 10:49 a.m.)

* * *

• (1055)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 10:55 a.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The House is now called back into session. I understand that the translation services are up and running. I am sorry for interrupting the hon. minister.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was saying that as Canada's population ages, women will be making an even greater contribution to the economy and society, so they should also benefit fully from the resulting economic prosperity.

Business of Supply

The trend toward increased labour force participation among women, including older women, will fuel economic growth and productivity gains in the long term, thus benefiting all Canadians.

Almost every country in the world is looking at the major trends involving women and the labour force. They are actively implementing key policies for growth and economic prosperity that take into account women's essential contributions.

This phenomenon is sweeping the world. Many countries have recognized that their well-being and future financial viability will depend on women's increasing participation in the workforce over the next four decades. For example, between 2003 and 2050, the employment rate for women is expected to rise, on average, by 10% in the European Union and by more than 15% in Spain, Malta and Poland.

It is not surprising that Canada's financial institutions recently looked at the relationship between women's participation in the labour force and economic growth. The Toronto Dominion Bank recently published a report on a number of related issues, and the Royal Bank of Canada noted that “—if women had identical labour market opportunities available to them as men, then personal incomes would be \$168 billion higher each year”.

It is in the public interest to take advantage of the talent that surrounds us. Our future prosperity as a country is directly connected to the prosperity of women and their families.

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there can be no economic security without equality, and the eradication of the prosperity gap is extremely important.

It was the Conservative government that removed the equity from the status of women mandate, and then the minister talks about all these programs the government wants to do. How can women take advantage of the programs if in fact the government has cut the most important, independent issue that is at the core of women's independence, which is child care programs across the country? The government has cut the child care programs so women cannot take advantage of many of the programs it is talking about.

When the government cuts social programs, it disproportionately hurts women. When the Conservative government announced an unprecedented \$1 billion cut in federal social spending on September 25, 2006, it was women and other vulnerable groups that disproportionately bore the burden of the cuts, which included \$18 million from the national literacy program, \$55 million from the students summer jobs program, \$45 million from the affordable housing programs, and \$10 million from the Canadian volunteer program.

The record speaks for itself. The government does not care about women's issues in this country.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, a number of the statements my colleague made are far from true. With regard to child care, we decided to introduce a universal child care benefit for Canadian families, which pays \$100 a month for every child under six.

It is not true that Canadian women all have identical needs, as the Liberal Part of Canada would have us believe. Women need flexibility in child care, and above all, they need to be able to make their own decisions.

Funding for Status of Women Canada has gone up by 42% under our government. That means that our government has decided to invest less in bureaucracy, which is what the former Liberal government did, and more in projects that benefit women directly.

• (1100)

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the minister and I would like to ask her about the Conservatives' mini-budget.

By their own admission, the Conservatives' tax cut amounts to \$190 billion over five years, that is, one-hundred ninety thousand million dollars, a lot of it a huge corporate tax cut. It is a fifth of the government's funding capacity. It is absolutely devastating that the mini-budget, supported by the Liberals, is effectively going to create huge deficits in terms of the programs that they say they want to protect for women.

We desperately need real child care, we need home care, we need affordable housing, all of the things that support women and their aspirations. There is none of it from the government and none of it in the future, by the Conservatives' own admission. Where on earth is the minister going to find the money to fund these programs when in fact it is very clear to us that programs will have to be cut?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, once again, what the member is saying about child care and Canadian women is nonsense. It is not true that Canadian women all have exactly the same needs, as the Liberals and the NDP would have us believe. Women want flexibility, because they work at a variety of jobs. It is not true that they all work from 8 to 6 and that the program the Liberals wanted to put in place suited everyone.

Women want to be free to choose the sort of child care that works best for them. That is why our government decided to help women directly rather than transfer money from one government to another that would decide for women. The government decided to give \$100 for each child under six directly to families, to let them decide what is best for their children.

Moreover, major transfers to the provinces were included in the most recent budget, which the NDP voted against, even though that budget was designed mainly to improve social programs. The economic statement presented this week by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, includes record-setting tax cuts for Canadian men and women.

Business of Supply

Women in Quebec and across Canada will benefit from these tax cuts. This is how we will give women a chance—through the cumulative effect of all the measures our government is taking to benefit women.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a few questions for the minister, as she sings the praises of her government, concerning women entrepreneurs and women's freedom of choice.

In the northern part of my riding, there is an RCM that is home to 35,000 residents and is a single industry community. It is entirely dependent on the forestry industry. But as everyone knows, that industry is currently going through a very serious crisis.

In my region, the majority of women are single parents who depend on insecure work or a seasonal job, or else they work only at their employer's request. What will I tell them when they are no longer eligible for employment insurance? In fact, only 33% of those women qualify. What will I tell these women who have no coverage and will be forced to turn to social assistance?

It that what the minister calls prosperity?

• (1105)

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, our government is funding a number of projects aimed specifically at helping these women—still too numerous—get out of the cycle of poverty.

The latest economic statement from my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, provides significant tax cuts, for businesses as well as all Canadians. We also announced an increase in the basic personal income.

Furthermore, I encourage women who need training to bring their ideas to us. These are the very people we wish to help and we would be happy to examine their file.

[*English*]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back for a moment and ask the hon. minister this. Immigrant women and even professional women in my riding are telling me that they cannot take advantage of training or jobs because they do not have anywhere to leave their children. Other women are spending \$1,200 a month for what child care they do have, which is a tremendous amount of money. Rural women have told us they can not take advantage of training, education or part time jobs because they have no child care. There is even a safety issue on rural farms.

Since the Conservatives cancelled the child care program, how can women take advantage of any of the economic securities? The budget does absolutely nothing for those women. How will they help women who need child care so they can take advantage of all the things about which she talks? They cancelled the child care program, and there are no child care spaces.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, as announced by our government, we are providing the universal child care benefit and, at the same time, creating child care spaces. And there are other things we are doing.

The member spoke a great deal about the women in her riding and their needs. I would like to speak about the women in my riding.

These women have told me that they would like to have a choice. They do not necessarily work set hours, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and they would like some financial assistance even if they do not have jobs with conventional schedules. That is what the women in my riding have told me and we must also listen to them. We must let them make their own choices.

Having said that, there are programs for women who would like to get out of the cycle of poverty and we are in a position to finance a number projects, especially since we increased the programming budget for Status of Women Canada. We decided to invest less in bureaucracy—as the Liberals did—and more in concrete results for Canadian women.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Compton—Stanstead.

The Bloc Québécois will obviously vote in favour of the Liberal motion. No one would oppose this motion that is asking the government for a real strategy to improve the economic situation of women. However, what is interesting is to see to what extent the Liberals, when in opposition, push such progressive measures; they were much more conservative when in power. This is a “soft” version of the Conservatives, but also a more centralizing one.

As for the actual Conservatives, we must condemn this government's failure to take any action or pass any measure in support of women.

We are far from achieving equality between men and women and, unfortunately, the actions of this government are only making things worse. If women have achieved equality, as suggested by this ultra-Conservative government, why do twice as many women as men live in poverty in Canada? Why is it that, more often than not, women leave their jobs to look after a parent or sick child?

I wonder whether the Conservatives realize that young women today have to forget about saving for retirement because they have to juggle career and family. Sometimes this forces them to take on part-time work that does not pay very well, and to focus on child care and other child-related expenses.

Today, the average income for women is still well below the average for men. In 2003, the average annual income for women was \$24,400, which was 62% of the income for men, who were earning \$39,300 on average.

In a recent study by Statistics Canada, from May 2007, entitled, “Has Higher Education among Young Women Substantially Reduced the Gender Gap in Employment and Earnings?”, we learned that although women are now more educated than men, their income is still inferior. In 2000 constant dollars, the average income for men who attended university was \$45,054 and for women was \$36,782. That is what the Conservatives are not telling the public when they have the nerve to say we have achieved gender equality.

Business of Supply

In this week's economic statement, the Conservatives went even further in their attempt to sabotage gender equality. It is the men who will benefit from a significant cut in their taxes. According to the latest information from Statistics Canada, the median income in 2005 was \$32,300 for men and \$20,200 for women. Accordingly, two single people, whose only difference is their sex, will not benefit from the same tax cut. Cutting the tax rate from 15.5% to 15% will give the single male \$113 more in disposable income in 2007, while his female counterpart will get only \$53 more. That is less than half, but it also represents the Conservatives' idea of equality.

Tuesday's economic statement did not include anything for women in our economic reality either. Do you believe that a 1% cut in the GST will really improve the situation for women? To benefit from tax cuts, a person must first earn an income.

If the Conservatives were in touch with the situation women are in, surely they would know that women work low end jobs, unstable jobs, part-time jobs, seasonal jobs.

If they had really wanted to help women in their statement on Tuesday, they would have sorted out the pay equity issue once and for all. They also would have made the necessary changes to employment insurance so that women could benefit from a plan that reflects the reality facing female workers.

They would have given back to the court challenges program and the women's program the money needed for women to regain their voice in a country that sends soldiers to Afghanistan to fight for the emancipation of Afghan women, but is incapable of giving a real voice to its own female citizens.

• (1110)

Let us also talk about the cuts that the Conservatives made to Status of Women Canada, and the changes made to the women's program. These are more fine examples of this government's lack of vision. We have already established that equality between men and women exists only in the minds of this government and the minister, and that they are completely out of touch with everyday reality.

How can the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent claim to be familiar with the reality facing everyday women, when the women's program can no longer fund research on the economic and social status of women, or fund lobbying activities which at least informed the government of these realities?

In light of the government's decision to cut \$5 million in administrative funding from Status of Women Canada, how can closing 12 Status of Women Canada offices help women raise awareness of the reality in their community? Do the Conservatives really believe that the head offices will know enough about what is going on in the different regions of the country?

My colleague from Laval and I have met and listened to many women's groups that came and testified before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. They virtually all denounced the decisions made by this government. How can the government and the minister claim to speak on behalf of women and represent them when women themselves are telling the government that it is headed in the wrong direction and its decisions do not make any sense? The ideologically motivated blindness of this government is

unequalled, except for its desire to wipe out more than 30 years of work toward the equality of women.

Even in the matter of pay equity, it is deeply disappointing to see that this government does not intend to do anything at all to correct the terrible inequality between men and women. On average, women in Canada earn only 71% of what men earn. Even in fields where women excel and are in the majority, they still have to be constantly taking further training and courses to reach the pay scales of their male counterparts.

Through it all, the Conservative government continues to proclaim—through the voice of its minister—that all is well in the kingdom of Canada. They should finally wake up, and when they do, a little bit of humility would do them a lot of good. What are they waiting for to follow once again the example set by the nation of Quebec, which recently resolved this question once and for all by settling the pay equity issue, to the great satisfaction of the women of Quebec? Fortunately, the women of Quebec can count on the Bloc Québécois here in Ottawa to remind the government of its duties, defend their rights, and protect the strides they have made.

I would like to finish by turning to a subject that is very close to my heart: employment insurance. Once again, the blindness and ideology of the Conservative government prevent it from seeing straight on an issue that really hits the women of this country hard. Part-time workers, seasonal workers, those in unstable jobs, workers at home, natural caregivers, divorcees, women with little education, heads of single-parent families—only 33% of the women who contribute to employment insurance are eligible to benefit from it. This means that many have no protection at all.

Our lovely Conservatives should just develop a little backbone. What is there to fear in allowing the House to give the working women of this country an employment insurance system that meets their needs? Passing Bill C-269 would just correct this injustice done to women.

It was shameful to cancel the court challenges program, which helped women contest the government's choices, as it was to make changes in the women's program, which enabled women to defend themselves and raise their voices in the debates affecting them.

If defending pay equity, fighting violence against women, promoting women's right to abortions, and working to ensure their economic security are what the minister calls just playing politics, I will continue to play politics with all my heart and soul.

Business of Supply

•(1115)

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member to share with us, if she would, the Quebec model with respect to parental leave, which is much more generous than the rest of the country, and also the child care program, which again is a model for the rest of the country, both in terms of how it assists women to be more economically secure and to participate in the labour force more and how it helps the whole family. My understanding is that in fact birth rates may have gone up as a result of that, but certainly it helps the labour market. Maybe she could share that with us because I think it is probably a model for this country in many ways.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and I would like to say to her that she is quite right and that I am also very proud of the Quebec child care model. It is a universal model for all families, without discrimination, and it corresponds to the realities and the wishes expressed by Quebec's families. It is a government-funded model. It is a model which, in terms of equality and equity, costs the same for everyone. Thus, it is available for all Quebec citizens and families.

This model was established in 1998. I personally was able to take advantage of the child care services at an early childhood centre, known as a CPE. What is remarkable today is that, looking back, we can see how it has evolved and also how this service ensures that children are well-prepared when they start school. The people who work there are more than just babysitters. They are trained individuals who are very much in tune with the difficulties young children may experience.

Thus, my dear colleague is quite right when she says that, in Quebec, we have the best child care services network.

•(1120)

[English]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question to the member involves child care. The report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommended that the government implement a national system of child care that is accessible and affordable.

I would like the member to comment on the criticism of that proposal that it is probably unconstitutional. It is probably beyond the terms of sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act. Transfer payments are made to the provinces for social services, and therefore, it is admitted by some that the recommendation falls outside the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Considering that the member is a member of the Bloc Québécois and supports stronger provincial rights, does she support that proposal by the status of women committee?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is rather specific. I have a two-part answer.

First of all, women appeared before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to tell us that most women want access to child

care services similar to Quebec's current system. I think we are the envy of many women from across Canada.

Second, by wanting to limit the government's use of the federal spending power, this means giving each of the provinces the option of implementing a system that meets the needs and expectations of families in that particular province. The government of each of the provinces, like the Government of Quebec, has the knowledge and know-how. The only thing missing is the funds to be transferred from the federal level to the provincial level.

At home in Quebec, the system is already in place. We are therefore not asking for anything that would require consultations or long studies that would take more than 18 months to complete. We are calling for the transfer of these funds to Quebec and the provinces. However, since Quebec already has this service, we would like the government to give us the funds with full compensation, so we can improve the existing services.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and speak here today during this official opposition day.

As we all know, for eight years, I sat on the town council for Ascot, where I was the only woman in that still male-dominated world of politics.

I am not sharing this experience in order to brag or to denigrate the field in which we work. I am relating it because I believe it is important to break down the barriers that, unfortunately, still hinder women's access to good jobs. We must try to change the macho culture and mentality that have dominated for too long in Quebec and Canada.

To allow women access to good jobs, greater investments must be made in meeting basic needs, as well as on the human side.

I would like to use my time here today to highlight a wonderful initiative that has been taken in my riding.

Last year, the Tools for Life project was launched to help young women enter the job market. The goal of the project was to help young women who had not finished high school, who had children, and who, in many cases, were single mothers. These women were, understandably, discouraged.

Thanks to Tools for Life, these young women learned to prepare budgets, to cook and to put together a resumé. Most importantly, they learned to shoulder their responsibilities and to believe in themselves. These young women quickly realized that people who believe in themselves can accomplish a lot.

I found the first Tools for Life project in Stanstead so inspiring and promising that I was delighted to be the honorary sponsor for these young women. That was a good move. Seven of the nine women who signed up for the program earned their diplomas, but most importantly, they finished the program with a renewed sense of pride. These young women are now working, and they have become part of their communities.

Business of Supply

The project was such a success that it is now under way elsewhere in my riding in the municipality of Bury. Projects like this one enable women to escape the vicious cycle of financial insecurity.

Today's opposition motion supports that because it asks the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Quebec and Canada.

Despite progress toward equality, women are still at a disadvantage in the nations of Quebec and Canada, and elsewhere in the world. The federal government's failure to act on this issue continually reminds us of this.

Take, for example, the employment insurance reforms that neither the Liberal nor the Conservative governments wanted to implement. Or the child care system or the older women who are not receiving their guaranteed income supplement. Or the fact that here in Ottawa, in the federal public service, pay equity is still not a reality.

The time to act is now, but the government is still not doing anything. Instead of helping women, the federal government has been making their lives harder, and things have gotten worse under the Conservatives.

Despite growing surpluses, the government is still slashing its investments in people.

I am always astonished when I hear the Conservative ministers announce cuts to literacy, official languages, social programs or status of women, claiming that it is important to make budgetary choices, while the Minister of Finance announces an unexpected \$14 billion surplus or cuts to taxes and the GST, as he did earlier this week.

I want to remind the government that disadvantaged women pay little or no income tax already. I also want to remind the government that these women's main expenses are rent and groceries, two areas where the GST does not apply.

This is nothing new, though. The Conservatives have always been far more inclined to help their friends in the oil industry than the people who need help the most.

What makes me even sadder are cases like that of the National Association of Women and the Law, which I learned last month had closed because of Conservative cuts, after 33 years of defending women's rights.

• (1125)

We had known since last October that the new women's program eligibility criteria set by the former minister responsible for the status of women would have an impact on organizations like this one, but we did not realize just how dramatic that impact would be.

At the time, the minister told us that only groups that aimed to improve women's economic, social and cultural status would be funded. Groups that did research on the status of women and worked to have legislation amended were therefore shut out.

The former minister said at the time that the idea was to fund "real" women. I believe she was making a thinly veiled allusion to REAL Women, an ultra-conservative organization founded in the U. S. that advocates a return to traditional values.

The change of ministers did not really improve matters. The new minister said that the National Association of Women and the Law had only itself to blame. I quote:

The Government of Canada is not responsible for the office closing. The office closed because the association was unable to raise enough money to fund its activities.

Clearly the minister does not understand her role very well. She is supposed to be the voice of women in cabinet, not the voice of the Conservative cabinet—a conservative voice in every sense—for women. Perhaps she should re-read the mission statement for Status of Women Canada. On the Web site, it says that Status of Women Canada is the federal government agency which promotes gender equality, and the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of the country.

Do the minister's comments really come as any surprise, when her government has been trying for a year now to silence women's groups that stand up for equality? Not at all.

In my eyes, it is clear that gender equality, which was far from becoming a reality under the Liberals, has been regressing since the Conservatives arrived. For the Conservatives, the specificity of women's lives is not even worth talking about.

It therefore comes as no surprise that in their first election platform, the word "women" came up only twice: once in the context of increasing sentences for offenders and another time in talking about female immigrants who settle in Canada. That is quite the vision for women, who represent 52% of the population.

I am focusing on the Conservatives because it is time for them to take action. However, things were not much better under the previous government. In the last Parliament, I was a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. One after another, the witnesses who appeared before us did not come to tell us that everything was just fine, quite the opposite. They came asking for more help from the government.

It makes me laugh today to see the official opposition calling for a strategy to improve the economic security of all women and then to add a deadline. I am in favour of such a strategy, but I find it somewhat ironic that this motion was moved by a party that formed the government for 13 years and never invested significantly into improving the economic situation of women. Perhaps they have become more progressive since becoming the opposition.

Like all my colleagues in the Bloc, I am surprised by the Liberals' attitude today. We are also condemning the Conservatives' actions vis-à-vis the status of women. Despite the progress that has been made in the past 50 years, women in Quebec and Canada still need us to care about them. A strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Quebec and Canada is welcome. This strategy should nonetheless respect Quebec's achievements when it comes to status of women.

• (1130)

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place among all parties and I believe you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

Business of Supply

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the Opposition Motion in the name of the member from Beaches—East York, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to the end of government orders on Tuesday, November 13.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that my colleague will agree with me when I say that equality for women cannot happen without pay equity and that without pay equity, women will not have economic equality either.

Lack of pay equity hurts women and their children and makes them more vulnerable to poverty. Statistics Canada says that women generally earn less than men. In 2003, they earned, on average, \$24,000 before taxes, while men earned an average of \$39,300.

I am sure that my colleague would agree that this situation is appalling and unacceptable in our society.

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. In Quebec, women working in the public sector fought for pay equity, and we won.

When I was first elected in 2004, I met with young female journalists working for Radio-Canada, the CBC, a Crown corporation, who have always sought pay equity with their male colleagues. It is now 2007, and they still do not have it.

Most single mothers work part-time, in their spare time, on weekends, etc. They have the right to equal pay for equal work.

The Bloc Québécois will continue to stand up for these women so that one day, they will win the fight for pay equity, just as we won it in Quebec.

•(1135)

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reference has been made to the report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women, "Improving the Economic Security of Women: Time to Act", which came out in May or June.

Recommendation six had to do with language training. Specifically, the committee recommended that Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in consultation with provincial and territorial governments, expand eligibility to the language instruction for newcomers to Canada program to Canadian citizens who have immigrated to Canada and to successful refugee claimants.

She is a member of the Bloc Québécois. Would the member support that language training take place in French and English in the province of Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member. As we all know, the bill introduced by the leader of the Parti Québécois is causing quite a stir. The Government of Canada has recognized the Quebec nation. Now it has to walk the walk.

I support the bill's goal with respect to francization in Quebec because the rest of Canada requires some knowledge of English and French. If Canada wants to pride itself on its anglophone dominance, that is its choice.

Nevertheless, because Quebec is the only francophone province in anglophone North America, I will stand up for my language, my values and my culture.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech. She touched briefly on the issue of the guaranteed income supplement recipients and the inadequacy of those payments. My question is regarding a motion that I tabled and that we have not yet had the opportunity to debate. We will be debating it at a later date.

Does she acknowledge that calling on the government to significantly improve the guaranteed income supplement should be aimed primarily at singles? As we all know, it is much more expensive to live alone and it is mainly women, by a vast majority, who live below the poverty line this way.

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. Indeed, the guaranteed income supplement is something for which the Bloc Québécois has been fighting for the past 10 years. Many women live below the poverty line and cannot benefit from the guaranteed income supplement.

We are not asking that the guaranteed income supplement merely be readjusted. Rather, going back in time is what is really needed, to seek retroactive payments from the age of 65.

The government is amassing astronomical surpluses of \$14 billion and, this year, if everything goes well, the surplus will be \$20 billion.

Do you really think that the quarter cent or half cent to help these women, who are living in misery, will bother them? Not at all. I think the Conservative government needs to open its heart and its pocketbook to help these women living in poverty. These elderly women are like our library and hold our memories, and they are the ones who raised us. My mother always told me, "I raised my daughters for my sons-in-law and my sons for my daughters-in-law." That is equality. These people deserve a little more dignity.

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I am rising in the House today in response to the Liberal opposition motion that restates the absolute need for pay equity and calls on the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of women in Canada.

Business of Supply

I confess that I find this motion coming from the Liberal Party to be hypocritical. The Liberals had 13 years of majority government to promote stable economic security for women. They had 13 years of majority government to implement progressive pay equity legislation and what did they do? They cut spending to Status of Women and failed to implement any of the 113 recommendations from the pay equity task force.

I want to start with the report that the Liberals failed to implement in 2004. Last year, the Status of Women committee specifically asked the Conservative government for a comprehensive response to this pay equity task force report. All the committee received from the Conservative government in response to the 570 page pay equity report was a one and a half page letter. The government's comprehensive response was less than two pages.

The Conservatives made it clear that they would not address the need for new pay equity legislation and that they were somehow satisfied with the current complaints based model. The government has no intention of addressing inequality between the sexes in this country. This has been proven by its reaction to the pay equity report. It has no intention of addressing inequality any more than its Liberal predecessors.

In the estimates released earlier this week, the Conservatives have again cut \$5 million from Status of Women Canada. It is clear that their cuts to the department, their changes to the mandate and the elimination of the court challenges program is an assault on equality for women.

The Conservatives want to take Canadians back 25 years instead of moving Canada ahead.

The recent Speech from the Throne left women and the issues of equality out entirely. The economic statement delivered earlier this week provided lots of tax breaks for big business, big oil and big banks but the tax breaks aimed at ordinary Canadians will do absolutely nothing to improve the economic security of women in Canada. The tax breaks will not increase pay equity nor will they create child care spaces, affordable housing, enhance health care or build schools. Women and their families are being ignored again.

Now it is not very clear to me why the Conservative government refused to draft new legislation. In 1998, the now Prime Minister described our current pay equity laws as follows:

For taxpayers, however, it's a rip-off. And it has nothing to do with gender. Both men and women taxpayers will pay additional money to both men and women in the civil service. That's why the federal government should scrap its ridiculous pay equity law

He also pointed to specific flaws in the current legislation. He said:

Now "pay equity" has everything to do with pay and nothing to do with equity. It's based on the vague notion of "equal pay for work of equal value", which is not the same as equal pay for the same job.

Just to be clear, in 1998, the member, who is now our Prime Minister, did not support the complaints based pay equity legislation now in place. Now that he is in government, his party refuses to draft new legislation to remove the complaints based model. I am wondering if the Prime Minister has reversed his position or does he not believe in pay equity at all. It is my fear that the truth is the latter.

It has become clear that Canadian women will need to fight the government as they had to fight the last government. The fact remains that while Liberals were in power, women's rights, economic security and pay equity were stalled. They failed to act as an effective government and now they are failing to act as an effective opposition.

In March 1997, then secretary of state for the Status of Women, the member for Vancouver Centre, announced the elimination of program funding for women's organizations starting in 1998-99. From that point on, moneys from Status of Women Canada were delivered on a project basis within the priority areas set out each year by Status of Women Canada. This eliminated any long term or core funding for women's groups.

Overall, program funding for women's organizations was cut by more than 25% over the 1990s. The Liberal government also disbanded the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, a semi-independent agency that conducted research on a wide range of issues as they affect women.

● (1140)

The previous government then merged the body that provides funding to women's organizations, the women's programs, into Status of Women Canada and then eliminated the Canadian Labour Force Development Board which had given organizations of women, people of colour and people with disabilities a small voice in training policy. Women's equality seeking groups were dealt blow after blow.

Economic security for women hinges on key things, such as access to child care, access to affordable housing and the ability to earn a decent living.

Both Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to address the need for affordable housing in Canada. The first step toward economic security for any person is a safe place to live. Despite this, the Liberals ended the federal role in social housing in 1996. The Conservative government has ignored calls for spending in affordable housing, without regard for the fact that strong investment in housing would go a long way toward economic security for all Canadians.

Both Liberal and Conservative governments have also failed to create affordable child care in this country. The Conservative touted taxable money for child care has failed to create a single child care space in Canada.

In 1993, the Liberals promised to create 150,000 new child care spaces. However, after 12 years and three majority governments, they created none.

Today a woman still earns only 72.5¢ for every dollar that a man earns. Because pay inequity contributes to poverty, it has devastating health and social consequences for children. Pay inequity is also related to economic dependence which can affect a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship. The choice between abuse and poverty is one no person should be forced to make.

It is also true that women bringing home lower paycheques also receive lower retirement incomes. Too often, senior women live hand to mouth until the end of their lives.

Business of Supply

I will not stand here and just point out how both the Liberals and Conservatives have failed women in Canada because I could take up several speaking spots doing that. I would prefer to show fellow members of this House that positive action for women can be achieved.

The NDP has released a fairness for women action plan. Part of that plan includes making equal pay the law. Canada needs proactive pay equity legislation that would compel all employers to ensure that all employees receive equal pay for work of equal value. The NDP's plan to make Canada a leader in gender equality has the implementation of the pay equity task force and the introduction of proactive federal pay equity legislation, in particular, at its core.

Our plan is to increase access to employment insurance. Only one in three unemployed women collect employment insurance benefits. The NDP plan would ensure access to EI includes an overhaul to the legislation governing employment benefits. In the 39th Parliament, the NDP introduced eight private members' bill to improve access to this vital income support.

Our plan is to establish a \$10 minimum wage. Two-thirds of minimum wage workers over the age of 15 are women. Many minimum wage-earning women are living well below the poverty line. Clearly, the federal government has a role to play in setting fair pay to ensure welfare of all hard-working Canadians and their families. The NDP has tabled a bill to reinstate the federal minimum wage, scrapped by the Liberals, at \$10 an hour.

Our plan is to create a national child care program that would include passing the NDP's national child care act and establishing a network for high quality, licensed, not for profit child care spaces. The creation of new, reliable child care spaces so that women are not forced to choose between work and family.

Our plan is to improve parental and maternity benefits. One in every three mothers lacks access to maternity and parental benefits under employment insurance. Women are paying an economic penalty for having children. Our plan calls for a dramatic overhaul of maternity and parental leave programs.

We can achieve equality for women in Canada but what we lack is political will. Past Liberal governments stalled and failed to act. Conservative governments have ignored the problems and chosen not to promote equality and instead have given tax cuts to corporations.

We need a real commitment from this House to act and create the legislation needed to achieve equality for Canada's women, equality now.

• (1145)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her passion on this subject. She has been a good member on the Status of Women committee.

I would like to bring to her attention that sometimes rhetoric overshadows fact. The fact is that the Liberal's achievement for women was re-established. The Standing Committee on the Status of Women re-established an expert panel to provide advice on gender based budgeting.

We brought in gender based budgeting. We increased parental benefits, established centres for excellence and we put in money for national crime prevention and family violence. We did a lot of things, including the affordable child care strategy which was done in negotiations with the provinces and territories. We brought in the Kelowna accord to help aboriginals. We put in money for post-secondary education because that was what women told us to do. We put in \$1.3 billion for immigrant women, the women who are vulnerable, the women who basically told us what was affecting their economic security.

Why did the NDP join hands with the Conservatives and break all the social programs, which were then gutted by the Conservative government. One billion dollars were taken from literacy and affordable housing. We had affordable housing. We had spaces. The Toronto *Star*, which is not regarded as a Liberal paper, showed that over 1,000 spaces—

• (1150)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, although I thank the hon. member for her question, unfortunately, there were some gaps in it. A little amnesia perhaps.

I would like to point out that the committee on the Status of Women Canada was re-established at the insistence of the NDP. On gender based budgeting, we heard from finance and other agencies that it still is not as effective as it needs to be.

I want to come back to two things, the first being child care and the so-called plan. The Liberals, who said that if they had three budget surpluses they would have a comprehensive child care program, had eight surpluses. The gobbledygook, the incredible concoction of what they said was a child care program, simply did not work.

I also want to point out that there is still no affordable housing. The Liberals cancelled it in 1996 and they brought in SCIP which was a band-aid. Basically, those who depended on SCIP had to come cap in hand year after year hoping that somehow they could get money for programming.

I want to tell members what SCIP did in my riding. A place in my riding called My Sister's Place looks after homeless, abused women who are living on the edge. It came cap in hand year upon year to the Liberal government, and now to the Conservative government, asking that its programming be maintained because of the incredible need. At this point in time its funding has been cut in half. It has no idea how it will survive.

The legacy of the former government is that women do not know how they will survive. It is also now the legacy of the current government. When will it change?

Business of Supply

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to ensure that the House is aware and clear on the facts. I also have a question that goes along with the facts.

A number of members have made mention, including the previous speaker, that we have not been investing federally as a government in child care spaces. If they disagree with the \$100 per child, per family, under the age of six, that is fine.

However, I want to point out that Bill C-52 was passed in the House on June 22, 2007 and received royal assent. A section in the act, if they would care to read it, is called child care spaces. The finance minister is authorized to give \$250 million to the provinces to create child care spaces in the provinces. It was set up. The provinces have the responsibility and the expertise for developing child care spaces.

The question should be: Where did the money go? It was included in the social transfer; \$250 million annually.

My question is for the member. Can you remember what the Liberals put in their implementation bills—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member did not get to put his question because he asked the member instead of me.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to have this chance to respond. I was looking at some figures, and I guess the old saying that figures do not lie or liars figure or something like that might pertain to this situation. The Conservatives talk about \$1,200 for each child under six. That does not buy adequate child care. It does not create a single child care space.

Earlier the minister said they have created all kinds of spaces. I would like to know where and I would like to know how many. I am not hearing any strong numbers. What I do know about that \$1,200 is that it is taxed back. The end result is that in the last fiscal year \$340 million was taxed back from hard-working families on this child benefit. Annually, it is going to be \$400 million. We could create a whole lot of national, affordable, decent child care for that kind of money.

The Conservatives did not do it. The Liberals did not do it. We are prepared to do it.

• (1155)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for London—Fanshawe for splitting her time with me and also for her tireless commitment and passion around working on behalf of women and children across this country.

I was honoured and privileged to serve as a New Democrat on the very first standing committee for women in 2005. I have to acknowledge as well the tireless work of the member for Winnipeg North and the member for Vancouver East, who worked hard to ensure that the committee was actually established by the House.

This is an interesting motion that has come before the House. The member for London—Fanshawe rightly pointed out the failure on the part of the Conservatives to work on behalf of equality for women, whether it is in regard to cuts to the Status of Women department, gutting the court challenges program, their failure to establish a national child care program, or the Conservative failure to actually move forward on social and affordable housing. I am not

going to spend a whole lot of time talking about the very dim track record of the Conservatives, but I am going to talk about the Liberal track record.

When we are talking about the Liberal track record, most of us, when referring to economic security, would take that to mean access to affordable housing, access to a national child care program, good quality jobs, and good pensions, which would mean that senior women in particular could afford to live. We would take that to mean that an employment insurance program, that safety net, actually meets the needs of workers who lose their employment through no fault of their own.

Instead, we found under the Liberal watch a continuous cut to all of those programs that supported working and middle class families in this country. It was cut after cut after cut. Lest hon. members think this is simply New Democrat rhetoric, I want to talk about the fact that, domestically and internationally, the Liberals were consistently cited for their failure to protect the most vulnerable people in this country.

In the March 2007 report of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, there were many criticisms of the Canadian government, but I will talk about one. The report said that “the Committee remains concerned about serious acts of violence against Aboriginal women, who constitute a disproportionate number of victims of violent death” related to domestic violence.

The report goes on in its recommendations to talk about the fact that in the year 2000 it was recommended that “the State...strengthen and expand existing services, including shelters and counselling, for victims of gender-based violence, so as to ensure their accessibility”. That was under the Liberal watch.

We also have a preliminary report from the United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari, from a press conference on October 22. Again it is a report that is very critical of Canada's housing policy. It talks about inadequate housing. It talks about this being a “crisis” in Canada. Again we have an international person talking about the Liberal track record.

He talks about the fact that “Canada's successful social housing programme, which created more than half a million homes starting in 1973”, at the insistence of New Democrats, I might add, “no longer exists”. He says:

Canada has fallen behind most countries in the [OECD] in its level of investment in affordable housing. Canada has one of the smallest social housing sectors among developed countries.

Those were cuts under the Liberal watch.

Today, we truly do have a national crisis in housing. Thousands of people across this country are homeless. In a survey that was done two years ago in my riding, 50% of the homeless in the city of Nanaimo were women and children. We had a Liberal government that in the past cut the very supports out from under those most in need.

Business of Supply

In case the Conservatives think they are off the hook, they are also mentioned in the report. We have a Conservative government that is talking about a “shift in housing policy to provide support for home ownership, mainly through the tax system, while eroding support for social and rental housing”.

Many of the most vulnerable will never have a chance to own a home in this country. That is why we need to invest in social and affordable housing.

• (1200)

What about unemployment insurance under the Liberal watch? By the time the Liberals finished reforming the then unemployment insurance system, now called employment insurance, we had the situation where now only about four out of every 10 male unemployed workers are collecting EI benefits at any given time. This is down from 80% in 1990. Only one in three unemployed women is collecting benefits at any given time. This is down from 70% in 1990.

I am sure that somebody will get up and say that is because the economy is so much better, but the reality of these numbers is that these people are paying into the system, and when they apply for employment insurance, they are told by the government, today the Conservatives, yesterday the Liberals, that they do not qualify despite the fact that they are paying into the system.

Under the current system the basic benefit paid is 55% of insured earnings while the level of insured earnings is averaged over 26 weeks to a maximum of \$423. That was a while ago, but under the Liberal watch, it fell from 66% in the 1970s to 55%.

With respect to first nations, the Liberals instituted a 2% cap in funding growth to first nations in 1996. This cap applied to all core programs and services, such as education, child and family services, income assistance, Indian governance support, housing, capital and infrastructure, and regulatory services programs. Again, that was under the Liberal watch.

As for pay equity, a report was commissioned by the Liberals in 2001. Three years later in 2004, the pay equity task force tabled its final report called “Pay Equity: a New Approach to a Fundamental Human Right”, which contained over 100 recommendations. Unfortunately I do not have time to read them all, although I would be very pleased to do that.

The very first task force recommendation was that “Parliament enact new stand-alone, proactive pay equity legislation in order that Canada can more effectively meet its international obligations and domestic commitments, and that such legislation be characterized as human rights legislation”.

The Status of Women committee at that time, which I was very pleased to sit on, did a report to the government outlining the circumstances of the pay equity report. The committee made a recommendation to the government. It recommended that “the Departments of Justice and Human Resources and Skills Development draft and table legislation based on the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force by 31 October 2005 and that the legislation be referred to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women”.

As for the Liberal response, by now it should be no surprise. It was that they were going to have another study. They were going to consult. So after the Liberals had been confronted with report after report on what needed to be done to ensure economic security for women in Canada, after they commissioned a report and spent untold thousands of dollars on that report, which was well worth it, they wanted to spend more time and more money to commission another report.

One of the women who came before the Status of Women committee talked about her dilapidated office, because of course the Liberals cut core program funding to women's organizations. She had a broken table in her office. The leg was missing. To shore up her table, she used stacks of reports about inadequate housing, inadequate wages and inadequate pension income. What she asked the committee to do was act on some of the recommendations in those stacks of reports that were holding up the table.

The Liberals had 13 years of majority and minority government to move forward on some of the recommendations in the countless reports they had done with women's groups across this country. Instead of acting on the recommendations, they consulted more and asked for more reports. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are continuing in that same vein.

In conclusion, I want to talk about the convention on the elimination of discrimination against women. Again it cites the Liberal track record and says that the Liberals could not even be bothered to report on that convention in 2002 for the period covering 1994 to 1998. I think that is a good way to end. The Liberals could not even fulfill an international commitment to report in a timely fashion on issues that were of the greatest importance to women, whether it was violence against women, adequate shelter, or access to transition houses. The list is endless. I think it is a very sad comment on today's women's rights.

• (1205)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it must be nice to be able to stand in the House and not take responsibility for any of one's actions and to provide information that is totally not on.

Let me start with the child care program. It is nice to stand and say there was no child care program, but if there was none, how is it that the Conservatives were able to cut one? One cannot cut something that is not there for starters. There was \$5 billion on the table. The money had already flowed to the provinces. That is why there were 11,000 spaces lost in Ontario and others in Toronto.

Mr. Charlie Angus: It is in the red book.

Hon. Maria Minna: Never mind the red book. Mr. Speaker, we met the commitment. There was \$2 billion in the year 2000. The fact that the provinces and Mr. Harris in Ontario refused to use that money for child care had nothing to do with us. In the year 2000 there was \$2 billion spent on children in this country, plus \$5 billion going up to \$10 billion for a national child care program.

The NDP chose to have an election instead of establishing a child care program across this country. It chose to have an election instead of having affordable housing through a 10 year housing strategy. It chose to have an election and get more seats, and those seats cost Canadians the child care program.

The hon. member should take responsibility for her own actions.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take responsibility for my own actions.

I am grateful the hon. member thinks that 19 New Democrats were able to overthrow the Liberal government, but it was actually the voters of Canada who decided they had had enough of the Liberal lack of movement on very important issues.

When we talk about child care specifically, I want to remind the member that the Liberals had an opportunity to enshrine child care in legislation and they failed to do that. In those agreements with the provincial governments across this country, they failed to enshrine some accountability measures. In provinces like mine, no child care spaces were created in British Columbia because the Liberals failed to make sure that the province of B.C. had incremental funds. What the province did under the Liberals in B.C. was it substituted federal money for provincial money so that there was no net gain. That was a failure on the part of the federal Liberals to make sure that child care spaces were actually going to be created in this country.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's absolute frustration with the Liberal record over 13 years. It clearly was a mess.

In election after election the old Liberal government promised that it would deliver a national child care program. It never happened. The Liberals made so many promises.

The Liberal member who just asked a question actually referred to the red book and wanted to avoid any responsibility for it. In fact, that red book is a legacy to the broken promises of the Liberal Party.

I also want to remind the member that it was actually this government that increased funding to women's programs in Canada. First, we did an efficiency review. We made sure that the money that was supposed to go to women was not going to high paid lobbyists, high paid lawyers, high paid consultants, but that it was going to the front line where women really needed the funds. That is where the money was redirected. On top of that, our government increased that funding by 42%, some \$20 million over two years in budget 2007.

I would ask the member to comment on why she cannot support increasing funding for women's programs as we did in budget 2007.

● (1210)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Abbotsford for his question. However, I need to first point out to the member that under the Conservative watch we have seen very important women's organizations in this country having to close their doors.

The National Association of Women and the Law has done yeoman's work over the years in making sure that important matters confronting women across the country are studied and raised. It has had some influence over policy and legislation that was brought

Business of Supply

forward. Organizations like that have been forced to close their doors.

There are women's resource centres in my own riding that are having to do things like sell coffee in order to keep their doors open. These resource centres are very important avenues for women to find out information.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very, very, very happy about the motion that was debated this morning and will be debated during the course of the day. I will read this Liberal motion:

That, taking into account the reports produced by the Standing Committee on Status of Women on the need for pay equity and the lack of economic security for women, the House call upon the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Canada and present this strategy to the House by February 1, 2008.

This motion was introduced by my colleague from Beaches—East York.

This is an important motion. We have seen what has happened since the Conservative Party was elected to lead the Government of Canada. A number of my colleagues from the other parties have spoken today about everything the Conservative government has done since it was elected on January 23, 2006, such as eliminating programs that help women and slashing funding, if not doing away with it altogether.

It is interesting. If we look at Status of Women Canada, for example, we see that the government has slashed its funding and removed the word "equality" from its mandate.

[*English*]

It is interesting. We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that guarantees gender equality. We used to have a status of women that had that as part of its mandate, but the Conservative government decided to cut it.

It is interesting that in so doing the Conservative government has also cut all and any funding to women's organizations that do advocacy work on behalf of women's rights here in Canada, women who are our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our cousins, our spouses. For them, there is no more advocacy work, but at the same time, the Conservative government has no problem whatsoever in other policy areas to provide moneys to groups that advocate.

Business of Supply

Let us look at the Conference of Defence Associations. The oldest advocacy group in Canada's defence community received a \$500,000 multi-year grant in March 2007. I have no problem with that organization's advocating for guns, for more guns, for virtually no gun control in Canada. We live in a democracy and freedom of expression is guaranteed under our Constitution and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, if the Conservative government says that women may not advocate and women's organizations may not advocate on behalf of gender equality and will not receive one penny of federal moneys because they advocate or for that portion of their activities which comprises advocacy, how is it that the Conservative government has no problem whatsoever providing funding to other advocacy groups that advocate the issues and positions that the Conservative government favours, such as no gun control and abolishing the firearms registry?

Before I forget, Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the member for Mount Royal.

Now let us come to the NDP members who sit here snapping their straps about how holier than thou they are and who denounce the Conservative government for eliminating the child care agreements with the 10 provincial and three territorial governments, for eliminating the word "gender" from the mandate of the status of women, for cutting money to literacy groups, to women's groups, for cutting affordable housing programs, for cutting the program for the homeless.

It is interesting that the NDP members will sit here holier than thou and denounce the Conservative government for doing exactly what the Conservatives when they were the official opposition promised they would do when they became government. Yet in the words of Tom Flanagan, in his book at page 230, in talking about the Conservative Party campaign at the time that it was the official opposition:

No matter how well designed our campaign had been, it would have been hard for us to win if the NDP had not held up its end.

So the NDP is responsible in part for the fact that the Conservative Party is now the governing party in Canada and now has virtual free rein under a Prime Minister who has shown himself to be somewhat dictatorial, to cut child care, to cut funding to women's groups, to cut funding for affordable housing, to cut funding for our homeless, to cut funding on programs that work with our children and our youth.

The NDP sits there holier than thou, but according to the chief campaign organizer of the Conservative Party—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I am sorry for interrupting the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

There seems to be some interest in her comments. I would just urge members to wait until the questions and comments portion. If they have any questions or any comments to make about her speech, they will have that opportunity.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that you have called the Conservative members to order.

Canadians need to know that if Canadian women do not have child care spaces in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, the three territories—

• (1220)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: You missed a province.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I must say that comment was funny.

If they do not have child care spaces today, they should blame the Conservative Party, but at least it kept its word. But they should also thank the NDP for colluding with the Conservative Party, knowing full well that should the Conservatives come to power, they were going to cut all of these social programs. The NDP is to be thanked by Canadians who do not have affordable housing, who do not have social housing, and who do not have child care spaces.

According to Tom Flanagan, the main campaign organizer of the Conservative Party and a senior policy adviser to the Conservative Prime Minister, until recently, the Conservatives would not have won the election and been able to implement all of their promises to slash social programs to ensure that women do not get further ahead, either on the economic front or on the social front. He said, "It would have been hard for us to win if the NDP had not held up its end".

I guess we should congratulate the NDP for holding up its end and ensuring that there are not any child care spaces that have been created since the election of the Conservative Party, that there are not any new affordable homes or social housing created, and that women's groups no longer get funded if they dare to advocate gender equality. We need to thank the NDP because it held up its end with the Conservatives.

It ensured that the Conservatives would win and do exactly what they promised to do. So I have to wonder, who should we be blaming more? A party that made clear its anti-women, anti-poor family, anti-working class, and anti-aboriginal views, and said it would cut all of that if it came to power, or the party that claimed to stand up for Canadians but worked with the Conservative Party to ensure that party would come to power and do exactly what it said it would do.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague's discourse. Whenever she speaks, it is sort of like looking in a political funhouse of mirrors because whatever she says is so distorted when it comes out the other end I am not sure what side is the upside or the downside.

I am certainly pleased to take credit that 19 New Democrats stood up along with millions of Canadians across the country and threw their royal petards out on the street. In the speech we just heard, the sort of shallow revisionism actually speaks to the fact that the Liberals do not get it. They do not believe that average Canadians, who became tired of year after year of empty promises, actually had the right or the nerve to stand up and throw them out of government after what they failed to deliver on. If the member wants to put the hopes and beliefs of the Canadian people who wanted something different than the Liberals on the backs of the NDP caucus, I would certainly be more than willing to assume that.

Business of Supply

However, I have to ask her a simple question. Why is she talking about history when we should be talking about today, when we are talking about a budget that will strip the fiscal capacity of the government, of future governments to bring forward any form of plans that they are advocating? The Liberal Party is a party that took a dive. This is the party that members do not have the guts to stand up. Those members would rather sit down because they are more worried about saving their own political skin. If the member believes what she says she believes, why did she not just stand up and vote?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting what the NDP member says. This is the party that on a confidence vote on the softwood lumber deal sat on its hands.

We did not criticize those members for abstaining. We did not criticize them at all. They abstained on a confidence vote on the softwood lumber deal, knowing that the Conservative government had blackmailed the forestry and softwood lumber industry that was dying, and at risk of closing its doors with the loss of thousands of Canadian jobs. Nevertheless, that party sat on its hands.

We said it was their right to do that if they believed that they could neither support or oppose. They decided to sit and abstain, good for them.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must say that I always find it interesting that, in a forum composed of men and women, when a woman expresses herself forcefully, all sorts of motives are imputed to her, but when a man does so, he is described as passionate and courageous. This is especially surprising in a place that represents democracy.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague whether, in the government's intentions, as expressed in the throne speech and yesterday's economic statement, she found anything similar to what she is talking about. I do not want to ask her a partisan question or know why she has not done this or that. I just want to know whether she has found anything consistent with the Liberal motion today.

•(1225)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I do not find it partisan at all. It is a completely impartial question.

The throne speech contained nothing for women or for single parent families which, as we know, are primarily headed by women. There also was nothing in it for children.

However, the increase in the basic personal exemption announced in the mini-budget, that the Conservatives finally decided to restore to the level set by the former Liberal government, does help a little, although not very much.

According to this mini-budget, the lowest tax rate—15% when the Conservatives were elected and then increased to 15.5%—will now be returned to 15% by the Conservatives. That will result in small savings for families and higher-income earners, and it may be that some families or individuals will no longer have to pay federal tax. However, I cannot venture anything about provincial taxes.

Clearly, the 1% reduction in GST is of no help at all to poor or working families.

[English]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the 25th anniversary of CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the treaty monitoring committee made a series of recommendations of particular relevance to Canada which bear recall today.

It recommended that Canada call upon the federal government:

To double its efforts to put an end to the feminization of poverty and to reform laws that both directly and indirectly result in discrimination against Aboriginal women. The CEDAW Committee also recommended that Canada: i) improve its Live-in Caregiver programme by re-examining the legal obligation that workers live with their employers and by fasttracking access to permanent residency; ii) double its efforts to eliminate violence against women; iii) adopt measures to increase women's representation in politics and public life; iv) work harder to implement a national child care strategy; v) increase benefits allocated to maternity/parental leave; and that Canada vi) double its efforts to achieve pay equity and increase funding for legal aid, notable by restoring the budget to the Court Challenges Program devoted to addressing inequalities in the provinces.

In that regard, what I would like to do within the time constraints is address three areas in which government action or inaction can have a positive or prejudicial impact on the state of women's rights in both the domestic and international arenas, as the case may be.

First and foremost, and having regard to the motion before this House today, I will address the issue of pay equity, where the government has failed to act on this issue on the grounds that no consensus exists as a matter of principle and policy in this matter. Yet, this response by the government ignores the seven points of consensus that have arisen from the pay equity task force group which conducted a comprehensive review of pay equity law and policy in this country, a consensus which our government adopted and which, as I indicated in one of my last submissions as a minister to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women of the House of Commons, we were prepared to act upon in that regard.

Let me briefly identify the seven points of consensus for the purposes of our understanding, arrived at after a series of sustained consultations across this country with a myriad of groups, all engaged in this issue and arrived at within the 113 recommendations.

First, all stakeholders were committed to the principle of pay equity.

Second, all agreed that the principle of equal pay for work of equal value is a human rights principle.

Third, all agreed that employers have a positive obligation to take steps to eliminate wage discrimination.

Fourth, all agreed that any new pay equity regime should be equally accessible to unionized and non-unionized employees.

Fifth, all stakeholders agreed that any new pay equity regime should provide more guidance on how the pay equity standards should be met.

Business of Supply

Sixth, all stakeholders agreed that there should be a neutral source of assistance, information and respect.

Finally, all the stakeholders agreed that there should be an independent adjudicated body with expertise to deal with any pay equity issues.

One would have hoped that the government would have acted upon this, not only because of the seven points of consensus, but because the Prime Minister, in his remarks on January 18, 2006, in the midst of an election campaign, declared this on the whole issue of women's rights:

Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality. If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada.

• (1230)

One would have hoped that the Prime Minister would have followed through on the commitment. Yet if one looks at the Speech from the Throne, if one looks at the mini budget, there is nothing to reflect and represent that commitment which, at the time when uttered by the Prime Minister, encouraged us to believe he would act on the recommendations as set forth by the committee, regarding the convention on the elimination and discrimination against women.

One would have hoped the would have appreciated the clarion call that came out of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, which said, "Women's rights are human rights and there are no human rights which do not include the rights of women" and that we must act on this, not as a matter of rhetoric but as a matter of principle and policy.

As women's groups across the country and Canadians have affirmed, not only as principle and policy but to ensure its implementation, this should be a priority on the government's agenda. Yet there does not appear to be any expressed priority on the government agenda in this regard.

I mentioned the seven points of consensus on pay equity. Regrettably, in the matter of pay equity, the Prime Minister once said, "Pay equity is a ripoff". I would hope that the Prime Minister, in light of his own statement in the election campaign on January 18, 2006, and which I quoted and I take him at his word, will therefore move to act on the issue of pay equity, which at this point is out of reach for many women, and the statistics speak for themselves.

On average, women working part time earn 30% less than their male counterparts. I am just quoting some of the data. Indeed, in the Prime Minister's province, Alberta women make only 56¢ for each dollar that men make. Moreover, regardless of their educational attainments, women suffer from pay disparities and inferiorities. In 2003 women earned on average \$24,000 per year while men earned \$39,300.

Accordingly we recommend that the government should take the comprehensive pay equity task force set of seven points of consensus seriously. First, it should introduce as recommended a proactive law to rectify pay inequality from the start. Second, it should set more than clear standards for pay equity and ensure that the laws apply and this right is redressed.

This brings me to a second issue that I wish to address. It has to do with the whole question of a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid system in the country.

At a meeting of the ministers of status of women, held in Saskatchewan in 2005, all the women there, reflecting and representing a consensus across this country, called for a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid system in Canada, recognizing, as they affirmed that the absence of such a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid system prejudicially impacted on the rights of women, whether we talk about family matters, or child custody cases, or low income single parents who are women, and I could go on.

Later that year, in November 2005, the meeting of federal-provincial-territorial ministers of justice across the country, acting upon the recommendation of the ministers on the status of women conference, unanimously recommended that such a comprehensive and sustainable legal aid program be put into effect. Regrettably, the government has not taken any initiative in this regard, neither in the area of enhancing the criminal legal aid program, nor, in particular, the civil legal aid program with all the adverse fallout that the absence of such a comprehensive program has for women and other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the country.

This brings me to the third and final point, which is the importance of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the promotion and protection of equality rights in general and women's rights in particular.

The advent of the Charter of Rights, as the women of Canada have themselves affirmed, has had a transformative impact, not only in the protection of equality and women's rights but in fact on the ground, in the lives of women.

• (1235)

As justice minister, I went across the country. When I asked women if they were better off now than they were before the Charter of Rights was enacted, the answer was, invariably less. This was also because the women were particularly responsible for including in the charter the section 15 guarantee in the language in which it reads, which now prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender inequality and it speaks about equality before the law, under the law, equal protection law, equal treatment law, and has the only non-substantive clause in the charter dealing with gender equality. Notwithstanding anything in this act, men and women are equal in all respects.

Regrettably, however, in the throne speech, before and since, there has been no reference to the promotion and protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, nor to the promotion and protection of women's rights.

Business of Supply

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member has a lot of experience in the area of the charter challenge. When I was involved in community work in the city of Toronto around 1986, the policy of the Government of Canada was not to provide subsidized language training, English or French as a second language, to immigrant women. The assumption was that immigrant women would not work when they arrived here or, if they did, they would do demeaning work so English did not matter. They were left behind and only the head of the household, supposedly the male, would get language training as an integration process. That was clearly discriminatory.

Myself and the organization I worked with, along with immigrant service agencies in the city of Toronto, consisting of women of immigrant and visible minority backgrounds, and LEAF, the women's legal education fund, launched a charter challenge to the Supreme Court of Canada on the basis of discrimination against immigrant women. At the time, it was a Conservative government under Brian Mulroney. We had to go that far in order to get rights for immigrant women. We succeeded, and did not have to go all the way.

Could the hon. member tell us why this is critically important to women in Canada?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, in the matter of equality rights in general, and women's rights in particular, and in the matter of the rights of minorities, regrettably not only was the government silent in the promotion and protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and equality rights in its Speech from the Throne, or even by reference in its mini budget, but it dismantled the very instruments which have, by way of principle and precedent, promoted and protected equality and minority rights in general and women's rights in particular. The government dismantled the court challenges program.

In the course of my tenure as minister of justice and prior to that, I appeared together with LEAF, in matters to which reference was made, before the courts for the purpose of promoting and protecting women's rights. In those cases, the court would affirm, as a matter of principle and precedent, issues related to women's rights brought about by the support given by the court challenges program.

Regrettably the court brought about the dénouement of the Law Commission of Canada, which also facilitated the promotion and protection of equality rights. Regrettably it brought about the dénouement of the National Association of Women and the Law, which was a catalyst for the promotion and protection of not only women's rights in the country, but for the promotion of law reform in the matter of equality rights in general and women's rights in particular.

I mention these three instruments in particular because of the manner in which they underpin the whole struggle for women's rights along with the whole struggle for equality rights.

• (1240)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives cut funding to women's groups, they cut it based on the fact that they were advocating for safety, for aboriginal issues and against violence. Yet they are providing the Conference of Defence Associations, the oldest advocacy group in Canada's

defence community, with a \$500,000 multi-year grant for safety purposes.

What does the hon. member think when acts of violence really are committed by handguns and guns are a real problem for violence against women?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, regrettably violence against women continues to be pervasive in the country, and in particular, with respect to vulnerable women such as aboriginal women and visible minority women.

One would have hoped the government would have kept in place those instruments and provided support for those groups that were there to protect women against violence, that were there to protect vulnerable women's groups such as aboriginal women and visible minority women. Regrettably, here too the government has not only been silent, but it has dismantled those initiatives.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Simcoe North.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this important motion. I would like to thank the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for its 21st report. We appreciate the diligence that the committee has shown in exploring the issues concerning the economic security of women.

Our government shares the committee's recognition that there is a need to ensure economic security for women and we have taken a number of measures to achieve this goal.

Speaking as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, and as a woman, our government's objective to enable Canadians throughout their lives to have the opportunities needed to participate in all aspects of Canadian society is fundamental in recognizing the many roles of women in Canadian society. Solid analysis on a wide range of issues, including gender, is key to fulfilling that mandate.

Before looking at the specific measures our government has taken to ensure the economic security of all Canadians, I will first take a quick look at the important advancements that women have made to improve their own security, particularly in education and in the labour market.

Over the past few decades, the participation of women at university has increased dramatically. A Statistics Canada study found that among 19-year-old youth in 2003, 38.8% of girls attended university compared with only 25.7% of boys.

As well, I am delighted to inform the House that the increase in Canadian women's participation rates in the labour force is one of the most significant social trends in recent decades. In fact, our nation has one of the highest women's labour force participation rates among the OECD countries and the highest among the G-7 countries. Our unemployment rate of 5.9% is the lowest it has been in 33 years. Half a million jobs have been created in the past two years alone.

Business of Supply

Achieving positive results for all Canadians is our government's role. To this end, the economic update introduced by the government on October 30 lowered taxes, both income tax and GST. Taken together, these measures will contribute to greater economic security for millions of Canadian women.

In addition, because skilled workers are necessary to boosting productivity, budget 2007 made a landmark investment in post-secondary education, aimed at creating the quality workforce of tomorrow.

As I mentioned earlier, women are attending university in record numbers and our investments will help those numbers continue to rise. By 2008-09, we will be transferring \$3.2 billion to the provinces and territories, an increase of \$800 million, or 40%. Budget 2007 also provided an additional \$500 million a year for labour market training, starting 2008-09.

Working with provinces and territories, this new investment will help all Canadians get the skills and training they need to prepare them for the future.

Our government supports low income Canadians through a range of programs, transfers to the provinces and territories and tax measures that work together to support self-sufficiency. To help in this effort, budget 2007 introduced the working income tax benefit, which will help Canadians over the welfare wall and reward work for low income Canadian men and women. This is in addition to the Canada employment credit of up \$1,000 to help working Canadians.

The federal government also has built measures to support parents during the first year of a child's life through employment insurance, which is a national program providing Canadians with a full year of maternity and parental benefits.

Furthermore, after 13 years of empty promises and inaction by the previous Liberal government, our government is providing Canadian parents with choice in child care. We have taken action to support families with the cost of raising their children through a number of concrete measures. These include the universal child care benefit, which provides \$100 per month for each child under the age of six, a new \$2,000 child tax credit for each child under the age of 18 and the Canada child tax benefit. This provides \$9.5 billion this year alone to families with children.

• (1245)

We also recognize that many families need child care spaces and this is why we are transferring an additional \$250 million per year to provinces and territories to help them create and enhance child care spaces. This is on top of \$850 million they already receive for children's programs and services, for a total of \$1.1 billion this year alone.

We are implementing a tax credit for businesses that create child care spaces for their employees and the surrounding community. With this support, provinces have already committed to the creation of tens of thousands of child care spaces.

The standing committee's report rightly focuses on the most vulnerable women in society. Our government also concentrates its efforts in supporting these Canadians.

Housing is fundamental. To this end, we designated close to \$270 million for a new homelessness partnering strategy and \$256 million in support of CMHC's renovation programs over the next two years. This will help improve the living conditions of some 38,000 households, including single women, seniors, persons with disabilities, aboriginal people and others in need across Canada. We have invested \$1.4 billion to create three provincial-territorial trusts that will help Canadians to find safe, affordable housing.

We have invested \$300 million for a first nations marketing housing fund that will facilitate up to 25,000 housing units on reserve over 10 years.

We recognize, too, that aboriginal women and men need access to skills training jobs that enable them to participate more fully in the workforce and the economy.

Our aboriginal human resources development strategy is a \$1.6 billion community based initiative designed to help aboriginal people prepare for, find and keep jobs. The aboriginal skills and employment partnership, ASEP, is an \$85 million labour market initiative designed to provide training and long term skilled jobs for aboriginal people in major economic development sectors across Canada. We recently announced an additional \$105 million investment to extend ASEP until 2012.

We all need financial security. This is particularly so for seniors, especially women who constitute a large share of the seniors population. Through its stewardship of Canada's public pension system, old age security and the Canada pension plan, HRSD provides income security for Canadians in their retirement years. Canadians know that the government has done more in 20 months than the previous Liberal government did in 150 months to address the needs of seniors.

For example, through Bill C-36, which we introduced and has been passed, we made it easier for Canadians to apply for and receive the benefits for which they are entitled, such as the guaranteed income supplement. We have also created the Secretary of State for Seniors and the National Seniors Council to ensure that our policies, programs and services continue to meet the needs of seniors.

The Government of Canada works with other levels of government and all concerned and informed stakeholders to develop a national approach that responds to the needs of seniors today and in the future.

We all know there is more work to be done. We know there is still a gap in earnings between men and women. However, the gap has diminished in recent decades and our government will continue to work to close that gap.

Business of Supply

I am proud to be a part of a government that is strongly committed to providing effective and meaningful support to all Canadians, men and women. Once again I would like to thank the standing committee for its report. The observations and recommendations it contains will be of valuable assistance as we move forward.

• (1250)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the struggle for equality rights and women's equality is something the Conservative government does not advocate. Let us look at the Conservatives' record. They eliminated the court challenges program. We know there are financial barriers for Canadians to challenge offensive laws and policies. However, now that the government has eliminated this vital program, which has helped millions of people, they cannot make a challenge.

The program helped aboriginal women to challenge unfair laws. I am not surprised that the issue of aboriginals is not of concern to the government, given its appalling record on the international stage where it did not want to ratify and adopt the aboriginal convention that is presently being discussed at the United Nations.

When there are laws in this country that need to be challenged, the Conservative government has said that there are no financial barriers to women, but we know that is not the case. Many minority groups in this country depended on the court challenges program. It is a question of rights and equality. It is a question of fairness. Unfortunately, the Conservative government does not believe in equality and fairness.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there was a question there so I will just affirm that equality of opportunity is what I believe in, rather than in equality of outcome.

I believe this government has shown that it does believe in equality and where it starts is with our universal child care benefits. We did not discriminate. Wherever a person lives and no matter what a person's income might be, the person will receive \$100 a month for every child under the age of six. We did not discriminate. It did not matter what region someone lived. It did not matter whether the parent wanted to remain at home and if a parent had a child that they wanted to stay at home with.

Right now in my province there is a group that has problems with children suffering from autism. The group welcomes the \$100 a month because it helps with some of the needs that it has.

Equality is something on which we base all of our policies and principles. When we are guided by the principle of equality, it is a lot easier than trying to divide and put wedges between different regions, different peoples and different genders.

I do not think the member who spoke understands the meaning of equality. True equality for all individuals in all provinces allows for diversity and it promotes equality. If the member really wants to talk about equality, he would agree that our universal child care benefit and many of the tax benefits that were announced in the fiscal update are all about equality. Everyone is treated the same. Everyone across Canada will receive 1% off the GST. It does not matter where that person came from or what—

• (1255)

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary and I have a question for her. She is pleased, as a member, to have the same salary as her male counterparts.

Why then, in the Conservative Party election platform, is there no mention of pay equity, or maternity benefits, or parental leave?

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry but I need to know the circumstances. Perhaps the member could give me a circumstance of where there is no equal pay. I did not quite catch her question. Would she repeat it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I will speak more slowly.

Why are pay equity, maternity benefits and parental leave not part of the Conservative Party election platform?

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, maternity and parental benefits are part of our legislation. EI benefits afford parental and maternity benefits to both women and men. There is no difference and no discrimination.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address this issue raised by the hon. member for Beaches—East York concerning the support provided by the Government of Canada to Canadian women.

[*Translation*]

The member is referring to the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, a committee that I was pleased to be a member of in the first session of Parliament.

[*English*]

I know the committee's work on the issue of economic security of women was extensive and thorough and I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee members for their considered efforts on behalf of Canadian women on this and other important issues the committee addresses.

The Government of Canada shares the committee's belief in the need to ensure the economic security of women and has taken a number of measures to achieve this goal. Despite the high participation rate of women in Canada's labour force, actually one of the highest, as was mentioned, in the OECD countries and certainly the highest in the G-8, we know there is still a gap in earnings between men and women.

To ensure that women are treated fairly in the workforce, we are undertaking new measures to improve wage imbalances for women in the federal jurisdiction. Our approach has three components: first, we are increasing education about pay equity; second, we are implementing a new specialized mediation service; and third, we are expanding our compliance monitoring. I will elaborate briefly on those three measures.

Business of Supply

First, on increased education for pay equity, we are distributing information packages about the rights and obligations of the workplace parties. We are increasing the number of site visits and encouraging representatives from industry, such as the banking and trucking sectors, to help employers of particularly smaller federally regulated businesses to establish more gender neutral job evaluation systems.

Second, our mediation services will assist labour market partners address the pay equity issues during collective bargaining. We are doubling the number of dedicated pay equity mediators to enhance this service.

Finally, the third plank in these measures, we are expanding the already rigorous monitoring program that will enable us to be more vigilant in verifying whether employers are complying with pay equity requirements. We trust that these employer audits will reinforce and encourage compliance with the already substantive pay equity laws.

Our aim is to ensure that for those women who wish to participate in the workforce, the fundamental right of equal wages for work of equal value is upheld, regardless of gender. It is noteworthy that through the course of our committee's study on the economic security of women we learned of some significant trends that suggest the wage gap between men and women is closing, especially in the Canadian public service where in the last five years women are competing head on in securing no less than 61% of the new hires in management, scientific, professional and administrative positions.

The educational attainment of women has reached unprecedented levels, now seeing some 60% of all university graduates are women, and these higher graduate rates among women will see that women will surpass men in the number of doctoral graduates in the very near future.

It shows that the better awareness of the federally regulated workplace parties, the higher educational attainment of women and the participation rate of women in the workforce are trending toward an ever-diminishing earnings gap between men and women.

Achieving positive results for all Canadians is the goal. With respect to women, we are proud to have contributed to their lives in a number of important areas, such as promoting self-sufficiency, child care, parental leave and the economic security of senior women. The Government of Canada supports low income Canadians through a range of programs, transfers to the provinces and territories and tax measures that work together to support self-sufficiency.

Of course, we recognize that family responsibilities, especially child care, play an important part in the lives of many women. The Government of Canada is supporting families with the costs of raising their children through a number of measures, including the universal child care benefit, the Canada tax benefit and the new child tax credit.

We also recognize that many families need child care spaces. We are transferring an additional \$250 million per year to the provinces and territories to help them create more child care spaces. We are implementing a tax credit for businesses that create child care spaces for their employees and the surrounding community.

● (1300)

The Government of Canada also concentrates its efforts on supporting the most vulnerable members of society, many of whom are women. Housing in this area is fundamental. To this end, we have designated close to \$270 million for a new homelessness partnering strategy.

As well, the federal government is investing \$256 million in support of CMHC's renovation programs over the next two years. This renovation funding will help improve the living conditions of some 38,000 households, including single women, both with and without children, seniors, and persons with disabilities. Aboriginal people and others in need across Canada will also be included among those who will benefit.

In addition, the one time investment of \$1.4 billion to create three provincial-territorial trusts will help Canadians, including many women and children, to find safe and affordable housing. We are also implementing a \$300 million first nations housing fund which will facilitate up to 25,000 housing units on reserve over 10 years.

Finally, it is common knowledge that women have a longer time to enjoy their senior years. The Government of Canada helps to ensure that men and women have the opportunity to enjoy a high quality of life in their elder years. In addition to the old age security and Canada pension plan which provide income security for Canadians in their retirement years, we have established the new National Seniors Council. It is a fulfillment of our commitment to establish a body to advise the government on seniors issues of national importance, particularly health, well-being and quality of life.

The council works with other levels of government and all concerned and informed stakeholders to develop a national approach to these important issues. Its mandate is to help ensure that federal government policies, programs and services continue to meet the evolving needs of seniors today and in the future.

The National Seniors Council is just one avenue the Government of Canada is using to improve the lives of older Canadians. Another is through our \$10 million expansion of the new horizons for seniors program committed to in budget 2007. This program funds community based organizations for projects led by seniors. It is a grassroots approach. The purpose is to encourage older persons' contributions and to enhance well-being in the community through seniors sharing their skills, experience and wisdom. It is a great program.

● (1305)

[*Translation*]

The program ensures that individuals have the opportunity to participate and to enhance their well-being in their community.

[*English*]

This is an especially valuable outlet for the many older women who feel isolated and lonely to remain active and contributing members of their society.

Business of Supply

The actions we have taken on a wide variety of fronts, from labour policy initiatives and tax reform to child care, housing assistance and programs for seniors, demonstrate the Government of Canada's continued strong commitment to providing effective meaningful support to all Canadian women and men.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the committee, the hon. member has worked with us and has heard the presentations from various organizations and groups at our hearings. We heard from the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Rural women, first nations and Inuit women and immigrant and visible minority women made presentations.

There are some things that are common to all of those groups, one of which is child care which allows women to participate in the workforce and helps them to become financially secure, and another is literacy. In both areas the government campaigned on cuts to and the elimination of a national child care program. It has been two years now. Essentially many spaces have not been created. The \$1,200 does not do it because it gives parents absolutely no choice. It is taxed back in any case, so it is not \$1,200. The amount announced earlier by one of the member's colleagues of somewhere over \$200 million, is not even close to the \$5 billion the provinces were receiving and up to the \$10 billion which was committed in the last election by our party.

For literacy it is the same thing. Businesses in this country want literacy back. There were cuts to literacy. Women need those programs.

Could the hon. member explain why the government is doing contrary to what the women essentially asked for at the hearings?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, certainly the hon. member has been a very vocal and engaged member of the committee on the status of women.

The fact of the matter is that the universal child care benefit, the program that this government promised in election 2006 and which it has since delivered, is the most meaningful, direct benefit to women and families right across the country. It involves far more money than was ever contemplated under the previous Liberal regime. Maybe I will correct that. The Liberals contemplated doing it, but they did not get it done. They talked about doing it but one's track record is based on what one does, not what one plans to do.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech today and certainly he made some very good points. We appreciate his work.

What Canada promises to all of its citizens is opportunity. What Canada promises to those who come to this country is opportunity. Not always is the outcome successful in new ventures but we try to provide equal opportunity for all who come to this country, regardless of their gender.

In Afghanistan, women have been given some of rights that they had never been able to have in the past. Women now represent 25% of that country's parliament. Women are back in schools.

I wonder if the member would comment as to how Canada is helping the rights of women in that country.

●(1310)

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, certainly the experience in Afghanistan speaks for itself. We see a segment of Afghan society rising to the occasion with the support of Canada and 36 other countries from the international community that are helping to make that country stronger and to rebuild that country so that people there can enjoy the kind of peace and security Canadian women and Canadian families right across Canada have come to enjoy for many years.

There is nothing better than Canada, in keeping with its history of this kind of work in dangerous places in the world. We are going to keep doing that.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government member opposite did not say anything about child care. We know that access to regulated, affordable child care is pivotal to reducing poverty for women. Without good quality child care, thousands of women are kept from full time and well paying jobs.

Instead of building a national child care system, the Conservatives cancelled an agreement signed by the former Liberal government and the provinces and territories to increase access to early learning and child care. This means a loss of \$3.5 billion in funding over the next three years.

Why is the member not addressing these issues of importance to Canadians across this country?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that the ultimate jurisdiction and responsibility for child care spaces and the like lies in the hands of the provinces. That is why the Government of Canada is working closely with the provinces and territories, with some \$250 million per year to help with the creation of those child care spaces.

We are working hand in hand. It is the kind of cooperation that the country needs in these important areas of shared responsibility. We are going to keep doing that as well. That is the kind of investment Canada is making for women right across the country.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for York West.

We are here today to speak about a very important opposition day motion, a motion which speaks to the rights of women and women's equality. I want to take the opportunity to commend the member for Beaches—East York who put this motion forward, because I know she and the rest of the Liberal caucus believe in true equality for women across Canada.

We are here today to talk about women. We are here today to talk about the women from Brampton—Springdale and so many other women who feel that they have been ignored, who feel that the Conservative government has failed them, who feel that the Conservative government has turned its back on them.

Business of Supply

The ideological right-wing approach to our country's social issues about which women are so passionate has really created a situation where the government continues to pretend that we have achieved true equality but its agenda actually speaks about another.

In 2006 during the election campaign, the Prime Minister stated that he supported the United Nations recommendation "to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitment to women in Canada". Now we learn from Conservative insiders like Tom Flanagan that his government's goal is actually to stop funding what he calls Liberal outsider organizations.

We have seen that the Prime Minister has already broken his promise to thousands and thousands of women across this country, to women who continue to advocate on behalf of others, to women who empower other women, to women who actually speak up.

The Prime Minister has actually broken his promise, because one of the first initiatives that he and the Conservative government undertook was to remove the word "equality" from the Status of Women Canada. This was an absolutely shameful act when we realize that as the Canadian dollar increases, women in this country still continue to make only seventy cents for every dollar that is earned by a man.

We all know from talking to these women that the wage gap is still alive and well. One has to ask, why did the Conservative caucus members allow the Prime Minister to remove the word "equality" from the Status of Women Canada, because we all realize that there is no economic security without equality.

The Conservative government continues to thwart equality at every turn. It continues to make an antagonistic relationship for all of those women who work to better the lives not only of their fellow Canadians, but of so many children.

What is interesting is that the government has absolutely no problem talking about equality issues when it comes to the lives of Afghan women, when it comes to ensuring that women and their rights are defended in Afghanistan. Why is it that they talk about the word "equality" and those issues for the women in Afghanistan, when the women right here at home in our country, in Canada, continue to feel neglected, continue to feel failed and continue to be isolated?

There are so many issues that continue to impact women right here at home. We only have to look at the issue of child care. I listened very intently when the government member opposite who spoke prior to me spoke about the fact that the Conservatives were working in cooperation and collaboration with the provinces. We only need to talk to those provinces and territories, to talk to the women who are disappointed and feel isolated because the government has failed to produce a single child care space. Not one child care space has been created since the Conservative government came to power.

The Conservatives talk about giving \$1,200 to Canadian families. We do not need a government that acts as an ATM machine. We need a government that will come up with a national strategy to ensure that the women of this country, that families, that mothers and fathers have access to quality, affordable, universal and accessible child care

spaces. They cannot do it alone. We need national leadership on this issue.

In talking to women from the west coast and out in Winnipeg, from the east coast and up in the Northwest Territories, I very quickly have realized that these women are disappointed. They were counting on the government for support. They were counting on the government to honour its word and actually maintain the early learning and child care agreements which were signed by the former Liberal government, agreements which were done in cooperation and in collaboration, agreements which would have resulted in quality, affordable, universal and accessible day care spaces.

● (1315)

We also have realized in talking to the Canadian Child Care Federation that it is actually living without its \$750,000 a year federal grant. Why is an organization that has done such tremendous work on behalf of families, children and women having to live without a grant when our country has a surplus and we are living in one of its most prosperous times?

Why is it that there have been significant cuts made to Status of Women Canada? Twelve of 16 offices have been closed. Why has \$18 million been cut from literacy programs? Why has \$55 million been cut from the student summer jobs program? Why has \$45 million been cut from affordable housing programs? Why has \$10 million been cut from Canadian volunteer programs? Why have there been these cuts to programs that actually helped Canadian women?

Let us take a look at the issue of pay equity. As I mentioned earlier, women in Canada still continue to make 70¢ for every dollar that is made by a man, but the government continues to pretend there is true equality.

While I was writing this speech, I actually wanted to ask one of the Conservatives a very simple question. How many times has this government actually mentioned the words "women's equality"? How many times has it mentioned the words "pay equity" in its last two throne speeches or the last two speeches in regard to the budget? There has not been one word on women's equality or one word on pay equity in either the Speech from the Throne or the budget. That is a very sad statement.

Liberals on this side of the House actually understand that pay equity is a fundamental human right protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act. The previous Liberal government actually made a commitment to pay equity. The former ministers of justice and housing wrote to the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in October 2005 and stated that the government would work toward introducing a bill on pay equity by 2006 or early 2007.

However, where is the government on the issue? Let us take a look at the Conservative national policy declaration, which states, "The Conservative Party supports gender equality through all policy and legislative considerations".

Why are the Conservatives not practising what they preach in all the policies and programs they have been initiating since elected? Why are they not practising what they have preached in the Conservative national policy declaration? We fail to see any attempt by the Conservatives to address the issue of pay equity for women.

I stand here before the House today on behalf of the very many women across this country who feel disenfranchised and ignored by the Conservative government. As I was writing my speech, I came across this interesting quote:

For taxpayers, however, [pay equity is] a rip-off. And it has nothing to do with gender. Both men and women taxpayers will pay additional money to both men and women in the civil service. That's why the federal government should scrap its ridiculous pay equity law.

Do members know who said that? The Prime Minister. When did the Prime Minister say that? The Prime Minister said that while he was president of the National Citizens Coalition.

I do not think these words are very comforting to the numbers of women and Canadians who are fighting for pay equity in Canada. It is comments like this one that come as no shock in regard to the actions the government clearly has taken to target women in Canada. It has chosen to ignore the tremendous number and complements of women's organizations. Whether we are talking to women from aboriginal communities or women from ethnic or demographic communities, we have realized that they are being ignored.

In the end, I would say that the women of this country and all Canadians deserve a government that is going to stand up and speak on behalf of the challenges faced by women. They need a government that is going to believe in true equality for both the men and the women of Canada.

• (1320)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I get upset when Liberals talk about rights. One would think they had a monopoly on rights in this country. Let us look at some facts

. In the second world war, Nazi refugees trying to flee Nazi Germany came to Canada. They were turned down by this country, sent back to Nazi Germany and ended up as Holocaust victims. Who was in government at that time? It was a Liberal government.

Who interned Japanese Canadian citizens and deprived them of their property and fundamental rights? It was the Liberals.

The only time in Canadian history that martial law has ever been imposed in this country, where our citizens had their rights suspended and people were rounded up and put into internment camps, was during the Trudeau regime. Every Liberal should know that.

I should not speak so fast because they have a tough time remembering a few of these things.

Who granted the women the right to vote in this country? Which government did that? It was a Conservative government.

Who granted aboriginal people the right to vote almost 100 years after the slaves were freed in the United States? It was a Conservative government.

Who appointed the first woman to a cabinet post in this country? It was a Conservative government.

We Conservatives need not take any lectures from that group about fundamental rights and freedoms in this country.

Business of Supply

I think we need a charter of rights, a bill of rights, to protect Canadians against Liberals.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I found it very interesting that the member opposite had to go back all those years to the days of Pierre Trudeau in regard to talking about inaction on women. We only have to go back to yesterday or a week before and talk about the fiscal update or the Speech from the Throne to realize that the Conservatives have not stood up for the women of Canada.

If they truly cared about the women of this country, they would have mentioned the words “women's equality” and “pay equity” in the Speech from the Throne and the fiscal update. It is only the Liberal team that is standing up for the needs of women in Canada.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I could go back quite a few years as well.

But I would like to hear the hon. member who just delivered that highly eloquent speech say a few words about something that is happening across the entire country. I am talking about women who work on the family farm and do not receive pensionable earnings.

Recommendation 18 of the 21st report mentions this need in particular to develop options in order for women, as well as men, who work on the family farm to receive a decent income when they retire. That is what I call equity. I would like to know whether the hon. member agrees that this would provide pay equity for women who work in farming.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing up a very important issue in regard to achieving true economic security not only for women living in urban areas, but also for women living in rural areas, for women working on farms who perhaps do not have the opportunity to contribute to pension plans and EI.

I think it is extremely important that we work together to address some of these issues, but let me tell the House that closing 12 of 16 Status of Women offices is not going to get the job done. The issues of pay equity and the advancement of women are only going to happen if we collectively work in cooperation and collaboration and, most importantly, if we have some leadership from the federal government.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened all morning to my colleagues from the Liberal Party blowing rhetorical spin bubbles. I have not agreed with very much of it, but I did agree with the hon. member on one point that I thought was actually very profound.

After her attack on the Conservative ideology, with which I completely agree, she said that Canadians deserve a government that will stand up. I think that is a fairly simple statement.

Business of Supply

Yesterday we saw a plan that was put forward to dramatically alter the economic capacity of the federal government to provide the kinds of programs that most progressive Canadians would believe in, yet what did we see? We saw a party that took a dive, a party that refused to stand up, a party that sat on its hands and is sending a message to Canadians that its one fundamental interest is saving the political skin of its leader over taking on the wrong-headed, right wing ideology of the Conservatives.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear a member of the NDP say that. We would not be in this mess of women not having true equality and not having a child care program if the NDP were not in bed with the Conservatives.

Let me remind the NDP member that in 2005 the Conservatives actually sat on their hands and did nothing on the budget. In 2006, let me ask the NDP member, why did his party not stand up and fight for the softwood lumber deal? I do not recollect those members standing up in the House and fighting on behalf of Canadians. The Liberal caucus, the Liberal team and our leader are committed to ensuring that we achieve true equality for all women in Canada.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this very spirited debate today. I want to read for the benefit of Canadians watching at home and the constituents of York West the motion that we are dealing with today. It reads:

That, taking into account the reports produced by the Standing Committee on Status of Women on the need for pay equity and the lack of economic security for women, the House call upon the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Canada and present this strategy to the House by February 1, 2008.

That does not sound like a huge job for the government to do.

Last year I had the opportunity to chair the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We heard from Canadians all across the country who reminded us time and time again that the issue of pay equity is crucial for the economic security of women in Canada. Unfortunately, women are still earning only 71¢ for every dollar that men earn.

Regardless of their educational achievements, women continue to have earnings well below those of men, for many reasons. This means a heightened risk of poverty for children and for women in their retirement years. In recent statistics, 47% of single parent families were poor and more than one-third of single women over 65 continue to live in poverty. This last is an issue that I continue to hear about in my constituency, as I am sure many members do. I continue to hear from women who are really struggling to live on a very minimal pension.

The current Prime Minister once said, as my colleague alluded to, that pay equity is a “rip-off”. Clearly, the Conservative government is not providing the leadership to help women improve their economic status. The Prime Minister clearly does not understand and does not respect pay equity when he can say it is a rip-off.

Sadly, that is clearly all we are going to be able to expect from the Conservatives. The Conservative minority government has yet to explain to the women of this country how Status of Women Canada will be able to continue to fulfill its mandate in light of its \$5 million cut, almost half of its operating budget.

Liberal governments are known for their commitment to women's equality and to defending women's rights. Our former Liberal government did exactly that and took action in various areas, such as, in the year 2000, extending parental benefits for a full year, something many people are thoroughly enjoying. This is a legacy for Canadian families that we on this side of the House are very proud of.

In 2004 the Liberal government also established the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which was an important move forward for women in Canada.

In October 2005 we created an expert panel to provide advice and options to strengthen accountability mechanisms to advance gender based analysis and gender equality issues.

Other Liberal achievements that I am very proud to have been part of include creating the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health and the Institute of Gender and Health to work on health policies and issues that are unique to women.

We also committed \$32 million every year to national crime prevention initiatives. We know that women continue to be the victims of a lot of the crime in our country and that \$32 million in crime prevention initiatives is helping many women to feel safer.

The Liberals provided another \$7 million to the family violence initiative to try to deal with issues of domestic violence.

Also, to help make post-secondary education more affordable for lower income and middle income Canadians, we committed over \$2 billion over five years to improve student financial assistance.

For our valued seniors, Liberal budget 2005 ensured that senior women would benefit from a \$2.7 billion increase over two years to the guaranteed income supplement. Seniors are and want to remain active members of our society. Our budget increased support for the hugely successful new horizons program, which promotes voluntary sector activities and supports seniors. Annual funding would have increased to \$25 million by 2007-08.

But the Conservatives care very little about seniors. We just need to look at what they did a year ago. Yesterday marked the first anniversary of the Conservative government's decision to levy a 31% tax on income trusts.

Many of those Canadian investors included huge numbers of retired seniors who actually invested their savings in the income trust market as a result of the fact that the Prime Minister himself explicitly promised over and over not to tax them. He even wrote it directly into his election platform, which turned out to be completely false.

● (1330)

Ten months after being elected, the Prime Minister broke his promise, resulting in the loss of \$25 billion of investors' money in a single day. The majority of these people were not slick, savvy investors, but ordinary citizens who relied on their income trust dividends for their day to day necessities and to supplement their retirement income.

I had the opportunity to meet some of these Canadians yesterday at a rally on Parliament Hill. My Liberal colleagues and I heard how these people felt betrayed by the Prime Minister and the Conservative government. It was tragic to hear their stories of such dramatic losses of their savings and what they were counting on for their futures.

Speaking of dramatic losses, another loss that we have clearly experienced is the loss of early learning and child care agreements that the Liberal government had negotiated. It was a disastrous loss for Canadians, for women and for our country. These early learning and child care opportunities would have been of huge benefit to working families and in helping to prepare our children for the future.

What happened to those agreements that took so many years to put together? The NDP, led by the member for Toronto—Danforth, plunged the country into an unnecessary election, which resulted in child care through the mailbox, a system of a taxable allowance to parents.

The NDP's crackerjack of a leader then stood by while the Conservatives proceeded to undo all the good work, other than a few Liberal programs that they have re-announced. I am sure the fourth party leader, when he goes to bed at night, cannot be very proud of that.

I will go back to the excellent motion that my colleague has tabled today. Pay inequity is a critical issue for women in this country. Pay inequity clearly hurts women and our children. It makes women and children more vulnerable to struggling on very low incomes. In Canada, more women than men live in such difficult situations and the majority of single parent households are headed by a woman living on a low income. We have over one million children who continue to be poor.

Almost half of single, widowed or divorced women over 65 live below appropriate income levels, and 51% of lone parent families headed by women are living on very low incomes. Economic security is at the heart of women's equality. Women continue to be economically disadvantaged and it is time for action.

We call on the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Canada and to present the strategy to the House by February 1, 2008. We must all work together to ensure a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

• (1335)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find this ironic. If members of the party opposite felt that their actions would be better for Canadian women, why did they allow this government to survive and continue governing? When they talk about standing up for women, they certainly did not take advantage of that opportunity.

What does the hon. member have against women benefiting from the paydown on the federal tax debt? She just ended her presentation by saying that we should look out for future generations. That is an important step that we are taking and it will benefit future generations of Canadian women.

Business of Supply

What does she have against women who own small businesses? Why does she not want to take action to ensure they have the advantage of the tax breaks that we are giving to small businesses? Why did she not stand and support all the benefits that Canadian women will get as taxpayers, employers, employees and members of families, et cetera. I find it very ironic that she has not taken advantage of that opportunity.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, let me first address the issue of what I consider to be important for an opposition party.

One thing I have noticed in the eight years I have been here is how often people simply vote against something because it is the opposition or the government. The fact that we chose to take the road we did yesterday was, to me, acting in a responsible way as a responsible opposition.

Sure, there are issues that we agree with but there were issues in the mini-budget yesterday that we did not agree with. However, bringing the government down and spending \$500 million for another election would likely bring us right back to the situation we are in today, except we would probably be on that side of the House and the Conservatives would be on this side.

Over and above that, I would rather invest that \$500 million in seniors, in medicare and in housing programs that we do not have. There was nothing in the mini-budget that talked about the issues that really matter to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. Conservative ideology has the government investing in law and order, in prisons and harsher sentences for sex offenders.

What does the hon. member think about this government that abolished the national firearms program and slashed spending on transition houses for battered women?

What does she think about all the brouhaha over law and order?

• (1340)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech and in the mini-budget yesterday there was no investment specifically for women. What is most important to the government is its law and order agenda.

Let me add that the law and order agenda is important for all of us. I can say that we have done a lot of things on this side of the House to ensure that women in our communities are safe.

However, with all of that money, why did the government not invest more into the health and safety of Canadians and into our economy by investing some of that money into jobs, rather than just giving everybody tax cuts? We appreciate that as well, but I believe there should be a balance in how we spend taxpayer money. We want a little bit of both.

Business of Supply

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in her blaming the NDP, all 19 of us at that time, for the last election, would the member not agree with me that it was in fact the people of Canada who wanted that election and that they in fact turfed the Liberals out in that election not the NDP? However, we did quite well in that election. We increased our membership on this side of the House by another 10 members.

The other thing I would like to clarify has to do with some misinformation that the Liberals have been putting out here all morning, which is that somehow we sat on our hands or did not vote for the softwood lumber agreement.

We have admitted very openly that yes, a mistake was made on that day, as do many members around this House from time to time when it comes to a recorded vote. We asked for the unanimous consent of the House to correct that mistake but on that day the Liberals chose, in a pique of self-centredness, not to allow us to clarify that.

The Liberals probably have single-handedly done more to damage support for women by doing away with the Canada assistance plan and reducing the social transfer by some \$7 billion in the early nineties. Was she there and why did she allow that to happen?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, in 1993 we inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the Conservatives. We had to make a lot of changes. They were clearly not doing their job.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say right away that I will share my time with the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

I am pleased to have the privilege to discuss the motion put forward this morning.

If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women—

This was the promise our Prime Minister made to women during the January 2006 election campaign. It is now November 2007. He was referring to Canada's commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

I must point out that in 2003, the United Nations committee overseeing the implementation by member states of the measures referred to in the quote, put pressure on Canada to do more for women. The committee was highly critical of a number of Canadian policies and called on the government to seriously address a number of issues such as poverty among women, wage inequity, discrimination against aboriginal women, and child care.

When the United Nations made those comments following the promise by our Prime Minister, one might have expected tangible and satisfactory results for all the women of Quebec and Canada. The sad reality is that did not happen. It turns out that the new government, as it likes to call itself, has done nothing tangible or positive for women.

It is absolutely true that they have taken tangible actions. However, because they concern social services, those actions should be under the jurisdiction of the provinces, not the federal

government. While this government claims to have an open mind in terms of provincial jurisdictions, it increasingly interferes by assuming a role in social services which has nothing to do with its mandate.

Instead of becoming involved in those programs, it would be better to concern itself with its own areas of jurisdiction; for example, first nations women or older women who receive the guaranteed income supplement. People should know that 18.9% of older women in Canada who receive the supplement are living below the poverty line. To be living below the poverty line means they have so little money that they must choose between groceries and prescription drugs.

If that is what they call equality for Canadians, if that is what the minister calls equality achieved, I would like her to come back down to earth because she needs to see reality.

This government slashed the women's program and women's advocacy funding, saying there was no need to defend women's rights because women had achieved equality. At the same time, they offer grants of \$500,000 to a coalition of associations that promotes the rights of people who own firearms. They have a right to advocate if they want to own a firearm but women have no right to advocate that they should be respected. What planet are we living on?

I really wish my Conservative colleagues—since it is always Conservative colleagues who adopt this arrogant air and who will not listen to the truth—would, at least, have the decency to listen to what they are being told. These comments are not coming from the member for Laval, but from groups of women that my colleague for Laurentides—Labelle and I met with over a full year.

● (1345)

And I especially wish those from Quebec would listen. Unlike our Conservative colleagues, we took the time to tour the whole province to meet with women's groups as well as representatives of homes and shelters for women and women's advocacy centres. We met with all the groups who work on behalf of women in whatever way. It was those very women who asked us to represent them in this House, to make known their dissatisfaction to the different parties.

The member for Laval did not simply decide to do this one morning. Indeed, some of the people that we met live in ridings represented by our Conservative colleagues and they, unfortunately, were unable to gain the ear of their elected representative.

A great number of the women we met also told us they wished that the federal government would resume its work in various programs that existed previously, especially those programs to help residents of Canada's north to obtain food and products that they need to properly feed their families.

In northern Canada, a litre of orange juice costs \$22. I do not know who could feed their children properly if they are paying \$22 for a litre of orange juice. There used to be programs so that people could get less expensive food, at a price that we might consider normal. But those programs, which made it possible for women to meet their needs and for other women on reserves to apply for assistance, have been eliminated.

Business of Supply

We pride ourselves on wanting to have programs so that women can have financial and economic security. But we cannot even pay \$100 a month more, through the guaranteed income supplement, so that our older women, who helped to build this country, can live decently. We are told that the guaranteed income supplement has been raised, but it was an increase of \$17 a month over the last two years. Is that a real increase? Did my colleagues get a pay raise of \$17 a month? I think not; neither did I.

I may seem to be angry and over the top. But I am not ordinarily angry. I am normally even-tempered, and people who really know me can attest to that.

I have spent my entire life, since I was very young, standing up for the rights of women, children and seniors, who have been poorly represented and poorly served by their government. The reason that I decided to be a candidate for the Bloc Québécois was that I believed it was the only party that was genuinely advocating on behalf of people's interests and rights. It was the only party that was not somehow connected with Bay Street. It was the only party that owed nothing to any corporation and that could not be bought by any corporation.

The reason I chose to join the Bloc Québécois was that I sincerely believed that we could make this government understand that an opposition is a healthy thing in a democracy. When the Conservative government was in opposition, it believed the same thing. I would therefore like the government to open its ears and listen, today, to the women who are calling on it to revisit its position and its policies, because what is at stake today is the quality of life of thousands of women.

When we are talking about economic security, we absolutely have to ensure that women have access to that security, and that requires policies. We have to invest in social housing and provide a decent income through the guaranteed income supplement, and a decent income for older women who lose their jobs.

• (1350)

I see that my speaking time has run out. That is unfortunate. I would have had many things to say, to get my Conservative colleagues to understand that what we want is our rights, and that we have a right to what we want.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to hear opposition parties repeatedly say day after day and mislead the House by suggesting that our government has put women in a bad position by making cuts. In the status of women committee we hear over and over again that cuts were made to the Status of Women. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Members opposite know we moved money from administration and put it directly toward Canadian women's projects. Canadian women all across the country are setting up organizations and using that money at the grassroots to do things that people in their communities appreciate.

Led by Liliane Kohl and Peggy Sakow, an organization against human trafficking has been set up. I am sure at some point in time this organization will feel free also to make an application. There are all kinds of different projects like that.

How can the member across the way stand in the House of Commons and say that we have made those cuts from the Status of Women and from Canadian women across the country? How can she do that in all good conscience when this money goes directly to the projects on the ground for these women?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Believe me, Mr. Speaker, we are in no way opposed to bills that are meaningful, that can help women. However, in a government with a \$14 billion surplus, surely there is room to fund social programs as well as defend rights. Up until now, we have sent \$37 billion to Afghanistan. I am very sorry, but I do not think this money was well spent. Our soldiers work very hard. But we could have used some of the \$14 billion to at least defend the rights of women here.

• (1355)

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it odd that the party that is impotent, that the woman with the eternal smile, would be so partisan. Honestly, when I see that she is trying to protect a program in which 66% of the program costs—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Luc Harvey: Earlier, I was accused of maybe not listening, but I could say the same to her.

How can the member defend a program in which 66% of the funds for the entire program went to administration costs? We decided to reduce that by 38%, so that all the money would go to women and so that local projects could be implemented.

Contrary to what the woman with the eternal smile said, yes, I met with all the women's groups in my riding, and they understood. We re-explained things, and not only were these women in agreement, but they were also happy with the results. In my riding, an organization called Nouveaux Espoirs was going to shut down simply because the grants were eliminated.

Also, how can the member defend a program in which administration costs account for 66% of the total costs? That makes me laugh.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I cannot do anything about the member's impotence. He should see his doctor about that.

When we are talking about abolishing programs and about women's access to programs, I would remind the government that 12 of the 16 regional offices have been closed.

Eligibility criteria for these programs have been restricted. Now, groups that defend women's rights, lobby groups and research groups no longer meet these criteria. With the change in philosophy of the women's program and the elimination of promoting women's equality from its mandate, women's groups that work for egalitarian reform of legislation and policy are being muzzled. There has also been the abolition of the court challenges program, even though the government is the first institution that should support all organizations that defend women's rights.

Statements by Members

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Resuming debate with the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, bearing in mind that at 2 o'clock we will proceed with statements by members.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope you will be kind enough to let me know when it is almost 2 o'clock. I see that there are roughly two minutes left.

I will start by commending the hon. member for Laval for making such a strong argument. I am absolutely honoured to speak today during this opposition day to debate the Liberal Party motion on a strategy to improve the economic security of all women.

I want to remind everyone in this House and everyone watching us today what the Conservative Party said during the January 2006 election. It said this about women toward the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006.

Did you know that in the Conservative Party election platform, the word "women" was mentioned just twice? Does that make any sense? No, it makes no sense.

The first time was to talk about women as victims when they were talking about tougher sentences for offenders. Half the time, the Conservatives see women as victims. The other half of the time, they see women as immigrants and mothers. The election platform said that female immigrants seek better opportunities for themselves and for their families. Then the Conservatives talk about families 24 times in their election platform. Half the time the Conservative Party—it is a shame the hon. member for Louis-Hébert is not listening to me—sees women as victims and the other half of the time as mothers.

Women are not just victims or mothers. They are also workers and, as such, often need a bit of extra help. Historically, as everyone knows, women have been denied their rights far too often.

The Bloc Québécois focused on female workers in its 2005-06 platform. In Quebec, there is legislation to correct the lack of pay equity.

Mr. Speaker, I see that you are telling me my time is up.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert will have eight minutes after oral question period to finish her comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

IMPERIAL ORDER OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased and honoured to recognize the Lord Dufferin Chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire of Orangeville, Ontario on its 100th anniversary.

This outstanding organization has successfully improved the quality of life for children, youth and those in need in our community during its long history. The organization brought Orangeville its first hospital in 1907.

Throughout the years the Lord Dufferin Chapter of the IODE has also undertaken a long list of projects in our community including English instruction for immigrants as well as making significant contribution to the Headwaters Health Care Centre, Family Transition Place and the Orangeville Public Library, and has raised money for cancer research and other important local causes.

On behalf of the residents of Dufferin—Caledon, I would like to sincerely congratulate the Lord Dufferin Chapter of the IODE for 100 years of community service excellence and I wish the chapter many more years of success.

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CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision to move two Coast Guard vessels from Dartmouth to Conservative held ridings continues to raise eyebrows. This week David Parkes, secretary of the Canadian Coast Guard alumni raises new questions about this unfortunate decision. His concerns have been echoed by experts including existing Coast Guard employees such as the commanding officer of one of the vessels.

It is typical of the government that it tries to divide regions and pit province against province. That is not a productive approach. If there is a strong business case for moving the vessels, let us see it. Thus far we have not

In fact, the five year business plan for the Canadian Coast Guard which came out just a month before the decision was announced made no reference whatsoever to this move. Moving well over 100 employees and their families has serious repercussions for them and for the community as a whole. It is not acceptable.

A decision such as this should not be taken so lightly or politically. Consultations should have carried out most particularly with the employees who would be affected. People deserve better than to be political pawns of the government.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN OF CONGO

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for more than 10 years, amid general indifference, millions of women in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been living a veritable nightmare.

Despite the efforts of the international community and the general election in 2006, rape, murder, sexual assault, kidnaping and sexual slavery are a daily reality for millions of Congolese women.

Statements by Members

This humanitarian crisis recently emerged from oblivion thanks to a report released on September 6, 2007, by the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes. Yesterday, during testimony before NGO representatives, Julienne Lusenge said that Canada had promised \$15 million over four years to help victims of sexual violence in the Congo. After two years, her NGO, like all the others, has not seen one red cent.

The Bloc Québécois is calling on this government to take concrete, proactive action to stop the sexual assaults being committed against our African sisters.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, housing is becoming more and more inaccessible for many working families in Canada.

This January housing costs were up 7% in my community of Hamilton where the average cost of a house is over \$265,000. The Conservatives' GST cut will not even amount to an average of \$100 in savings and that just does not get it done.

Local not for profit groups like the Hamilton East Kiwanis Non-profit Homes in my riding struggle with the flawed funding formulas and inaction of current and past governments. Flawed funding formulas that mean decreasing subsidies while maintenance and capital costs, and property taxes all increase.

The throne speech reminded Canadians they should be worried about housing and homelessness issues, but it did not commit to doing anything about it. This week's fiscal update only talked about rebates for people who own homes, nothing for affordable, quality housing for those who need it.

The NDP is committed to reducing the prosperity gap between Canadians. We are committed to fighting for a national housing strategy that helps not for profit groups meet housing needs in our communities.

* * *

●(1405)

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise and inform the House that my constituent, Glenmore Elementary School teacher, Rhonda Draper, who joins us today on Parliament Hill, is the recipient of the 2007 Governor General's Award for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History.

Established in 1996 by Canada's National History Society, the award recognizes teachers from elementary and secondary schools who have inspired and challenged students to learn about our heritage.

Ms. Draper created a CD called *Canada: On the Wings of Our Song*, which teaches history through music. When I visited her class, it was clear to see from the smiles on the faces of students that

singing their way through the events of our past was a great way to learn.

On behalf of the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country, I wish to congratulate and thank Rhonda Draper for her commitment to teaching. She has given our children an appreciation for our country's history while imparting a love of learning.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we approach Remembrance Day, we remember Canadian veterans and soldiers, and honour all those who gave their lives in sacrifice for this nation.

Let us also commit to doing all we can to truly fulfill and respect the promises made to Canada's veterans.

Mr. Speaker, you might remember that the Prime Minister unequivocally promised, in a letter to Mrs. Joyce Carter, that he would:

—immediately extend the Veterans Independence Program services to widows of all Second World War and Korean War veterans regardless of when the veteran passed away or how long they had been receiving the benefit prior to passing away.

So far these are just empty words. Perhaps the government will take the opportunity of this Remembrance Day and truly honour the wishes of Canada's veterans, fulfill the promise to all widows of our brave veterans.

Lest we forget.

* * *

SIR ROBIN VANDERFELT

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow that I inform the House of the recent death of Sir Robin Vanderfelt, who served as the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for 25 years until his retirement in 1986.

His passing marks the end of an era within the CPA. Sir Robin Vanderfelt led the association through a period of extensive expansion, and the size and influence of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association today is due in no small part to his vision and leadership.

Sir Robin attended the University of Cambridge and in World War II served in India and Burma. He was made a member of the Order of the British Empire in 1954 and granted a knighthood in 1973.

He was held in high regard by those who knew him. He will be remembered for his patience, integrity and kindness, and for the distinction with which he served his country and the Commonwealth.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

CBC RADIO-CANADA NORTH SHORE PROGRAMMING

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, November 1, marks the 25th anniversary of Radio-Canada Côte-Nord. It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I join the entire organization and the employees of Radio-Canada Côte-Nord as they proudly celebrate their silver anniversary.

For all North Shore dwellers, Radio-Canada Côte-Nord is an essential and indispensable tool for the development of our beautiful region.

I hope Radio-Canada Côte-Nord will continue to fulfill its information and entertainment role, and that the federal government will invest more money to ensure the perpetuity and prosperity of Radio-Canada Côte-Nord.

Bravo and congratulations to the entire team that, for the past 25 years, has taken up the challenge of keeping our citizens better informed.

* * *

[English]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we leave the House this Friday, we return home for veterans week. Recently I participated in an event honouring veterans from my riding.

Hosted by the Billy Bishop Museum, guests including Lieutenant-Colonel Rob Kearney helped to honour: William “Bill” Corbett, Barry C. Jackson, John G. Newton, Clarence “Clancy” Wark, John Patten “Jock” Fleming, Gordon Jackson, Doris A. Pedwell, Clifford Iles, Thomas McClelland and William Avery Tiner.

On Remembrance Day, I urge all of us to take the time to attend a service honouring our soldiers past and present.

We pray for those who are serving our country today, like the brave men and women in Afghanistan, as well as for their families, such as the family of Owen Sound native Corporal Robert Thomas James Mitchell, who we lost just one year ago.

We must honour our veterans all year long, but Remembrance Day gives us a special chance to reflect, to respect and most importantly, to remember.

Lest we forget.

* * *

●(1410)

SIKH CANADIANS

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is a significant day for Sikhs across Canada and around the world.

It is today that we remember the pogrom of November 1984: the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in New Delhi and throughout India. After 23 years the victims have not received justice. They will be remembered at 6 p.m. with one minute of silence.

I congratulate the Sikh nation for honouring these victims by holding its annual blood drive. Since 1999, the Sikh nation drive has saved an estimated 30,000 Canadian lives and for the last four years Canadian Blood Services recognized it as its top donor.

I am proud how each year this campaign continues to grow. This year, many communities throughout Canada will join those in British Columbia to donate blood during the first week of November.

I urge Canada's Sikhs and all Canadians to join the Sikh nation blood drive in remembrance of those tragic events of 1984. Please make this small sacrifice of time and save a life.

* * *

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this November 1, I remember the tabling of the Gomery report two years ago.

I also remember the powerlessness of the Bloc with its 444 questions on the subject.

We are still looking for the missing \$40 million in taxpayers' money. The Liberals, and now the Bloc, are attempting to curtail the initiatives of our government with their desire to backtrack.

However, no one except the Bloc wants to go back to the days when scandal was synonymous with squabbling. Quebeckers want an honest government that will keep its promise to strengthen the federation, provide economic leadership and ensure the security of Canadians.

Fortunately, on January 23, 2006, Quebeckers gave themselves real power and Quebec became a winner by voting for the Conservative Party, a party that has the means to take action. We have delivered the goods by tabling the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history.

* * *

BRIAN MCKENNA

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to congratulate the recipient of the 2007 Pierre Berton award, Mr. Brian McKenna, a resident of the riding of Outremont.

[English]

In April 2006, Brian McKenna's latest production, *The Great War*, first aired on CBC-TV signalling a groundbreaking approach to historical documentary television.

Mr. McKenna calls his approach “observational history” and believes that involving families in the telling of social history provides a greater chance that this next generation of Canadians will retain and share the lessons of our past.

[Translation]

Over the course of his 37-year career, Mr. McKenna has gained an international reputation for his documentaries on Canadian history, in the realms of film, television and print media. His award-winning and controversial movies and televised documentaries have helped us to better understand key Canadian cultural and historic events.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

I hope we can all join in congratulating Mr. Brian McKenna, this year's recipient of the Pierre Berton Award in Canadian History.

* * *

MARGUERITE CENTRE

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Marguerite Centre for the tremendous help it provides to women in Nova Scotia.

The centre is a 12 bed, long term, residential facility for women in recovery from addiction and abuse. It is staffed 24 hours a day and is the only facility of its kind in my province.

[Translation]

The philosophy of the Marguerite Centre is that women have the right to be looked after in a safe establishment where their individual needs will be met and their problems solved and where they will be listened to.

[English]

I recently attended its fifth anniversary celebration at the Sacred Heart Church Hall in Timberlea and left with a much deeper appreciation of the impact this centre has on the lives of so many women.

[Translation]

It is fitting that we congratulate the Marguerite Centre on the day when the House is debating a motion asking the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all Canadian women.

* * *

RENÉ LÉVESQUE

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, November 1, Quebec remembers René Lévesque, who died before his time.

A remarkable journalist, Mr. Lévesque kept Quebecers riveted as he explained world events on his television show *Point de mire*. As Minister of Natural Resources, he was instrumental in making the nationalization of hydro-electricity an election issue. For the first time, young Quebec engineers built one of the largest dams in the world.

His first government, elected in 1976, was the most modern, with legislation on political party financing and agricultural zoning, as well as Bill 101. But the 1980 referendum broke his heart.

After being re-elected in 1981, he fought Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Supreme Court on the unilateral patriation of the Constitution. He was then faced with a profound economic, financial and union crisis, and ultimately resigned. He died in 1987, before seeing that in 1995 all the work he had done could have given rise to a country. He is still waiting. Thank you, Mr. Lévesque. Until next time.

● (1415)

*[English]***MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's manufacturing industry is in crisis and our auto industry is being hit hard. Just this morning Chrysler Canada announced it will eliminate approximately 1,000 jobs in Brampton as part of its second restructuring in only eight months.

Since one job in the auto industry results in up to seven spinoff jobs, we are looking at approximately 7,000 jobs being lost in Ontario. Yet the government continues to negotiate a flawed free trade deal with South Korea that is bad for the auto industry and is bad for Canada.

This minority Conservative government is selling out the auto industry in its free trade agreement negotiations with South Korea. This agreement is dangerous as it does not provide fair access to the lucrative South Korean market for Canadians.

Our responsibility as parliamentarians is to protect Canadian jobs. I call upon the Prime Minister to allow a full parliamentary debate before signing any free trade agreement with South Korea.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago Justice Gomery delivered his ad scam verdict and still the Liberal Party owes Canadians \$40 million.

Liberal strategist Warren Kinsella called on the current so-called Leader of the Opposition to order a forensic review of the Liberal Party's books. It did not happen.

The Liberal member for York Centre insisted he would ensure missing ad scam cash was returned to the government treasury. Maybe he is still searching for suitcases full of cash or brown envelopes in restaurants, but he will not find it. It has already been spent on Liberal election campaigns.

The current Liberal deputy leader, and some Liberals call him the real leader, was in favour of a full accounting of lost ad scam money. I guess he has lost interest in finding it, like he lost the Liberal leadership race.

The Liberal Party should open its books to a full forensic audit, unless it has something to hide from Canadians, like \$40 million, or which Liberal candidates benefited.

I call on the Liberal Party to finally come clean and pay back Canadians the \$40 million it stole.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***AIRBUS**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, new and disturbing information has come to light about a former prime minister of this country. This information damages the integrity of the office of the prime minister, a key component of our democracy.

The current Prime Minister must do everything he can to get to the bottom of this issue. Will the Prime Minister take every step necessary regarding this disturbing information about Mr. Mulroney to get to the bottom of this matter?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal member for West Nova rose in the House to make certain accusations, and he was of course invited to make those outside the House where he would be exposed to the consequences of a lawsuit.

Outside the House he told journalists that he had “no evidence of any wrongdoing”. I think that settles the question.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is bad enough that one person's reputation has been ruined, but this reflects badly on the very office of the prime minister. The current Prime Minister owes it to the institution he represents to shed some light on this issue.

Will he shed light on this issue? Will he call for a public inquiry?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat in French what I just said. Yesterday, the member for West Nova was invited to repeat his accusations outside of the House and to face the consequences. Outside the House, he said that he had, and I quote, “no evidence of any wrongdoing”.

I think that settles the issue.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in no other democracy in the world would it work this way.

When we have serious allegations of this kind, we get to the bottom of the issue. The Prime Minister owes that to the office he now holds. He owes it to Canadians to get to the bottom of the issue, because it is a matter of democracy.

Faced with this information about Mr. Mulroney, will the Prime Minister call a public inquiry?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in no democracy in this world does a prime minister and a party use their power to conduct political vendettas against their political enemies.

That Liberal leader was part of the cabinet that had to pay \$2 million of taxpayers' money for falsely pursuing allegations in exactly this case.

Now the Liberals want this government to carry out their political vendettas. They can make those accusations themselves and pay the price, instead of Canadian taxpayers paying it.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the government House leader would be interested to know that after that interview, I went home to watch *The Fifth Estate*.

In February of this year the justice department launched an investigation into Mr. Mulroney, but when the Prime Minister shuffled his cabinet, his new Minister of Justice apparently had one top priority: To protect his former boss, he shut down the investigation.

Now that the people of Canada know what he knew, that Mulroney received \$300,000 in cash from Schreiber, will he now change his mind, recover the \$2 million and launch a full public inquiry?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday that very member for West Nova told the assembled journalists he had “no evidence of any wrongdoing”. Has he changed his mind since yesterday?

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader must answer for a lot of ministers in the government.

[Translation]

We know that the Minister of Justice shut down an inquiry into Mr. Mulroney's actions as soon as he got his new job, and we know that Mr. Mulroney is a personal friend and confidant of the Prime Minister. However, these new allegations concerning Mr. Mulroney and cash payments of \$300,000 he received demand immediate action on the part of the government.

Why is the government not doing anything? What is it afraid of? Will it call a public inquiry?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the answer to my question: there is no evidence.

[English]

The last time the Liberals talked about this, it cost Canadian taxpayers \$2 million for pursuing false allegations. Why does he want to pursue that now? If the member thought there was something to it, why did that party settle that lawsuit and pay out that \$2 million of taxpayers' money?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, three ministers of the Government of Quebec said they were very disappointed with the federal government's economic statement because it contained no measures to help the manufacturing sector. While the oil companies turn a profit year after year, the manufacturing industry has been in serious crisis for two years.

Does the Prime Minister realize that there is nothing in his economic statement to help the manufacturing industry recover, while business closures and job losses are mounting?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see that the leader of the Bloc Québécois is very good at asking questions in this House, but that unfortunately he forgets to listen to the answers.

What did we do this week? We announced our economic statement. We told Canadians that we were going to reduce the GST by 1%, which means that even people who do not pay tax will benefit from this cut.

We also announced individual and corporate tax cuts. Once again, we will all benefit from these measures.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us look at who will benefit from these corporate tax cuts. Shell will save \$14 million; Imperial Oil, \$31 million; and Talisman Energy, \$20 million. However, Abitibi-Consol and Tembec will get absolutely nothing, because they did not turn a profit.

It does not take much education to understand that a company that makes no profit pays no tax. Only companies that are turning a profit—the companies that least need it—will benefit from this budget, while forestry and manufacturing companies will get nothing. The oil companies get everything. That is the reality.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois must have asked 6,000 questions since he became a member of Parliament. What does he have to show for it? What has he achieved with all his questions? We are taking action.

We have acted on softwood lumber. We have invested \$400 million in innovation in the forestry sector. We have also corrected the fiscal imbalance. And this is what manufacturers and exporters in Quebec had to say about our economic statement this week:

The reduction of federal corporate tax rates is an important measure that will enable Canada to maintain the level of private investment and attract foreign investment. We are therefore preserving our long-term global competitiveness—

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors is not new. The government's economic statement confirms that all these sectors, except for the oil industry, are experiencing a tragic decline.

Under the circumstances, how can the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for regional development claim that his

government needs more time before it can take action? Does he realize that is no different than a doctor telling a seriously ill person, "I know you are seriously ill, but come back and see me in six months"?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know where the Bloc Québécois was in 1993 when the forestry crisis first broke out. What did they do at the time to convince the Parti Québécois to take action?

I also want to remind hon. members that we took action in the softwood lumber industry by investing \$400 million in innovation in forestry. We corrected the fiscal imbalance. We gave \$4.1 billion to Mr. Charest's government to take action in sectors under its jurisdiction, sectors like forestry.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I remember that in 1993 it was the Conservatives who were kicked out, just as they will be the next time, given the way they are behaving.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, all the sectors are in serious crisis: manufacturing, forestry and agriculture. The only sector this government has decided to help is the oil network.

How can this government justify the urgency to help the oil industry, which is making huge profits, if not to help his dear friends and tough luck for those who are waiting?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Bloc Québécois members have not read the latest polls as we have. They would have seen that things are not so rosy for them.

That said, we know there are problems in the forestry sector. This was clearly indicated in the Speech from the Throne. People know that when the Prime Minister makes a promise like the one he made in the Speech from the Throne—he said he was going to address the forestry situation—he keeps his word.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is pulling the rug from under future governments.

With the help of his Liberal partner, he has now decided to give massive tax cuts to big companies and their CEOs.

However, today's families are being robbed at the gas station. Their money is being taken at the ATMs and seniors have to choose between their rent and their medication. This is unfair!

Why did the Prime Minister decide to help big companies rather than our citizens and communities?

Oral Questions

● (1430)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought on a day like this he would have particularly had some compassion for people who work for big companies. We want to help people who work for big companies and have jobs there to keep those jobs. That is why we are helping make those companies more competitive. It is also why we are cutting those people's income tax.

That is also why we have cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, so every Canadian who pays taxes has more money to buy things like cars and other things that people who work for those big companies make, so they will have jobs and prosperity in the future.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to their new partner, the Liberals, the Prime Minister is able to assume that he now has a blank cheque to cut taxes for the biggest, most profitable corporations, the banks, the oil companies and the rest.

It is like George Bush. This is exactly what he did and he left the nation's finances in a terrible mess, which is where we are headed.

We are sitting on a manufacturing jobs crisis. Has the Prime Minister not even thought about what happened at Chrysler today? What about the people who are struggling to make ends meet? The gap is widening. Why not cope—

The Speaker: The hon. government House Leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the leader of the NDP has come up with his solution to jobs at a struggling Chrysler, tax them to death.

That is not the way jobs are created and that is not the way we help the people who work in those jobs. We have done things to help those companies be more competitive. We have increased the capital cost allowance in the last budget. We are cutting corporate taxes so they can be more competitive. We are cutting the GST so people can buy their cars, so they can buy manufactured goods, so they can spend more money, so they have a better standard of living.

The policies of the government are one of the reasons why we have the lowest rate of unemployment right now in 33 years. We still have more work to do, but we are doing it.

* * *

AIRBUS

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is truly shocking is that despite serious allegations around Mr. Mulroney's conduct, the only answer we get from the Conservative Party is "take it outside".

Taxpayer dollars are lining the pockets of Mr. Mulroney. Canadians deserve answers. Will the Conservative government announce an inquiry that is free and independent and that is free of Conservative meddling?

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

Speaker, former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien went to great lengths to say that he had nothing to do with any witch hunt on former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in this case. Yet now a member of that very cabinet seems to be wanting to engage in the exact same witch hunt. I think we now know what the real truth was.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of National Defence stated in this House in 1998:

Will the government do the right thing, clear the air on this sordid affair and call a public inquiry into the Airbus scandal?...When this happens, Canadians will be allowed to finally see the truth.

That was before anyone knew of the \$300,000 paid to Mr. Mulroney.

Does the Conservative government still believe Canadians deserve the truth?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not this government that paid \$2 million to Brian Mulroney to settle a lawsuit on false accusations. It was that Liberal Party. When it was in government, it dipped into taxpayer dollars for that sum to settle the issue. Perhaps it was sweeping that under the carpet.

Is that not cute? Today is the first year anniversary of the Gomery inquiry report. I guess we know about the Liberal practice of sweeping things under the carpet.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been the long-standing policy of our country, reaffirmed by Foreign Affairs as recently as last Friday, that "there is no death penalty in Canada and the government of Canada does not support the death penalty" and that it will "seek clemency for Canadians sentenced to death in foreign countries". Yet the government has now reversed this policy in not seeking clemency for Alberta-born Ronald Allen Smith, the only Canadian on death row in the United States.

Will the government reaffirm our long-standing policy restated last Friday and seek the commutation of a Canadian citizen?

● (1435)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will not be actively seeking to bring back to Canada convicted murderers who have been found as such in a jurisdiction that is both democratic and respects the rule of law. It would be a wrong message. We want to preserve public safety in Canada, and that is our position.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the commutation of a death penalty.

Oral Questions

Canadian law also prohibits the extradition of an American citizen back to a state in the United States that practises the death penalty. Why would we now refuse to intervene to protect a Canadian citizen sentenced to death in an American state, thereby effectively reinstating capital punishment for Canadians?

Are we going to, in fact, change our extradition law as well as change our policy on capital punishment?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no capital punishment in Canada. Nor is there any attempt at all to change that sort of a policy.

We will not actively pursue bringing back to Canada murderers who have been tried in a democratic country that supports the rule of law.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative economic statement does not include any measures to help the regions. This government has no plans for the manufacturing sector or the agricultural sector or the forestry sector or for employment insurance. Absolutely none. Zero.

How does the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec dare tell those living in the regions to wait six more months when they are in the midst of a serious economic crisis and nothing is being done to help the regions?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to read this quote from the association of manufacturers and exporters of Quebec—and I did say Quebec: “—we congratulate the Minister of Finance for recognizing the challenges faced by manufacturers with regard to competition.” What more can I add.

The throne speech mentions that we will intervene in the forestry sector. That commitment was made by our Prime Minister and, as a general rule, when our leader, our Prime Minister, says he is going to do something, he does it.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the agricultural sector was also left hanging. Yesterday, Laurent Pellerin, president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, said, “Producers in the agricultural and forestry sectors are very frustrated that the Minister of Finance completely ignored agriculture and private forestry in his economic statement even though people in those sectors are grappling with some of the worst crises their industries have ever experienced.”

How can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food say that he is helping farmers when there is nothing in the economic statement for them? Are he and his finance colleague ganging up on farmers?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that since the combined 2006-07 budget, the agricultural sector has received an additional \$4.5 billion. That is real help. We moved on article 28. Supply management was right there in black and white in the Speech from the Throne. My colleague voted against it. It looks like they are the ones who are against producers.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale came here to meet with the parties to raise awareness of the importance of international aid. The Minister of International Cooperation refused to meet with them.

During the meeting, we learned that the minister had contacted a number of groups to find out what portion of public funds they spent on lobbying and advocacy to protect basic rights.

Can the minister assure us that she is not putting together a list of organizations whose funding she is planning to cut?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, I can give that assurance.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, forgive me if I seem skeptical. The minister's history is sure to repeat itself. We have good reason to be concerned, because we all remember that this is the minister who cut funding to groups that promote women's rights.

Is she doing the same thing to international cooperation groups that she did to women?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this government has demonstrated, it is responsible. It takes each responsibility and makes the right decision for the right reasons.

I can assure members there is no intent, and we will ensure that our international aid money is effective, is focused and delivering results.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I travel across the country, I hear the same thing, from those with disabilities, from those who cannot read, from students, from aboriginals. I ask them what the government is doing and they say nothing or next to nothing: from seniors, from parents needing to work who have children needing to learn, nothing; from the poor, nothing; from people who live the experience, not just formulate life from their own minds, anything big, tough, anything that has to be taken on together, nothing.

Oral Questions

When will the government take this special opportunity and really do something?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the last government that did precisely nothing on these issues.

This government is spending more on child care and more on training than any government in history. We have reversed the big cuts the Liberals made to the Canada social transfer and have increased spending for education by 40% in a single year.

The question for the member is this. Why did he do nothing?

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public knows. It is hard to really do something about climate change. To take a real bite out of poverty, takes a long time and takes real commitment. That is the difference here.

With the Prime Minister, when he realized the public cared about climate change, his was no call on the road to Damascus conversion. His was a scheme on the road to an election conversion. To take on climate change and child poverty, one has to believe. Here is a believer. There is no believer.

When is the government actually going to do something?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have not seen overacting like that since Shatner on *Star Trek*.

This government is doing something for people on climate change and on poverty. We are putting more resources into housing than any government in the history of the country.

When we have the opportunity, we stand up for Canadians. We do not just sit there like the Liberals did.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I would remind hon. members today is Thursday, not Wednesday. Perhaps we could calm down a little.

The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the Conservative government does not care about workers, especially seasonal workers, when it comes time to provide them with help in the form of employment insurance.

The pilot project to bridge the gap is what ensures survival for a number of families during the difficult months, which are often the winter months.

Since we have heard nothing from the government regarding the pilot project, which expires in December, can the minister show a bit of compassion and announce that he will make this a permanent measure, or will he do what he always does for workers, which is nothing at all?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the good news is that in great swaths of the country the economy is creating a tremendous number of jobs, 500,000 in the last two years, 87,000 in Quebec this year alone. That is good news.

We do recognize that there are parts of the country where people are struggling to find full time employment and we are very sympathetic to people in that situation. The future of that pilot project will be judged accordingly.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister will not forget that there are also seasonal workers in the Atlantic regions.

On December 15, 1995, when the minister was in opposition, he had the audacity to say: “we are going to have to cut a lot deeper into our social programs”.

Clearly, the minister does not understand the reality facing our workers in the regions. If the minister truly had any compassion for these people, he would announce here today a permanent extension of all employment insurance pilot projects.

Will the minister make the announcements here today that our workers need to hear?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are doing a tremendous amount to help workers. We are investing more in training than any government in history. We have great faith in the potential for people to continue to contribute when they have been laid off.

We do understand that there are people in regions of this country where full time employment is not easily available. As I said before, we will judge the future of that EI pilot project accordingly.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, my colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, highlighted the good work our government is doing for Canadian women.

It is disappointing to hear opposition parties repeatedly misleading this House by suggesting that our government made cuts to Status of Women. Nothing could be further from the truth. We moved money from administration and directed it toward Canadian women in the form of projects that actually change lives.

Could the minister update the House on this support?

Oral Questions

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is proud of our support for Canadian women. Unlike the opposition parties, we have taken practical steps to address life's most difficult challenges: economic insecurity, lack of training, and violence against women.

[Translation]

A mentoring program for aboriginal women, another to prevent and combat violence against young women and young girls, and finally, a project to protect women with a developmental disability are just some of the initiatives recently announced by this government.

I am pleased to inform this House that a new call for project proposals under the program—

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

* * *

ECONOMIC STATEMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Finance, who describes himself as an elf, cannot decide whether it is Halloween or Christmas.

Our national elf went to his workshop to make a little present for his friends—including the banks—which will get at least \$12 billion more.

The Conservatives made a solemn promise to the municipalities to transfer 5¢ per litre of the gas tax to them.

Instead of paying the banks, will the Minister of Finance honour his formal commitment to the municipalities and—

The Speaker: The Hon. Minister of Finance.

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the tax reductions that were announced earlier this week in the financial statement give 75% to individuals and families in Canada, which is \$45 billion this year and the next five years as well, and \$15 billion to businesses in Canada.

Most of the businesses in Canada are small and medium size businesses. They are the great employers in this country. They are the growth in this country. We support small business in Canada.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance pretends to be something he is definitely not, and that is a friend to ordinary Canadians.

He did not get the job done on abusive ATM fees. He did not get the job done on retail prices. Harry Potter still costs more in Canada. Now we know who his real friends are: the banks, the oil companies and the Liberals who are letting him do it.

Now that he has decided that his priority is to give billions more to the banks, does he think he finally has the leverage he needs to get his buddies to lower ATM fees, or is he too afraid that they will send him packing again and humiliate him?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is rich coming from a member of the NDP who voted against reducing the GST for all Canadians yesterday in this House and who

voted against personal income tax reductions for all Canadians, which, by the way, they can claim in January because they are retroactive to January this year. Therefore, it is important for Canadians to get their tax returns in quickly in the new year.

This is what he voted against: \$45 billion in tax reductions for ordinary Canadian men and women and he says that he cares about them.

* * *

● (1450)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has now taken steps to stop the Chief of the Defence Staff from providing Canadians with honest answers about our combat mission in Afghanistan. If the Prime Minister were more willing to be truthful about the mission, this would not be an issue, but Canadians need the true opinion of the Chief of the Defence Staff now more than ever.

Did the Prime Minister or anyone from his office communicate with General Hillier and give him any direction regarding his public comments?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current government has misled Canadians about the failure of our mission in Afghanistan for a long time. Now, officials with the Prime Minister's Office are gagging General Hillier and preventing him from telling Canadians the truth, because the government does not have a realistic plan for ending our combat mission in February 2009.

Why is the Prime Minister not letting General Hillier tell us and the people of this country what he really thinks about our mission in Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. Mr. Hillier had the opportunity to speak to the media and the troops on the ground in Afghanistan. That is clear.

Our government is also clear about the end of the mission. There is a vote in the House of Commons and a plan to consult the House of Commons. This is not the same approach as the one taken by the former government or the opposition members.

Oral Questions

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in November 2005, I chaired a special meeting to address the issue of agent orange and compensation for our veterans. The current Minister of Veterans Affairs was also invited as he represents that area. He and his Conservative Party stated that we should use the studies from the Americans and that they were all completed and that it was sufficient enough.

The Conservatives also said that if they were government they would compensate immediately. It has been two long years. They have just announced a partial proposal for compensation. Why did it take them so long? Why are they not treating our veterans fairly?

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as everyone well knows, we are treating our veterans fairly and that man, that individual, that member came from a government that had 13 years to do it and did not.

What we have done is fair and generous and the veterans know that and the people in those communities know that. Why? Because I have met with them and he has not.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the son of a World War II veteran, that man is being intellectually dishonest with that response. The government's record speaks for itself: broken promises on agent orange; broken promises to injured soldiers who are in court today to get their compensation; and broken promises to veterans' widows in the letter from the Prime Minister promising Mrs. Joyce Carter that he "would immediately extend the Veterans Independence Program services to the widows of all Second World War and Korean War veterans".

Can the Prime Minister keep his word? Can he and the minister be honest?

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I consider what he used as unparliamentary language. What a hypocrite.

This what he and his Liberal colleagues did when they were in power. I will go through the list. They do not like this list because this is what they cut and eliminated. They cut VIP services to allied veterans. They cut burial programs for veterans. They cut travel rates and treatment benefits to veterans. In successive budgets they eliminated over \$100 billion in benefits to veterans. That is their sorry record.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, *Le peuple invisible* was shown on opening night of the Festival du cinéma international en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. This documentary reveals the terrible living conditions of the Algonquin, who are without running water, electricity or adequate housing. Unfortunately, there were no federal government officials in attendance, even though this was an important event.

With all due respect for the will and the autonomy of the Algonquin community of Kitcisakik, what does the government plan to do to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants?

• (1455)

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is keenly aware of the issues that have been raised in this documentary. In fact, we are putting roughly \$64 million into the Algonquin of Quebec. I hope that this will continue to advance these people.

However, that member and his party do not support extending the Canadian Human Rights Act to first nations people, which is an essential step and one that we must take for Canadian first nations.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is no secret to anyone that the forestry industry is facing a catastrophic situation. Forestry companies are having to get creative, just to survive. This is what ARC Resins, a subsidiary of Tembec, did by proposing an original and unique project to construct beams made of composite materials. We still do not know the fate awaiting this important file, which was presented to the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

Can the minister tell us where he is in examining that file and when he plans to give this project the authorization needed to move forward?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ARC Resins file is indeed very interesting. It is a wonderful project, especially since it involves re-manufacturing. The company wants to manufacture railway ties.

Initially, the file was not one of the regional office's priorities. However, it was brought to my attention and I asked to see the file. I can inform the hon. member that the file is currently being examined. We hope to reach an agreement with the sponsor and the partners to get this new project off the ground. If we are successful, that would be great.

* * *

[English]

ATLANTIC ACCORD

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic accord fiasco continues. The minister in the Senate says that there will not be legislation on the Nova Scotia side deal and the defence minister says that there will.

Oral Questions

Nothing is in writing and there is no information provided. As a matter of fact, the government has not made one mention in detail how this will affect Newfoundland and Labrador.

Is there another piece of legislation? Is there another side deal? Perhaps there is nothing at all. It seems that Premier Danny Williams scared them the most this Halloween.

Will the Conservatives finally shed some light on this phantom side deal in Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me shed some light on the hon. member's effort to put darkness over what is a very good deal for Atlantic Canada, a deal that is available to his province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is a fair and flexible approach to federalism that gives an option to participate in the national equalization program. In fact, it expands upon it for the province of Nova Scotia. It is on the Nova Scotia website. There is an exchange of letters between the Minister of Finance for Canada and the minister of finance for Nova Scotia.

The equalization formula is there for all to see. If the member would take a little time and study those details he might just get it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, PQ supporters are calling on the Bloc Québécois to fold since they cannot support two separatist parties. Out of a possible 308 seats, the Bloc runs just 75 candidates. The Bloc confines Quebec to a role outside leadership circles, on the sidelines. In 17 years in Ottawa, the Bloc has made no decisions and has accomplished nothing.

Can the Secretary of State for Agriculture tell us what the Conservative government is doing to advance the interests of Quebec's producers?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean asked an excellent question. I agree with him that the Bloc is not in a position to advance the interests of Quebec. In matters of agriculture, the Bloc cannot and will never be able to do anything for our producers. After 13 years of inaction, it is the Conservative government that is defending supply management, supporting our hog producers, investing in biofuel and encouraging the next generation.

All of that is in the Speech from the Throne. It presented clear commitments, but, again, the Bloc voted against it. With the Bloc, Quebec is idling. With the Conservatives, the nation of Quebec can finally move forward and flourish.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that France, as a precautionary measure, will indefinitely suspend cultivation of GMO corn and cited concerns about its safety, usefulness and uncontrolled dissemination. The conservative French

government has banned a product which has been authorized for use in Canada since 1997.

Independent scientific evidence suggests significant threat to human health from this product. Will the government commit today to follow the responsible path that France has taken? Will it act in order to protect Canadian families?

• (1500)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite said, we have grown that particular corn in this country for years. Our science is sound. We are moving ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of Canadians must never be compromised. And yet we learn that there have been budgetary cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that will limit the ability of the agency to protect Canadians. Allowing industry employees to conduct inspections is not a solution. That is the wrong direction.

Can the minister tell us how he can improve the inspection of our food by making draconian cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's budget?

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the NDP is wrong. There are no budget cuts at the CFIA at this time.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recent changes to the Canada Elections Act have resulted in the vote being stripped from one million rural Canadians. These changes will affect at least 80% of voters in my riding, including myself. This is not acceptable. These problems must be solved immediately by new legislation, not some administrative band-aid.

The government is consulting, but that is not enough. When will the votes of rural Canadians be fully restored by law?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the hon. member has not yet had an opportunity to inspect the notice paper for today, but the bill was put on notice yesterday. It will be introduced tomorrow. I look forward to the support of all parties on this important bill.

*Routine Proceedings***LABOUR**

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the Prime Minister visited Latin America in order to establish new partnerships and enhance our relationships in Latin America and the Caribbean. He demonstrated our government's commitment to playing a bigger role in our hemisphere and highlighted the need to re-engage in these countries.

Would the Minister of Labour inform the House what he is doing to make sure that labour policy is part of this re-engagement?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with Peru and Columbia and, along with it, a labour agreement.

I will be travelling to these countries in the next few days to advance these discussions. Our goal is to include provisions on labour law that will be stronger than those negotiated in previous agreements.

The best way to make progress is to include our partners and not to ignore them. That is how we will be proceeding.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. There was an exchange during question period that I did not hear all of between two hon. members, the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the hon. member for Scarborough Centre. I intend to review the transcript and will get back to the House, if necessary, if there were words used that were unparliamentary.

* * *

• (1505)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery, and I have several announcements in this regard today, of His Excellency Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2007 Governor General's Awards for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History. Their names are: Ms. Rhonda Draper; Ms. Rose Fine-Meyer; Ms. Susan Haynes; Mr. John MacPhail; Madame Monique Martin; and Mr. David Watkins.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: On the upcoming occasion of Veterans Week, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Canadian war veterans, peacekeepers and a current serving member of the military, namely: Mr. Fred Engelbrecht and Pauline Flynn, World War II veterans; Bill Black, a Korean War veteran; Ray Paquette, a peacekeeping veteran; and Master Warrant Officer Timothy Power, a current serving member of the military.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: There have been consultations between the parties. Therefore, before the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs rises to make a statement, I would invite all hon. members to rise for a minute of silence to commemorate our war veterans.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

VETERANS WEEK

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Wednesday, October 31, 2007, the House will now proceed to statements by ministers. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is the best country in the world and each of us in this House understands that. We enjoy rights and freedoms that many other countries simply have never known or will ever know. We owe much of this, if not all of this, to the brave men and women in uniform who are always willing to defend Canada, who have always stood up for Canada.

Other nations also understand how blessed we are. When we visit those countries that have been conquered or occupied by a foreign army, we realize just what remembrance truly means.

It was the former Minister of Veterans Affairs, a member of Parliament still serving in this House, who first told me about the deep appreciation I would gain from going overseas with our veterans. At the time the former minister had only called to congratulate me on my posting, but as we spoke, he told me that I would be changed by the visits I would make to the countries we helped liberate and that having the privilege to go to these nations with the very Canadian soldiers who made history there decades ago would have a lasting effect on me. I was told it would change the way that I view our country and that it would have a profound impact on the way that I look at our men and women in uniform. He was right.

I believe all members of Parliament who have made these sacred journeys have reached the same conclusion. They have watched the same emotional scenes play out before their very eyes with lasting impact.

We can see it happening in places like Monchy-le-Preux, a beautiful little town in rural France, a place where so many Newfoundland and Canadian soldiers gave their lives in defence of peace and freedom in the first world war.

Last April when our Canadian delegation went to France to mark the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, there was an early morning ceremony held in Monchy-le-Preux. It was not a national holiday and it was not a civic holiday, but the entire town was there. Banks were closed. Businesses had shut their doors. Farmers, housewives and school children came from villages far and wide.

Routine Proceedings

It always happens like this. When Canada comes to commemorate its fallen soldiers, the grateful people of Monchy-le-Preux, as with their sister communities, want to be there with us. They simply want another chance to say thank you.

This gratitude is real and it is lasting. It is handed down from generation to generation, like a family treasure, a sacred bond that will not be broken.

We see it every time our veterans return to the countries they helped liberate. We can see it in the eyes of the local children laying wreaths alongside our aging veterans. Quite simply, the expressions on their faces say it all.

It does not matter that many of these soldiers are now in their twilight years or that the passage of time has slowed their walk or caused their salutes to grow unsteady. Despite the physical challenges, despite the challenges of their aging bodies, they make the salute every time.

This determination in turn makes the children's admiration for our veterans even greater, because they know they are looking at the very men and women who freed their countries. They know that they are in the presence of the Canadians they have read about, they have learned about and their parents and grandparents have told them about. They know they are among heroes. That is why these countries welcome our veterans so warmly.

They know our history, our stories, our pain, our suffering. They know about the Fred Engelbrechts, a Dieppe veteran who, with his daughter Lynda, joined our delegation, returning this summer to that French coastal town 65 years after that impossible mission, that impossible landing on that distant rocky shore.

• (1510)

Together, hand in hand, Fred and his daughter were walking through the cemeteries of Dieppe when he found the graves of some of his fallen friends. It was then that the memories came flooding back to Fred. It was there that he broke down and wept for all the years that had passed, for the comrades who had never returned home with him, who had never realized their own dreams, who had never raised a family, and who could not, as he did then, return to that sacred place holding a daughter's hand.

That is why in Europe they line the streets to see our veterans parade through their towns and villages. From the youngest to the oldest, they want to reach out with spontaneous tears of gratitude to say thank you. Because the memories of the foreign invasions and occupations will remain with them forever.

We might ask ourselves how they could possibly remember after all those years. All I can say is that they will never forget.

One afternoon in a village church a French farm woman approached me with a single rose. She presented the rose to me. She wanted me to take it back to Canada. She wanted me to take it home.

She explained that it came from a rose bush on her family's farm, a farm that was completely destroyed during the first world war. The family's home was gone, the farm was gone, the animals were gone, and their way of life was gone. The only sign that the farm had ever

existed, the only thing that grew back from that total devastation, was a rose bush. For her, that single rose bush is her daily reminder, a living reminder of her freedom.

In Europe, such remembrance is part of their being. It is who they are, "in sunshine or in shadow". That is why when we lead Canadian delegations to the historic battlefields overseas, to Vimy, Passchendaele and Dieppe, there is no need to explain our presence to the local communities. They instinctively understand. As the mayor of one of these French towns told me, there are more Canadians buried in the surrounding communities than there are French citizens living in those communities today, 90 years later.

We all know that is Canada's sacrifice. That is our history. Canada is a nation that has always sent its finest men and women to serve where they are needed and in numbers far exceeding what the world might have expected.

But such willingness to act has come with a terrible price. In the two great wars alone, more than 116,000 Canadians made the ultimate sacrifice, a loss experienced by countless families across this country.

It was felt in Newfoundland, which was only a colony of barely a quarter of a million people during the first world war, when in just 30 minutes an entire generation of Newfoundlanders, Newfoundland's leaders, was lost in the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel. Of the 801 members of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment who went over the top that morning, 733 would not answer roll call the next morning. Only 68 did.

This is the type of sacrifice that Canada has bravely made, not just in the great wars, but in Korea and on peacekeeping and peacemaking operations throughout our history. That is the type of sacrifice Canadians continue to make today to defend our way of life and to protect the values we cherish: freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

Never was our tradition of great sacrifice, both past and present, made more painfully clear than when we were in France this April. We were there to remember Canada's heroic efforts at Vimy Ridge 90 years earlier. The world had come together to commemorate the battle that defined Canada, that marked our nation's coming of age.

• (1515)

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was there. Our Prime Minister was there, as was the French prime minister. So were a number of members of Parliament, including the deputy leader of the opposition, and of course, Mr. Speaker, you yourself were there. All of us were there to share this proud moment on a glorious day that only a poet could properly describe.

Yet when we prepared to honour and celebrate our history, a sombre reality was weighing on our minds. Only one day earlier, six Canadian soldiers serving in Afghanistan had made the ultimate sacrifice. When Her Majesty referenced this in her speech, the sombre reality of what we had achieved then and what we are doing today connected.

Routine Proceedings

That simple, handwritten sentence in Her Majesty's speech was a powerful reminder that freedom is never free and has never been free, and that when the world calls, Canada answers, because that is the Canadian way. That is our proud tradition. That is what we remember today.

At times like these, words cannot help but fail us. As a scholar once noted, words are all we have and words are not enough. Words cannot begin to describe the men and women behind the incomprehensible numbers and the tragic statistics of war, individuals who loved and were loved.

And now it falls upon us to keep faith with them. All those who have served will tell us that the greatest gift that we can give any veteran is the gift of remembrance. Many of our men and women in uniform have heard this in the final wishes, the dying wishes, of their comrades. They do not want to be forgotten. They do not want to have died in vain.

On November 11, we know where all members of Parliament will be. In the next few days when we leave this House, we will return to the people who sent us here, the people we represent, and we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them in our largest cities and our smallest villages.

Together we will be with our veterans to honour their own promises to remember their fallen comrades, to remember those buried at home and those buried in foreign lands, with unfinished lives. We will say thank you. We will say thank you on behalf of a grateful nation.

Lest we forget.

• (1520)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout our history this Parliament has asked Canadians to cross the oceans to fight for a better world. For more than 100,000 who answered the call, it was a better world and a better future they would never live to see.

While young Canadians have gone to the front lines, we members of Parliament have stayed here in the sanctuary of this House, striving to build a country worthy of their sacrifices.

During Veterans' Week, we recognize that above all it is our men and women in uniform who have made Canada one of the great nations of the world. Peace, freedom and democracy are their legacy at home and abroad.

[*Translation*]

Like the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, I have been on Canadian delegations to the sites of old battlefields and was deeply moved by the traces I found there of their fight for peace, freedom and democracy.

In 2005, I travelled to the Netherlands to take part in the ceremonies marking the sixtieth anniversary of its liberation. I was deeply saddened by my visit to the Canadian military cemetery of Groesbeek. In the rows of gravestones there, I could see what the price of freedom was. I can say too, though, that I felt enormous pride at the sight of a crowd of more than 100,000 men, women and children who had come to see our veterans march past through the streets of Wageningen.

In another city in the Netherlands, new streets had been named after Canadian soldiers who died for the freedom of Holland. The children there learn the history of our soldiers better than our own children do.

The gratitude expressed by the Dutch people was very touching.
[*English*]

This Veterans' Week, Canadians will reflect on the sacrifices of the veterans of the last century while mourning the loss of today's Canadian heroes in Afghanistan. This Remembrance Day, we will remember and revere them, along with their fallen comrades.

I will stand with Agatha Dawkins, mother of Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, in my riding of Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, as I have for the last five years. We will remember her son. We will remember his sacrifices as well as hers.

Over the last century, wars have left their mark on thousands of Canadian families. Children have lost parents. Parents have had to bury their children. And how many marriages have ended in a single bomb blast?

This past summer, I saw the sacrifices of war first-hand when I met with military families in Dieppe, New Brunswick. Listening to their stories, I was able to better understand the impact Canada's current presence abroad is having here at home.

Providing for these families is the least we can do. Providing comfort to those who have lost loved ones and remembering those who have served and continue to serve is the absolute least our country can do.

From November 5 to 11, we must pay tribute to our veterans by honouring their sacrifices and the sacrifices of their families. On Remembrance Day, we must stand together in a moment of silence to demonstrate our commitment to their legacy.

But a moment, a day, or a week will never be enough.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

The Canadian soldiers sacrificed the best years of their lives and their dreams for the future to defend the values we all hold dear.

In the tunnels of Vimy, on the beaches of Normandy, and in the deserts of Kandahar, they have given their lives so that we can live free.

We need to pass on their history to the next generation of Canadians so that these soldiers will never be forgotten.

In 2005, during Veterans' Week, former national defence minister Bill Graham said how important it is to hold high the flame of remembrance and gratitude, a flame that burned so brightly during the Year of the Veteran.

That same year, we paid tribute to our veterans by opening the Canadian War Museum.

Visitors here can experience the human side of war through the panels, military artifacts, photographs and personal accounts on display.

In the Canadian War Museum, the lives of the approximately 1,500,000 men and women who have served in the Canadian army, navy and air force are etched into the memory of visitors.

Our young people learn things here, we hope, that will help them avoid similar tragedies in the future.

[*English*]

There are not a lot of countries that have ever sent their armies abroad for reasons other than to help peace and democracy. We must be very proud of the fact that Canada is one of them.

Feeding the flame of remembrance also means ensuring the dedication of our soldiers is matched by our resolve to do all we can to protect their safety and preserve their health. That is the reason we delivered the new veterans charter in 2005.

The government must match the higher level of sacrifice it asks of our military with the resources soldiers and their families need to cope with the impact of the mission on their health and future. I encourage the government and all members of the House to accept this solemn responsibility.

In Flanders Fields, Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae recognized the poppies growing amongst the crosses as a symbol of hope, of the triumph of nature over the destructive forces of war.

In this House, let the poppies we wear over our hearts remind us of our responsibility to our troops. Let us keep faith with them and feed the flame of their remembrance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as happens every year on about this date, we are paying tribute today to our veterans. We remember our veterans. We remember all of the soldiers who have worn the uniform and have always been prepared to serve, in peacetime and in war, with bravery and tenacity.

While no one wishes for armed conflict, it is sometimes a necessity. When that happens, the soldiers are sent, whether on peacekeeping missions or on more dangerous missions, to risk their lives.

These men and women who have served in the armed forces for years do it not for personal glory or fortune, but because of the duty they feel to their fellow citizens. They sacrifice themselves out of their sense of duty to the democratic values we hold dear. When the need arises, they go to the front lines to protect what we at home believe is right and good.

When we see their unwavering commitment, it is only fair that we pay tribute to them, reminding ourselves of the hard road they have had to travel. Their sacrifices have won them the most honourable reward we can give: immortal memory, a memory constantly kept alive in our words and our hearts.

We remember the anguish and terror they had to overcome in the face of the horrors of war. Because we live in a democracy, they were able to talk about what they did, and that is why we can speak of their valour. They knew exactly what hardships awaited them, and still they did not turn away from the danger; they met it head on, with pride.

Routine Proceedings

We remember the hard work done by the soldiers to bring peace, security, freedom and equality to countries ravaged by war, in places like Europe and Korea. Not only did they fight the oppression of dictatorship, but they also restored hope to the people there by helping them to regain their dignity and freedom.

And so as we take time to remember, we have a very special thought for our soldiers who are now in Afghanistan, and especially for the men and women of the 22nd Regiment from Valcartier. No matter what we may think about the policy behind the Afghan mission, we must acknowledge the work and sacrifice of the soldiers from Quebec and Canada. Let us not forget that the soldiers of today will be the veterans of tomorrow.

We must also remember the perpetual sacrifice demanded of the family and friends of soldiers posted abroad. And our remembering must also take concrete form, for the benefit of the veterans who are still among us. We must give them all of the help they need to deal with the physical and psychological effects of their experiences in the theatre of operations.

It is unacceptable that soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress should not be able to receive the care they need, and that they have more than earned, without delay.

It is too easy to honour our veterans in word alone, while leaving them to suffer. We cannot and must not turn a deaf ear to their pain. Their job was to go to the front lines, and our job today is to express our gratitude to them by giving them all the care they need.

● (1530)

We must keep the sacrifices of the people who have fought to bring peace to the troubled places on earth alive in our memory, from each generation to the next.

Lest we forget.

● (1535)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure to rise in the House of Commons to pay tribute, not only on behalf of my party and my constituents but of all of Canada, and join my colleagues in praising the work done by our veterans and current service personnel.

The name of Jack Ford may not mean very much to most people in here, but it soon will. He is a Newfoundlander, who was in a Japanese war camp in Japan, and he witnessed the atomic bombing in Nagasaki. He is one of the few people left in the world who can tell us of what happened that tragic day. His book on his memories will be out very soon.

There is the story of Stan Mackenzie of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. He was a merchant mariner, who was torpedoed off the coast of Nova Scotia. For two and a half days he rode back to the coast, then signed up with the RCMP for the *St. Roch* journey around the Northwest Passage from 1942 to 1944.

He is one of the few Canadians who was awarded the Polar Medal, but that was not enough for him. In 1944 he then joined up and served in the battlefields of Europe. He is still with us as well.

Business of the House

Unfortunately, due to the passage of time and being elderly and of sickness, by the time we all go to sleep tonight, we will lose 120 veterans and/or their spouses. To the ones who have been left behind, the ones who are still with us, we owe them a debt of gratitude and say to them personally "Thank you for your sacrifice".

On a personal note, as a Dutch-born Canadian who was born in Holland and who is now able to stand in the House of Commons, I would like to tell our veterans who are before us what they specifically did for my family.

My father was a prisoner of war for two years in Germany, from 1942 to 1944. When the camp was liberated, he came across a Canadian soldier. He asked the Canadian soldier why Canada did so much for our country of the Netherlands. The young Canadian soldier said, in typical modesty, "Sir, we had a job to do". That was the first time in my dad's life that anyone ever called him sir. He handed my dad a chocolate and a cigarette and moved on.

In 1956, when the Dutch government made the decision to close the mining towns of Limburg over a few years period, the only answer in those days was out-migration. My father said to my mother, "If they have a military like that, can you imagine what kind of country they come from?", so we chose to come to Canada. We settled in the Vancouver area.

That Christmas my mom was given a turkey by the church. She did not know what a turkey was, but she knew it was meat and she knew we would be cooking with gas, if we had meat in 1956. She was a Dutch Canadian. She did not know what to do with a turkey, so she did what any good Dutch Canadian would have done in those days. She cut it up in tiny pieces and fried it in a cast iron skillet to feed to the family.

The neighbour next door came by to see how the turkey was coming along. She roared with laughter when she saw what my mom had done, so she went out and got my mom another turkey.

That Christmas, during Christmas dinner, was the first time in my parents' lives, after the depression, the war, the loss of a child at birth, the imprisonment of my father, the post-war deprivation of Europe, the move from their country to another country, when they knew if they kept their faith in God and worked hard, Canada would bestow many blessings upon them and their family.

That is what those veterans did for my family and for many thousands of Dutch people and Europeans in the war in Europe, from 1940 to 1945, and we thank them

For our modern day veterans, Louise Richard and Sean Bruyey, who served in the gulf war and came back with injuries that we could not even begin to comprehend, for the ones who served in Afghanistan who are coming back, for the parents who recently lost their sons and daughters in Afghanistan, for them, Remembrance Day is every day.

Men and women who sign up for our RCMP and our armed forces have unlimited liability. They are willing to lay their lives on the line so we can have a good night's sleep in our communities and our great country called Canada. We in Parliament and in government have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that their needs and those of their families are met.

I ask all Canadians, during this Remembrance Week, when they see the veterans, the armed forces personnel and those serving in our police forces, go up and give them a hug. Buy them a beverage on Remembrance Day. Take them out and say "Thank you, once again". Look them in the eye and say, "Without you, we would not have the country we have today".

• (1540)

On behalf of everyone, I want to personally salute the men and women of our military, past and foregone, and say to them that we know why they wear their medals with pride. It is not just for valour and distinction in service to their country. They wear them because of the many men and women who never had a chance to wear theirs because they paid the ultimate sacrifice. It is we who love them. It is we who bless them. May God bless them and their families. We salute all veterans and current service personnel.

Lest we forget.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank all hon. members who spoke for their eloquent contributions to the debate on this special day.

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 33 minutes.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to apologize for the unparliamentary language directly, if possible through you, to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I think it was precipitated by what I viewed to be some inaccuracies in his response, which I am sure the former minister will sort out in a future question during question period.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has apologized for the use of unparliamentary language and that is the end of the matter.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would give us a succinct description of the business that he plans for tomorrow and for the first week when the House returns after the Remembrance Day break.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because the official opposition was in disarray or whatever, it was unprepared to stand in the House and ask the Thursday question last week. As a result, I was unable to inform the House that this week's theme is "Effective Economic Leadership".

[*Translation*]

I am proud to say that to date, we have been very successful.

Yesterday, the House approved the government's budgetary and economic plan to provide tax relief to Canadians by reducing the GST to 5% and cutting personal and business income taxes.

[English]

Tomorrow, we will continue to provide effective economic leadership by debating Bill C-7, which would amend the Aeronautics Act; Bill C-15, which would assist in developing natural resources, in Nova Scotia in particular; Bill C-4, which would amend the Pilotage Act; and C-14, which would amend the Canada Post Act.

If time permits, we will also continue with our plan to tackle crime and strengthen security by debating Bill C-3, which would improve the security certificate process.

Next week will be “Honouring our Veterans Week”, allowing members to be in their ridings during this important time.

Today, I would like to recognize the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound who worked hard to make it a reality.

[Translation]

When the House resumes, we will carry on with our very full legislative agenda for democratic reform.

[English]

Therefore, I am proud to inform the House that the theme for that week will be “Strengthening our Federation through Democratic Reform Week”.

[Translation]

On Wednesday, November 14, the government will discuss Bill C-6 concerning the visual identification of voters.

[English]

We will also be debating legislation that we put on notice last night to address the issue of verification of residence for rural voters.

[Translation]

We hope that the opposition parties will work with the government to pass these two bills quickly before a general election or byelections take place.

[English]

We will continue to work toward increasing voter turnout by debating our expanded voting opportunities bill in committee, which would increase the number of advance polling days.

We will also move forward with other parts of our agenda to modernize Canadian democracy.

By debating and passing these legislative initiatives, we will strengthen Canada's political institutions and enhance public confidence in the integrity and accountability of those institutions.

[Translation]

Finally, Tuesday, November 13, will be a supply day, and today we will resume debate on the opposition motion.

• (1545)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that the official opposition did not ask the usual Thursday question

Business of Supply

last week, maybe I can be permitted to add a small additional question.

Would the government House leader tell the House when the government intends to introduce the legislation stemming from yesterday's ways and means motion? Maybe he could enlighten us on that point. I am sure we would find it very helpful.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, there will be a further budget implementation bill coming forward. I am not certain which specific measures the hon. member has in mind, but it will obviously be some time after the break.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: When the debate was interrupted, the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert had eight minutes remaining.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour and pleasure of beginning my speech before question period. I had the opportunity to spend two minutes talking about improving women's economic security, which the Liberal Party's motion addresses.

To sum up, I said that in the Conservative Party's 2005-06 election platform, the word “woman” appeared only twice. The first time, it referred to women as victims, and the second, as mothers. I said that women are more than victims or mothers. For example, during question period, it seemed to me that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages talked about status of women in terms of victims and women with disabilities.

We are not just victims, women with disabilities or mothers. In Quebec and Canada, we are also workers. Much remains to be done to improve the status of women as workers. The first thing I would like to talk about is pay equity.

In Quebec, since 1996, the Pay Equity Act has corrected the salary gaps resulting from gender-based discrimination. Too often, men and women do not receive the same pay, as I will illustrate in a few moments. This disparity still exists at the federal level. The Bloc Québécois wants to see new, separate and proactive pay equity legislation for workers governed by the Canada Labour Code.

We know that the income of women is lower than that for men. In 2003, the average annual income for women 16 years of age and older was \$24,400, while men earned an average of \$39,300, putting women's income at 62% of men's. That is not right. For equal work, people should receive equal pay.

Business of Supply

In the years prior to 2003, the situation was even worse. However, we see that there has been a slight improvement. The average income for women in 2003 was 13% higher than in 1997. That means the gap was not quite as wide, but that was scarcely better and still not very good.

Moreover, we see that more women than men are attending university and that should have an effect on income. However, such is not the case. Among young women, the gap has been reduced but there is still a difference, even though they are better educated. In constant 2000 dollars, the average income of men who attended university was \$45,054 in 2001 while the average for women was \$36,782.

What about the income tax cuts in the Conservatives economic statement this week? They do not in any way improve the situation of women. On the contrary, they increase gender inequality. The Conservatives have proven once again that they are incapable of being concerned about the living conditions of women. On one hand, they have cut funding to almost all women's organizations, some of which have had to close their doors. We are talking about women's organizations that are dedicated to promoting the status of women. What is more, this week, the Conservatives made cuts that affect women more than men.

In fact, women will receive a smaller income tax reduction than men because we know that men earn more than women do. As a result, two single people whose only difference is their gender will not receive the same income tax reduction at the lowest level. The reduction of the minimum rate from 15.5% to 15% means that a single male will have an additional \$113 in 2007. However, a single woman in the same bracket will have only \$53 more in the same taxation year. That amounts to less than half the amount for a man.

It really is a shame. It shows once again that the Conservatives are doing nothing to improve the status of women. that they do not understand and that they do not care. They are doing absolutely nothing to reduce the salary gap between men and women.

• (1550)

As I said, Quebec passed proactive legislation back in 1996. It requires employers to have a policy on pay equity. With the federal legislation under the Canada Labour Code, women have to lodge a complaint. So a woman who is all by herself, not organized, in a union or not, has to get up good and early in order to take on her employer and all her employer's lawyers to demand more equity. The result is that very few women take up the struggle, and if they do so, it is through their union. Even then, they are not out of the woods.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada, one of the largest unions in the country, battled the government for nearly 20 years for pay equity. It was thanks to its former president Nicole Turmel, an extraordinary woman, that the union finally won. However, it took 20 years of legal proceedings for these women to win their struggle for pay equity. It took 15 years for the telephone operators at Bell Canada. The struggle at Canada Post has been going on for 24 years and still is not over. The employer has decided to appeal to the highest levels.

What can a woman do against the army of lawyers that employers like Canada Post, Bell Canada or the federal government can throw at her? It is David and Goliath all over again. It does not make any sense, and that is why the Government of Canada should put pay equity legislation into the Canada Labour Code. In this way, women would not have to go out individually to seek their rights.

I see I have a minute left. The anti-strikebreaker legislation would also help women, as would legislation on psychological harassment and protective re-assignment. The Bloc Québécois already introduced a bill to this effect in May 2005.

In conclusion, it is not true that the Conservative government cannot do anything in the face of so much inequality between men and women in the workplace and in their incomes. The Conservatives should be roundly condemned for the way in which they have behaved toward status of women organizations.

In the meantime, the Bloc Québécois supports the Liberal motion and I will personally take great pleasure in voting for it.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I would also like to thank my colleague for her eloquent speech.

Given that pay inequity has been prohibited by the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms since 1975—32 years have passed if I am not mistaken since pay inequity was recognized—does my colleague not believe that this government should be more proactive and stop dithering?

To date, the government's response to this problem have not been very concrete. As she indicated, pay inequity is a serious problem.

I would like to hear her views on how long this has been allowed to go on. Given that it is found in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, is it not somewhat immoral that the government is not doing something about this?

• (1555)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

There is in fact something immoral about this Conservative government. The first immoral thing is the fact that only 13% of the candidates in the last election were women. I have not done the math, but the Conservative Party is certainly the party with the least representation by women in the House of Commons.

This situation is not simply a matter of it being absolutely necessary to have equal representation of women and men, or to have women account for 52% of elected representatives because they represent 52% of the population. The problem is that the Conservative government is dominated by men and is insensitive to the status of women and the needs of women.

Pay equity should be included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is right! Pay equity should be a fundamental right. There is also the question of protective withdrawal of work. In addition to the real measures set out in the Charter, there should also be other concrete measures taken by this Conservative government.

Earlier, I raised the question of protective withdrawal, an extremely important question. It would allow a pregnant woman working in an environment that is harmful to her or to her fetus to stop working and still receive 90% of her net pay, as is the case in Quebec, without having to mortgage her employment insurance, as women working in companies governed by the Canada Labour Code must unfortunately do.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a letter from many local and provincial organizations to the Prime Minister, the women stated that:

—when a country like Canada enacts constitutional rights it takes for granted that residents, when they believe the government is violating their rights, can and will challenge the offending law or policy. If residents cannot use their rights because of financial barriers, then Canada's constitutional democracy is hollow.

I wonder if the hon. member would expand on and explain to the House the elimination of the charter challenge, how that directly impacts on women's rights in this country. Does she consider women's rights to be the same as human rights and how all of that affects women's ability to participate in both the economic and social success of Canada?

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. It is in fact an excellent question. Why are women's rights and pay equity not looked at as being equal in importance to the other rights in the charters? Why is that?

As I was explaining earlier, I believe this is inherent in the Conservative government, the Conservative Party, where fewer than 13% of the party's candidates in the last election were women. Thirteen percent! That is nothing, when women make up 52% of the population. The Conservatives could only find enough women to make up 13% of the people representing them.

There are two reasons for this. First, there is obviously no interest, no awareness of the status of women, and second, women may not be interested in the Conservative Party, which has never stood up for their rights. All it has done since being elected is eliminate funding for status of women organizations, on the pretext that too much money was being spent on administration. I would like to see them organize things and not have administrative expenses.

So only 13% of the Conservative Party's candidates were women. There are also not very many women in their cabinet or on their benches. The result is that that party is totally lacking in any awareness of the problems women face and the inequity that exists in our society today.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg South Centre, one of the great MPs in the House.

It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to this motion. I want to commend my colleague from Beaches—East York, who has championed many causes in this area for a long time in the House, along with other members of our women's caucus who have produced the pink book and other documents and reports specific to issues that are generally regarded as women's issues.

Business of Supply

I will begin with a quote by Harriett Grant from the book entitled, *Our Grandmothers, Ourselves: Reflections of Canadian Women*. She said:

Women accomplish many things throughout their lives, but so much of it is taken for granted and not applauded as it should be.

I think those words are very true.

When the government took office, I believe it had an agenda to cut funding to organizations and programs that sought to assist women and minority groups in this country. If we listen to the words of the Prime Minister's good friend, Tom Flanagan, and I will not repeat the entire quote as many people have spoken to this today, he indicated that the government made a nice step early on when it de-funded the court challenges program. He said that on CBC Radio. That is pretty scandalous.

When the Conservatives came into power, they cut the child care accord right away. They cut the Kelowna accord. They went on to cut the Atlantic accord. They do not seem to like accords. The Prime Minister must never drive by a Honda dealership.

Many of us could not believe it when the government announced, just months into office, billions of dollars in cuts to social programs, many of which impacted women the most. Why would anyone cut funding to these organizations? Why would the government cut funds when it is awash in cash? The reason is clear and I believe ideological. It is a relatively new and divisive approach to Canadian politics brought in by the party opposite.

I must say that there are elements of that party that are offside with the traditional Canadian values, the Canada that I believe in. The notion of equality, respect for the charter and the idea that government does in fact have a responsibility to level the playing field and equalize opportunity is foreign to many of them. Many members of the old Reform Party are still in this place and are not keen on things like the charter. They hold views that are, again, out of whack with a modern and inclusive Canada.

The Prime Minister has done a great job of muzzling the fringe elements in his party but that fringe element is rattling the cages and I suspect it is only a matter of time before they break free and show their true colours.

There was a time in this House when political parties on all sides understood the need to address inequalities and the inequalities of women in Canada, when the notion of a charter was universally accepted, and when we used to recall and respect the struggle that women have made to be included in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to stand up for their causes and even to get the vote in this country.

There was a time when all parties understood that government should and had a responsibility to play a role in the lives of Canadians, especially the most vulnerable. Those days are gone. I suspect they ended when the Reform Party swallowed the whole Progressive Conservative Party. We can thank the member for Central Nova for that.

Business of Supply

As if we needed further proof, in Quorum today there is an article from the Toronto *Star* about a Conservative candidate in the riding of Toronto Centre who was dumped because he refused to be muzzled. He is quoted in the article as saying that he wanted to focus on the kinds of issues that matter in a downtown urban riding but that the powers that be in the Conservative Party did not like that. The member is gone.

When a government cuts funding to worthy groups engaged in social justice and social equality initiatives, it affects people and, far too often, women. When a government cuts funding in support of students, it affects people and, far too often, women. When a government fails to address the needs of seniors, it affects people and, far too often, women. When a government cancels child care programs and replaces them with a \$100 a month rebate, it affects people and, far too often, women.

When a government guts the power of the federal government to initiate national programs that help people, it affects people and, too often, it is women. When a government spends all of its money on tax cuts and does not address the needs of the poor, students, seniors and our aboriginal communities, it affects real people and, too often, it affects women. That is in Canada.

I want to speak of an experience I had this year. As MPs, we all get to meet remarkable people. This year I met a number of remarkable people and a large number of them were women.

● (1600)

The most remarkable woman I met this year was a woman in Nairobi, Kenya, named Ingrid Munro. She was a woman who, a few years ago, worked for the African housing fund and retired and thought she would live a quiet life. Fifty street beggars, all women, in the slums of Nairobi came to her and said that they needed her to help them. She asked what she could do. They did not know but they wanted to talk about it.

She instituted a micro credit organization dealing with the poorest of the poor in the slums of Nairobi, in the slums of Kibara which has somewhere between 800,000 and 1 million people, and in Mathare, with 400,000 to 500,000 people, where families of six or seven children and two parents sleep in a hut that is eight feet by ten feet. It was women who started and ran that organization.

She told the women who had nothing that they should start saving their money and once they had saved \$10 or \$15 she would lend them twice that amount to start a business. She told them that on a \$20 loan they could start a business and when that loan was paid off they could start another business.

She dealt with some remarkable women. I, along with the member for Halifax, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley and the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, met one of these remarkable women in January of this year, a street beggar who had nothing. Beatrice had 7 children and 12 grandchildren and, in the space of two years, all her children died from HIV and HIV-related diseases. She was left with 12 grandchildren and no hope. She decided that she would need to put arsenic in the porridge the next day because the kids had no hope. Instead, she borrowed \$20 U.S. and now runs four businesses in the slums of Nairobi.

When we talk about the economic power, the economic will, the resilience of women, we see what can happen in a barren place with no hope and no future and see the kind of hope that exists in those communities.

We are in one of the richest lands in the world and one of the richest nations on earth, with more money than we have ever had before. Yes, tax cuts are fine. We had an economic update of our own two years ago and we brought in the tax cuts that reappeared magically yesterday. However, we also invested in people. Just on students alone we invested billions of dollars, \$2.2 billion for students most in need; \$550 million to increase the Canada access grants.

The Canada that I believe in and most Canadians believe in recognize that not everyone is born with an equal opportunity to achieve success. However, as Canadians we believe we are strongest when we help the weak. We are strongest when we do something to equalize opportunity and give everybody a chance. We do not come in at a time of plenty and cut the funding to the Status of Women, gut the Canada summer jobs program, get rid of the court challenges program and get rid of a national day care plan that the member for York Centre had gone around this country and negotiated with all the provinces.

We have all had experience with the people who would have benefited from that plan. In my community, women came to me and said “this is unbelievable, we have never been involved in politics. We now want to be involved. We want to be part of this and we want to save this plan for all Canadians”. The government, however, came in and threw it out the window and instead offered \$100 a month. That \$100 a month, according to the Caledon Institute, actually benefits a family with \$150,000 income more than it does a two income earning family of \$30,000.

That is not the Canada that I believe in. I do not believe it is the Canada most Canadians believe in. Canada is a special country. We are a nation that believes in certain values and principles. I do not believe that the government represents the values of all or most Canadians. The people who are most shut out are women.

I applaud the member for Beaches—East York for bringing this motion forward today. I hope all members take part in this debate and will support the motion and stand up for Canadian women.

● (1605)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since we are in sort of a friendly frame of mind, I will lob a soft one over to my colleague.

The motion today deals with young women and students in terms of post-secondary education. He knows very well, and I have heard him speak so eloquently in the House of a need for government action, not just provincial action, but federal action to ensure that students have the very best head start that we can possibly give them.

Business of Supply

A tax cut to a bank and a corporation may be nice for them, but students hardly make enough money to pay for the books, which are taxed, by the way, and everything else in their schools.

I would like the member to comment on what he would like to see the government do, not just government but all members of Parliament, to focus their energies on students so that they, indeed, will be the bright future of our country.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, Canada's economy is pretty good. In the last 15 years, since we fixed the last mess, Canada's economy has been on a roll. It is obviously turning out a lot of positive economic indicators but we need to get serious about productivity. That is where other OECD nations, the emerging nations of the world, are catching up and, in some cases, passing us.

One of the things the OECD nations are doing is investing in education. All the current government has done is to throw out \$800 million, which is not very much for a nation like Canada with the provinces and territories we have, for post-secondary education and then give a tax deduction for books that amounts to \$80.

In the province where my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore and I come from, the average tuition is almost \$7,000 and that \$80 is nothing. We believe we must invest directly in education, not tax cut our way to an education. We must invest in education and ensure those who need help the most get it. We should increase the Canada access grants, re-invest in the Millennium Scholarship Foundation and give people a hand up.

• (1610)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, small, large and business in general have said, through consultations, that they want literacy training for a lot of people who need it.

Training and adjustment is fine but the problem is that when people arrive at their companies they do not have enough literacy to do their jobs and the training is not as effective.

Could the hon. member expand on the problem of the cuts with respect to literacy? A lot of money was cut from that and, if I am not mistaken, I think the literacy directorate was also shut down. This affects thousands of Canadians. In some parts of the country a very large percentage of the population has a literacy problem. We need improved literacy training to have a competitive, well trained and upgraded labour force in our country.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, literacy is such a big problem in the country. I do not think even Canadians understand how many people have issues with literacy. We need to invest in literacy. The government made cuts last year.

The member mentioned that the national literacy secretariat was in trouble and was under the threat of closing down. In my own province, Literacy Nova Scotia, which does such great work with a whole series of chapters around Nova Scotia, says that it will need to shut down in March next year because the money has been cut off.

If we talk to the minister he says, no. He says that they are re-investing more and that they have other investments to put in. Where is it going? We cannot get that information and nobody on the ground is hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling or touching it. They

certainly are not getting the money and they are pretty concerned about it.

If the government has a plan for literacy, I would like to see it because we need to ensure that Canadians have the skills they need. It starts with literacy and the government has turned its back on literacy in Canada.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting over the last few days in question period. Questions have been addressed to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development and some of the comments that have come back reflect on some of the cuts that were made through the mid-1990s. I think all Canadian sacrificed through the mid-1990s.

However, I would like to give my colleague an opportunity to expand on some of the points that he made with regard to those cuts that were made and maybe reach back in *Hansard* and share some of the words that were put on record by that minister at the time.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of non-partisanship, I do not want to take too long. I do want to thank my colleague though because we have heard continually the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development stand in the House and say that the problem is that \$25 billion were cut in the last decade.

If we go back in *Hansard* we will see comments like, “they have to cut deeper”. Another one is, “Here is a hint to the government. Start cutting and cut deeper”. He wanted to cut more and more in the last decade and now he says that we cut too much. The hypocrisy of the government is absolutely stunning. It is amazing that it says one thing and then comes back to say that it did not say that.

Fortunately, we had the record of *Hansard* back in the 1990s. Not only that, but we have the comments the Prime Minister made. The chickens are coming home to roost. What they said is on paper and they are going to hear more and more about it because it is shameful.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today as a former chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. As a continuous member of that committee, I have heard from many witnesses. Most recently, we heard from witnesses who urged the committee to take a life cycle approach to the economic security of women.

I want to start off by quoting one of the witnesses, Sheila Regehr of the National Council of Welfare, who said:

You can't take one population or one moment in time. There's a tendency to talk about “poor people” or to talk about “lone parents”, thinking that there's this group of lone parents who are always lone parents, or that somebody living in poverty now is always going to be living in poverty. Those groups move in and out. A woman who's a very contented middle-class woman is going to be a lone parent tomorrow. In a few years, when her children age, statistically she's not counted as a lone parent any more, she's an “unattached older woman” but she's experiencing the legacy of her earlier years.

It is that legacy that we need to address.

From an early age it is imperative women have an opportunity to succeed. We have all heard that early childhood education is vital to this success.

Business of Supply

In a recent speech in Winnipeg, Dr. Fraser Mustard spoke about the importance of investment at an early age to ensure lifelong success. According to Dr. Mustard, early development is linked to physical health and well-being, social knowledge, maturity, language development, and communication skills, all essential to the well-being of women's economic security.

The Conservative government has chosen to prevent that by cancelling the national child care program, which the previous Liberal government committed to. Low and middle income class families have no access to child care. How can the government claim that families have choice when in fact there is no choice? The taxable \$100 a month is not child care.

As one of the witnesses before the committee said:

You can't put a child in day care for \$100 a month. So if you use that on economics of scale, a woman goes out to work and—let's just keep it simple—she makes \$12 an hour, but she puts her child in day care, and that's costing her \$7 an hour. So her net return is only \$5, because day care is no longer affordable.

Access to regulated affordable child care is pivotal to creating opportunities for women. Without good quality child care, thousands of women are kept from finding full time and well paying jobs.

Women face many challenges upon entering the workforce, specifically low to middle income families, access to training and often access to literacy acquisition.

While the Canadian dollar has steadily increased in value over the last five years, women are still only earning 70¢ for every dollar that ends up in the pockets of men. Unfortunately, this wage gap is alive and well, and continues to be fed by the Conservative government.

Single mothers are the most vulnerable as their earnings tend to be the most volatile. Between the ages of 30 and 34, single mothers have twice the level of earning volatility than two parent families in the same age range. That is why child care and maternity benefits become so important.

The government has spoken frequently about human rights for aboriginal women, but human rights is more than pretty words or political posturing. It is about having clean water, opportunities for education for one's children and for one's self, and adequate health care and housing. It is about adequate resources, and most important, it is about respect.

As I have said before in a press release, “pay equity is a human right and an important step toward economic equality between men and women”.

Clearly, the current Prime Minister has very mixed feelings on pay equity. We have heard earlier today that when speaking about pay equity legislation in 1998, he was quoted as saying, “For taxpayers, however, it's a rip-off. And it has nothing to do with gender”. That hardly sounds like a Prime Minister who would stand up for the women of this country.

• (1615)

The fact of the matter is, without pay equity, women are denied economic equality. Proactive laws are required to take action to ensure all employees receive equal pay for work of equal value.

In response to the pay equity report from the Status of Women, the previous Liberal government, under the guidance of the justice minister of the day and the minister of labour and housing in October 2005, committed to introducing a bill on pay equity by late 2006 or early 2007. We would be on our way by now.

Extensive work has also been done to address parental benefits. I encourage the government to look at the Status of Women committee's report on maternity and parental benefits which focuses on the provision of benefits to self-employed workers.

This morning the minister said that the number of independent, self-employed women has gone up 50%. We know that most small businesses are being started by women. All the more reason to extend parental and maternal benefits to self-employed women. Again, I say, all the more reason for child care spaces for their children.

One might ask, what has the government done to ensure the economic security of women? It has cut \$1 billion in social spending, including cuts to national literacy programs, cuts to summer student programs, cuts to affordable housing programs, and cuts to the Canadian volunteer program. It has not honoured the Kelowna accord and it has done away with the court challenges program. These are all initiatives that have a direct impact on women and their economic prosperity.

The Conservatives have attacked Status of Women Canada by closing 12 of its 16 regional offices, gutted the research unit, removed equality seeking from the mandate, and shut down the voice of advocacy. After much outcry from women across the country, they put more dollars in to limited programs, but they cut the ability to access these programs right across the country.

During the 2006 election campaign, the Prime Minister signed a pledge and committed that a Conservative government would honour the UN CEDAW recommendations to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada, convenient comments during an election and, I submit, yet another broken promise.

Income security for senior women is an ongoing concern. The promise of a secure future for unattached senior women is often not realized. What has the government done for unattached senior women? Not much, acknowledged by one of its own members. “They seem to be just hung out there without any recourse”, said the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul during a March 27 committee meeting this year.

There was no action, but the Liberal government took action in budget 2005. Senior women would benefit from a \$2.7 billion increase over two years in the guaranteed income supplement and more money going into the new horizons for seniors programs.

The report of the committee on economic security of women is a plan for changes. I encourage the government to act on the 21 recommendations. I particularly want to highlight recommendation 21 which says:

The Committee recommends that, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, the federal government develop a national poverty reduction strategy that incorporates gender based awareness with concrete targets and goals to address poverty and Aboriginal poverty in Canada.

The government has yet to take action. There is much talk and a great deal of misinformation. Not once has the government mentioned women's equality, women's well-being, prosperity for women or pay equity in the budgets or the throne speeches.

This is clearly not a priority for the government. It is time to take action on addressing the issues that impact on the economic security for women. That is why I support the motion today and I encourage all colleagues to do so.

• (1620)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this last fall and summer I did some consultations with women's organizations across Canada. For some of that work I was in Winnipeg and in The Pas, in the northern part of Manitoba.

During those consultations, I met with many aboriginal, first nations and Inuit women. There were a lot of issues, but some of them had to do with the need to develop a national anti-poverty and anti-violence strategy for this country specific to aboriginal communities. Another was to provide greater access and assistance for education and training for aboriginal women and Inuit women.

I wonder if the hon. member, whom I know has a great deal of expertise in this area with respect to her own critic portfolio, could expand on those issues and any other issues that actually affect more directly first nations women and Inuit women in our country.

• (1625)

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, we all know that aboriginal women face double barriers to prosperity. Frequently, living in a first nations community, as I indicated in my remarks, they are denied access to housing, clean water, and educational opportunities for their children and for themselves. First nations women live in conditions that many of us abhor and cannot in fact believe are present in a country such as ours.

As I indicated in my remarks, the Kelowna accord would have been a first step, and I stress a first step, toward closing that gap.

There is much that has to be done on this basis. We have to ensure that all children who want an education have access to an education. I can assure the House that a Liberal government would make that happen.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the comments by my colleague from across the floor. What surprises me is that there is emphasis on focusing in on the welfare of aboriginal women, which we as a government take very seriously.

The member focused on all of the things that the Liberal Party is now promising to do for women across the country. However, it had 13 years in which to deliver. Did the Liberals actually deliver? No.

Business of Supply

In two subsequent elections the Liberals made child care the lynchpin of their election platform. Once they were elected, they did not deliver. They did not create one child care space in Canada.

Now, when I hear them talking about help for aboriginal women and supporting them, I have to ask my hon. Liberal colleague: why is it if she has such an interest in supporting aboriginal women does she oppose extending human rights protection to aboriginal women? Why does she and her Liberal Party, the official opposition, oppose extending matrimonial property rights to aboriginal women? This is an inconsistency. I would appreciate hearing her answer on that.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, more misinformation and more doublespeak from members opposite.

I have said this on the record in this House. I have said it in committee countless time. The Liberal Party does not oppose the repeal of section 67. We do not oppose matrimonial real property rights for aboriginal women.

What the Liberal Party does oppose is this “father knows best” attitude of members opposite, that they know how it should be done, that there is no reason to ask them how it should be done. There is no respect for collective and individual versus individual rights. There is no respect for the opinions of aboriginal communities and aboriginal leaders throughout this country.

We had many representations before the committee on this issue. Only one out of almost 30 representations supported the manner in which the government was imposing these changes on aboriginal people. That organization was a mouthpiece for those people across the way.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Laval for a final question.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

During question period, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul accused opposition members of spreading lies about Status of Women Canada and its new criteria.

Would my colleague like to confess and admit to these lies, or would she like to refute what the member for Kildonan—St. Paul said?

[*English*]

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, my understanding of my colleague's question is that a member opposite accused the opposition of telling lies about the Status of Women.

There is no misinformation coming out here. Again, I will give to the House, I will table, and I will show members the remarks of the member opposite, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, who acknowledged in committee that her government was not doing enough for senior women. She was speaking in an exchange with Canada's Association for the Fifty Plus when she said, “—unattached senior women...seem to be just hung out there without any recourse”.

Business of Supply

I defy her to find any misinformation on the part of opposition members.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that, with your permission, I will be sharing my time with the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

What should we be asking ourselves this afternoon? What are we doing as a government to ensure women's economic security through pay equity? I would like to point out first of all that the government and I, as Minister of Labour, believe in fairness and equality for all women. Our government is proud of the decisive measures it has taken to improve federal pay equity. We are convinced that women in the federal public service will also applaud these measures. These workers have waited long enough for real action.

The principle of equal pay for equal work was recognized as early as 1977 and was entrenched in the Canadian Human Rights Act. In 1986, as a member of Parliament—because I was here in this House at the time—I supported the equal pay guidelines that took effect under the Conservatives. I am still a strong advocate for pay equity today.

However, it turned out to be very difficult for employers and unions to apply these principles and there was a lot of litigation over key elements in the act. In 2001, a working group was tasked with studying the pay equity plan. Its members consulted a tremendous number of employers, unions, and equity defence groups. Three years later in 2004, they submitted a lengthy report.

One year later in 2005, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women submitted its own report in which it presented a bill to implement the working group's report. A little later, in 2006, the standing committee submitted another report on pay equity, the sixth in the series. Through the pay equity legislation that has been passed, our government is sending women in the workplace the following message: the wait is now over.

After years of discussions, studies and interminable debates, the stakeholders feel it is clear that everyone agrees on the need for pay equity. Everybody wants it. All parties have recognized that more needs to be done to eliminate discrimination in the workplace, including on the basis of sex. There was no agreement, however, on the best way to proceed. Everyone had a different view.

At the time when the working group on pay equity submitted its report, it was clear that it would be very difficult to get all the parties to move forward together on this matter. The shortcomings in the report proved insurmountable. We had to look elsewhere. We needed a solution that was flexible enough to meet all the various needs of the federal private sector. However, so much flexibility was simply unattainable. That is why a consensus could never be reached on how to proceed. Nevertheless, a lack of consensus is no excuse for inaction—I repeat: a lack of consensus is no excuse for inaction—or for the kind of senseless delays we have seen.

After looking at the experiences of other levels of government in Canada and of other governments on the international scene, we

realized that a lack of consensus on how to handle pay equity seemed to be the norm rather than the exception. Some provinces, including Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, have specific legislation on pay equity. It applies, however, to their respective public sectors. Other provinces, such as British Columbia, still do not have any specific pay equity legislation.

In Europe, the pay equity initiatives are far from comprehensive. In New Zealand, there is an act requiring pay equity for women doing the same work as men, but there are no policies on pay equity for work of equal value.

Here, in Canada, our collective experience with pay equity is among the greatest and most varied in the world. This has been achieved in part because the federal and provincial governments actively consulted stakeholders, and also because at key points in our country's history, they chose to act based on the most reasonable understanding of the facts.

• (1635)

We listened to the interested parties and came up with a response that would make positive changes in the workplace.

The measures we are now taking to support partners of federal workplaces are threefold.

First, we are striving to improve and increase the participation of education stakeholders in order to help federally regulated employers, workers and unions understand their rights and obligations in terms of pay equity plans.

Labour program officers have already visited 250 employers to inform them of their legal obligations. A training document and tools have been developed to provide better information for employers on what they must do. The Labour program has already provided specialized training on pay equity to 23 officers, and training sessions will be given to more officers again this year.

Second, what did we do? We established specialized mediation assistance for partners in the occupational setting who wished to cooperate in order to enforce pay equity. Mediation and conciliation officers were given specialized training in pay equity and can provide specialized services to employers and unions that need them.

The chief mediator even met with business representatives and other stakeholders, and offered specialized mediation services. Furthermore, the association that represents major unionized employers—FETCO—expressed its gratitude for the assistance we were able to provide regarding addressing pay equity in the context of collective bargaining.

Business of Supply

Third, by hiring 15 compensation specialists, we can monitor the situation more closely in order to ensure compliance with equity principles and measure the progress made towards eliminating gender-based discrimination in wages.

Lastly, when an employer refuses to take proactive measures to correct an unfair wage gap, the Canadian Human Rights Commission will be notified and asked to investigate.

In closing, we have taken the proper approach to resolving the contentious issues involved in federal pay equity.

Instead of creating a situation in which women must wait and wait for new legislation to be passed, we thought, and we still believe, that we could improve the existing pay equity system.

As Minister of Labour, my role is to make decisions that offer practical solutions for everyone involved. The pay equity measures that we have established allow for flexible, concrete enforcement of pay equity principles in the workplace.

We will continue to consult the major players, particularly, employer and employee representatives, to hear their points of view on the best way to implement measures to establish pay equity.

Very recently, we met with major stakeholders such as the CLC, CSN, Canadian Bankers Association and FETCO, and other meetings with key stakeholders will be held as needed, as questions arise.

I am confident that our approach will serve to support our vision of Canada's workforce, where industrial relations are strong and durable.

Let us be clear, our government is committed to the principle of pay equity and our goal is to eliminate wage disparities based on gender, in sectors under our jurisdiction. What do the Labour Program officers do in this regard? They promote the pay equity program, they educate employers about the program requirements and about their obligations and responsibilities. To date, in less than a year, meetings have been held with 250 employers. They have been asked whether they apply pay equity principles. They have been told what the law requires of them, what they have to do, and what progress they have to make. We are educating them about this, and we are supporting them, we are helping them to implement pay equity principles.

That is what we are doing. This fall, an information product, as it is called, and a toolkit will be sent out to employers to give them more information so that they will move forward with putting pay equity principles into practice in their own companies.

• (1640)

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the response from the government to the standing committee with respect to implementing proactive pay equity legislation does not really work. I know that the government is putting in all these new measures but the reality is that they are no different from the procedures that have been in place for a number of years.

In fact, it took the Bell employees 25 years of litigation before they got any answer on their issue. No matter which way we look at it, it is complaint based legislation. That is the major problem with it. In fact there is all kinds of litigation that goes on against the employees who dare to question and try to get their rights under the law.

This is why we need proactive pay equity legislation. It exists in Quebec and Ontario for the private sector. In fact Quebec has recently done a review which clearly shows that it is working very well. The employers themselves agree that they would not have done it had there not been legislation as strong as that. They have said that it is helping their companies in that there is better morale and better productivity in their companies.

Quite frankly, I would ask the hon. minister not to allow more time to elapse while trying things that are not going to work and one, two or three years from now we will be back here. Women in this country are paying the price. It is not fair to do this to them. Proactive legislation does not cost the government any money, but it does in fact give women the right to receive equal pay for work of equal value which they deserve.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, I think that the member fails to grasp the importance of the question of pay equity in the workplace.

We already have a law. At one point, the call was for the Wilson report to be adopted and another pay equity law to be written. The problem was not a shortage of laws, but a shortage of personnel to enforce the law. We were short of people with the political will to really do something.

At that time, the Liberal Party was in power. And it failed to do anything at all throughout its term in office. When we came to power, we looked at this question and we saw that we did not need a new law, we just needed to enforce the law already in place.

We therefore sent out our inspectors, and we do in fact have inspectors in the Labour Program for which I am responsible, to visit the companies. They go out to meet with employers and also with union representatives, to determine whether they are applying the principles of the Employment Equity Act. If they are not doing that, the inspectors inform them about the provisions of the Act and the consequences it provides for. We are proactive, so that they will move forward. That is what we are doing.

Over the last year we have visited 250 companies. We are in the process of preparing our information kit and we will be targeting companies where we think it is most important for us to step in.

I would point out that even though Quebec has its Pay Equity Act, unless I am mistaken, almost 60% of employers at present are not in full compliance with their obligations under the Act. Certainly, there has to be a law, and we have one. The problem is in enforcing it.

[English]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion put forward by my hon. colleague opposite.

Business of Supply

To start, I want to reiterate once again the labour minister's message that we all believe fundamentally in fairness and equity for all women.

The Bilson task force on pay equity found substantial areas of agreement among business, labour and pay equity advocates on a number of key principles, so I do not propose to repeat them all here.

However, the task force was not able to achieve consensus on the issue of implementation methodology. Indeed, there are some unique dimensions to the organizations that fall under federal labour jurisdiction which make compliance with the pay equity law particularly challenging.

I intend to focus on those distinct challenges today. Then I would like to describe how my government is addressing those challenges through a proactive three-point action plan.

As hon. members know, the federal equal pay legislation currently enforced is found in section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and its equal wage guidelines. The equal pay amendment was passed in 1977 and the wage guidelines were last amended nine years later. The legislation prohibits an enterprise under federal jurisdiction from discriminating against workers in female-dominated job categories if the work is equal in value to jobs performed largely by men.

The principle behind the law is sound, logical and fair. We all want to see fairness, and yet many employers have had a lot of difficulty putting it into practice, and not without reason. These companies and others covered by the law face distinct challenges in complying with the law.

The federal labour jurisdiction includes the federal public service as well as the broad range of federal agencies and crown corporations functioning in Canada. It also encompasses private sector firms engaged in activities that span provincial borders.

Within private industry, one could say that the federal reach is small in number but significant in impact.

Almost 12,000 companies fall under federal jurisdiction, representing only about one per cent of all Canadian businesses. The majority of them are small, very small. Indeed, four of five of them employ fewer than 20 workers. In all, about 875,000 people work for federally regulated companies.

Although we are not talking about a lot of companies, we are talking about important ones. These enterprises are engaged in vital industries such as banking, telecommunications, shipping, and interprovincial trucking. Clearly, they play a pivotal role in our national economy and infrastructure.

A number of factors render these federally regulated companies different from the rest of corporate Canada and present unique challenges in addressing pay equity issues.

For one thing, only a handful of companies employ more than 100 employees, yet they employ 86% of the workers who fall under the Canada Labour Code.

Unionization tends to be high in the federal private sector, except in the banking sector. Workers are older than the Canadian average, work slightly longer hours and are paid more than the national

average and, with the exception of the banking industry, women are underrepresented in all sectors.

For many of these firms, pay equity is rarely clear-cut. It is affected by multiple factors, including the size of the organization, the nature of its workforce and whether the workforce is represented by a trade union. In spite of these challenges, many companies have made significant progress in implementing the law.

In the federally regulated private sector, women appear to be gradually closing the wage gap. It is not perfect, but it is progress.

Still, some of the strongest criticisms of the current legislation relate to its complaints based nature. Some say it is too reactive.

• (1645)

Under the Human Rights Act, people who believe they are discriminated against are entitled to file complaints with the Human Rights Commission. Part III of the Canada Labour Code also empowers inspectors to notify the commission if they have reasonable grounds to believe that an employer is engaging or has engaged in a discriminatory practice.

My government agrees that a more proactive approach is more appropriate. That is why we have brought forward a package of measures aimed at strengthening compliance with the law. Their focus is proactive, with the aim of avoiding long, drawn-out, highly divisive legal battles like those that have plagued Bell Canada and Air Canada.

The last government studied the issue. We are taking action.

The action plan implemented by my colleague, the hon. Minister of Labour, has three key elements.

First, the labour program provides employers, employees and their representatives with more detailed and comprehensive information to advise them of their obligations under the pay equity law.

Labour officers have begun visiting employers to inform them of their pay equity responsibilities under existing federal legislation. An information document and educational materials have been developed to assist employers.

The labour program has already provided pay equity training to 23 labour officers. Further training sessions will be provided to additional labour officers throughout the year.

This helps in addressing one of the biggest complaints from companies: that they do not fully understand their responsibilities and how to meet them.

Business of Supply

The second element of the plan sees the government's mediators and conciliators reaching out to employers and unions during contract negotiations involving pay equity issues. The labour officers have been specially trained to deliver information, feedback and guidance to both parties engaged in collective bargaining. Their services are now available to employers and unions that request them.

The final element of the plan involves compliance and monitoring to ensure that employers understand how to comply with equal pay requirements. The goal is to be proactive: to identify and correct problems before they deteriorate into a messy dispute.

The labour program is hiring 15 compensation specialists who will be providing technical support to employers.

No one will pretend that pay equity is a simple issue. It is complicated and often difficult for all parties, but that does not mean we can ignore it or walk away from our responsibility toward women who are being discriminated against. They need and deserve society's protection.

Society has acknowledged this responsibility, which is why Parliament enshrined the principle of pay equity in the Human Rights Act nearly 30 years ago. We have the law, we have explanatory guidelines, and we have many years of detailed case law to help us move forward.

We have made a lot of excellent progress and we should not think of undoing it. It makes no sense to scrap the law we have in the hopes of eventually coming up with something better.

Instead, we need to acknowledge that the organizations affected by the law could use a little help to do the right thing. We have the capacity to extend that help and we have started doing so. We can and we must continue to do so because it is the best and most responsible solution for everyone involved.

● (1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I proceed to questions and comments, 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 Davenport, Air Transportation.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand what the hon. member is saying with respect to the procedures, processes and all of the things that have been put in. Many of these things were there before. They have been tried before.

This system has been in place for 34 or 35 years now and the reality is that when a system is complaints based, it means that the women have to complain about their employer. They have to take action. They have to go to someone in order for employers to comply.

Up until now we have seen a whole lot of litigation because the legislation is not strong enough. It does have to be more proactive. In provinces such as Ontario and Quebec, where there is proactive pay equity legislation and employers in the private sector have had to deal with this in a more aggressive manner, they have found out, as a result of the evaluations that have been done, that actually it is working better for them.

In fact, in the workplaces the morale is better. It is working very well, but the employers also admitted that they would not have done it had they not been obliged to do it in the way that the legislation basically forced them to do.

In regard to what is being put in place, it is not fair to women to put them in the position of having to fight and go to court and push and risk losing their jobs to try to get what is rightly theirs.

Quite frankly, I think we have had this debate. We have had the research. We have had two standing committees look at it. We have had two independent committees study the situation in this country and make reports to Parliament, two or three times now, and the last one was not that long ago.

Things have not really changed in this country. It is time that we actually introduced new proactive pay equity legislation and gave women the kinds of tools they need for their rights.

● (1655)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure I heard a question from the member, but she had a lot of good comments. Certainly I have enjoyed working with this member on different committees. I know that she has spent a lot of time on pay equity issues as well as other issues for women. I thank her for all her contributions.

The one thing I really want to say today is that this government does believe in fairness for everyone. As the member opposite pointed out, the pay equity laws and the legislation we are working under have been here for many years. However, this government is trying to be more proactive than other governments have been. We are working to eliminate gender based wage inequities within the federally regulated sector.

We are committed to the principle of pay equity. We are taking action and we agree that action must be taken. The minister announced last September that there is a pay equity program that is increasing the economic security of women, and it is ensuring they are paid fairly for the value of their work.

We have local labour program officers who are actively promoting the legislation and educating the employers so they do know what their responsibilities are, and so that when women and anyone else in the workforce have concerns about pay equity issues, the employers know that they have requirements and that they do have responsibilities.

To this point, over 250 employers have been visited. Education sessions have been held with many employers across this country. We are continuing to offer these services and we will continue to further fairness in pay equity.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this evening I will be splitting my time with the member for Kitchener Centre.

Business of Supply

Tonight we are talking about economic security for women. For centuries the answer to the question of women's economic security was singular. It was a good husband, who was a good provider. Girls and young women were taught this maxim even during the first half of the 20th century. From the attitudes and values I have heard today from members of the Conservative government, I believe some of them are still stuck in the first half of the 20th century. Canadian women living under the Conservative government will understand their own government better if they examine its initiatives through a time lens of about 1957.

The government has to wake up and realize that in the 1960s many women woke up and realized that they were just one man away from poverty. Mothers began teaching their daughters the importance of getting a certificate, a diploma, or a degree, so that they could get a job and work experience before they were married. These mothers, and many mothers who followed, had already witnessed the difficulties of friends whose husbands had run away and abandoned them and their children. They knew that these women had paid a horrible price for their poor taste in men. There was even a popular song that was their theme song. It was called "*A Good Man is Hard to Find*".

Women who entered the workforce soon learned that they were making about sixty cents for every dollar earned by a male doing equivalent work. They learned that younger men they had been asked to train were often chosen ahead of them for the fast track to management.

But there was some good news. Through a multitude of organizations that sprung up, a women's movement formed and was assisted by professional organizations, unions, women journalists, and women studies departments in universities. Together, these groups began to build a consciousness about the inequalities and the barriers to progress for women. I want to take a moment to thank them today for their very hard work. People like Kay McPherson, Ellen Fairclough, Judy LaMarsh and Monique Bégin come quickly to mind.

At the same time, in every community local women gathered to address local, national and international problems that prevented women from full participation in decision making bodies.

Looking back 50 years, one could say we have come a long way, but facing the realities as exposed in the committee's report, one would have to add that we have a long way to go.

Today I think we should all thank our colleagues on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for two reports to this House, one on pay equity and one on the economic security of women. The committee's recommendations are excellent.

At the same time, I would like to condemn the government's written responses. Whoever wrote these responses must have a broken arm from patting himself or herself on the back. The government acknowledges the progress that women have made and acknowledges many of the problems that remain, but it does not commit to address these problems. For example, on page 3 of the report, the government says:

Certain groups of women are at higher risk of persistent low income, such as women with disabilities, immigrant women, and Aboriginal women. These groups are less likely to secure an adequate level of earnings.

I expected to read on with the solutions to that problem, but no. In the next paragraph the government changes the subject. It does not give any answers to the problems that it lists for us. Then it changes the subject, and one might assume that means the government has no ideas on how to solve these problems. The status of women committee presented the government with solutions. One can only conclude that the government is refusing to listen.

I was particularly appalled by the section on "non-standard work". This is a nice name for the kind of work that often has odd hours, no benefits, less than appropriate working and safety conditions, low pay, and no labour standards protection.

● (1700)

How does the government respond to that unfairness? The government whitewashes it with the following on page 4:

The concept of non-standard work covers forms of employment that in some cases have existed for a long time.

As if that makes it all right.

This kind of employment has grown considerably over the past twenty-five years. This phenomenon likely reflects a combination of factors, such as new technologies, the desire of businesses to be more flexible to adapt and compete, and the needs of some workers, including women, to reconcile their work and family-related responsibilities.

That is ridiculous.

Consider the plight of one of my constituents, an immigrant woman who 10 years ago had little English but had to work. She went to an employment agency which found her a job in a factory at minimum wage as a contract employee and therefore, there were no benefits and only short term security. The agency received a portion of her salary every payday. She continued to work because she had been told that after a year or so with a good record she would get a raise and would be moved from contract to a regular employee with benefits.

For nine years she worked and waited. For nine years the agency received part of her wages. She was never moved to regular employment status.

The employer must have been happy with her work as she was not fired. The employer was even happier with the minimum wage and no benefits. This is exploitation and this is non-standard work.

The whitewashed explanation of the government is disgraceful. It omits even the possibility of a motive of greed on the part of the employer. It omits the collusion of the employment agency and it omits the lack of surveillance by the government.

Much needs to be done to ensure that all workers are treated with respect. The government's answer in its response to the committee seems to suggest that all the programs needed by women can be handled by the provinces.

Business of Supply

The federal programs mentioned are mainly from the past. It seems that the government has no intention of helping Canadians through new federal social programs. The government's answer to the child care crisis which women face is a new baby bonus in an amount totally insufficient to pay for that service.

I do not think that the government believes in social programs. It seems from its economic budgets and economic statements that it is dedicated to tax cuts and military spending.

I believe most Canadians have been very proud of the unique nature of Canada. At an international meeting, former Prime Minister Chrétien was asked how Canada had achieved such a peaceful, tolerant and fair society. He answered that many countries in the world invest very heavily in military spending, but Canada invests heavily in its people because Canadians want to care for one another.

The committee on the status of women, made up of members from all parties, has shown the government the way to continue this honourable tradition, a tradition of caring and fairness, a tradition which has proved so successful. The government's response to the lead of the women on the status of women committee is very disappointing.

• (1705)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that when we talk about this topic, from whatever party one comes from, whether it be the Liberal Party, the Bloc, the New Democratic Party or the Conservative Party, we try to lead by example, we try to set an example.

The members of the official opposition, including the member who has just spoken, has spent a great deal of time saying how inadequate this side is on women's issues.

I do recall when the leader of the official opposition was running for the leadership of the member's party, he said that 33% of the candidates running for the Liberal Party would be women. However, recently the Leader of the Opposition pushed women aside so that Bob Rae and Gerard Kennedy could run in those particular ridings. He announced his shadow cabinet and in the process he dropped four women from their portfolios.

When we talk about leading by example, is the official opposition prepared to lead by example and assist in women's issues when the leader of the official opposition and the Liberal Party act in that fashion?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to assure the member opposite that my leader, who has committed to 33% of his candidates in the next election being women, will achieve that goal. As far as the planning and priorities committee, 34.8% of the members are female, and that is the main planning body of our caucus to advise the leader.

I really do not know what the hon. member is talking about. We will achieve 33%. I find it odd that he would raise this point, seeing as his party has the least number of women members as a percentage of the whole in this House.

• (1710)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member, but before she answers, I have a little bit of a follow-up, because I do not want to set a trap for her.

Has the federal government a responsibility to actively protect and defend the rights of Canadian women? I want to warn the member that the member for Winnipeg South Centre said that for the federal government to actively defend the rights of aboriginal women on the reserve would be paternalistic. For government to be active on trying to protect the rights of Canadian citizens, whether they are aboriginal women or anyone else, if I understand it correctly, we cannot do that because it would be paternalistic.

What is your position and what is the position of your party?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Prince Albert has much experience in this House and knows that he should speak in the third person. The member for Oakville is recognized to speak.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, in response to the member, let me say that I find it odd that a member who has been in the House as long as he has is asking a question as to whether or not the Canadian government has responsibility to protect the rights of women or, in fact, the rights of any Canadian. Anyone who has been here as long as he has should know that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives the government that responsibility.

As far as situations on reserve for aboriginals, he should also know that it is very easy to come up with quick solutions, but the way to move aboriginal people forward, the way to make sure they do exercise all their rights is to consult. That is, I believe, what the member for Winnipeg South Centre was talking about, that the consultations that have gone on under the government have been inadequate, and if one does not consult but instead applies solutions, then one could be accused of being paternalistic.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to get up today and talk about this incredibly important issue.

The motion calls on the government to develop a strategy to improve the economic security of women all across Canada.

This is a very historic place. We should never lose sight of how significant what we do on a daily basis is to Canadians from coast to coast.

When I walk up the Hill on my way to work, I pass the statue of the "Famous Five". It reminds me that there have been initiatives, there have been rights and there have been advancements made for women by the women who came before us. It is incumbent on all members of the House, male and female, to ensure that those gains continue for our daughters, our granddaughters and all generations to come.

It is not easy making a living. While the government endeavours to convince Canadians that we are living in the lap of luxury and that there is great prosperity, it is simply not the case for all Canadians. Indeed, it is not the case for most Canadians, particularly for Canadian women.

Business of Supply

Liberal members understand that pay equity is a fundamental human right, protected by the Canadian Charter of Human Rights. Equality for women is not possible without pay equity. Without it, women are simply denied economic equality.

The evidence is clear. The current pay equity law is not working. The lack of effective pay equity hurts women and by extension, it hurts their children.

Statistics Canada tells us that women generally have lower incomes than men. In the year 2003 the average pre-tax income for women was \$24,400, while men earned an average income of \$39,300.

At a time when action is absolutely needed to improve the economic security of women, what do we see? We see a government that continually steps aside, making cuts in the areas that need study and require action. Economic security goes hand in hand with equality. Actions taken by the Conservative government continue to squash the efforts that build toward equality and a better life for Canada's women and children.

The Conservative government has made deep cuts into those social programs that empower and enable women. When this minority Conservative government announced an unprecedented \$1 billion cut in federal social spending, on September 25, 2006, women and other vulnerable groups were disproportionately bearing that burden. These cuts included \$18 million from the national literacy programs, \$55 million from student summer jobs programs, \$45 million taken from affordable housing programs and \$10 million from the Canadian volunteer program.

These cuts have come from a Conservative government that has recently announced a surplus that comes close to \$14 billion. This is the same government that earlier this year recorded the biggest spending budget in Canadian history, yet it chose the most vulnerable in our society to bear this burden. This is a government that picks winners and creates losers. It has done nothing to enable women to recover from the challenges that they face in society, in the workplace and in their homes.

A few years ago, I was a member of a Liberal task force on women entrepreneurs. We spoke to dynamic women entrepreneurs across the country, women who were ambitious, talented and determined. Yet these women continued to face gender challenges as they launched and developed those businesses.

The fight for women's equality must continue and the Canadian government has a role to play in that fight. We all win when women get ahead.

• (1715)

A recent study by Catalyst determined that Fortune 500 companies with the highest representation of women board directors attained significantly higher financial performance on average with those in the lowest representation of women board directors.

While the Conservative government may choose to ignore the logic of women's equality, surely it cannot be blind to the value to the economy that women can contribute.

Further, University of Alberta Professor Karen Hughes has recently published a research paper indicating that women are contributing over \$18 billion to the Canadian economy and own over 800,000 businesses in Canada.

Women are opening four out of five new businesses at a rate that has tripled over the last 20 years. However, women entrepreneurs continue to face challenges with the lack of benefits, a lack of protections and a lack of social services.

I am very proud of our previous Liberal government's commitment to women's equality. It was a former Liberal government that established the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, a committee that the current government was willing to get rid of. It was going to abolish it.

It was a Liberal government that created an expert panel to provide advice and options to strengthen accountability mechanisms to advance gender based analysis and gender equality issues.

It was a Liberal government that extended parental benefits to one year. I cannot think of a single program that our Liberal government brought forward that has not benefited people in my riding. They have said that it makes such a difference to their families. Parents often share it so it is a benefit where a family can choose to have the father or mother remain at home for part of that first year of their child's life.

A Liberal government created centres of Excellence for Women's Health and Gender and Health Institute to work on health policy issues unique to women.

It was a Liberal government that achieved results for Canadian women. This is in sharp contrast to what we see with the Conservative government, a government that continually demonstrates that it neither has interest or inclination to address the poignant problems facing Canadian women.

I will take this opportunity to tell the House about the women in my community of Kitchener Centre.

Kitchener is a popular settlement area for new Canadians. Immigrant and refugee women face an array of challenges, both social and cultural. As well, they are often targets of racial discrimination and they have difficulties in finding places in the labour market.

Statistics Canada will tell us that immigrant women, on average, have an income of only \$16,700. This was a statistic for the year 2000. That is roughly about \$6,000 less than a Canadian born woman would earn. As we recall, Canadian women earn significantly less than Canadian men.

The majority of women immigrating to Canada arrive with their families. Those who can find work face the added challenge of finding suitable child care and this challenge has been compounded by the Conservative's absolute lack of interest in a national child care system. The Conservatives have created no new child care spaces. They are giving Canadians, with children up to the age of six, \$100 a month, which any parent will tell us is bus fare and not child care.

Business of Supply

The Conservative government demanded the word “equality” be removed from the mandate of the Status of Women of Canada. Women in Kitchener Centre, not unlike women across the country, continue to be victims of violence.

The UN has recommended that Canada ensure that all provinces provide necessary government and non-government services to those who suffer violence. Instead of federal dollars being added to this, they have been withdrawn from women's equality driven advocacy groups. This limits women's access to help. There is an undeniable link between the achievement of women's equality and the elimination of violence against women.

● (1720)

There are few acts more courageous than a woman taking her children and leaving an abusive relationship. I believe that governments have to be there to support women and their families. This includes a commitment to equality. It includes a commitment to affordable housing. It includes affordable, quality child care.

All these things have been absolutely ignored and the government has not only refused to invest in it, but it has taken away funding.

I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has made some excellent remarks.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for Beaches—East York for her good work on behalf of Canadian women. In addition, I congratulate the member for Don Valley East for her report.

Could my hon. colleague comment on the fact that the government has sat for quite a few months and has decided to do absolutely nothing about the report?

The report, which is called “Improving the Economic Security of Women: Time to Act”, is from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. It has a series of recommendations that are very worthy and that need attention by the government.

One recommendation is that the federal government play a leadership role in improving labour legislation to extend a greater protection for the growing segment of non-standard workers and to ensure that working conditions of non-standard workers are placed on the agenda of future meetings of provincial labour ministers.

It also talks about the fact that parental leave, which is something the Liberals brought in, should be extended from one year to six years.

There is a series of recommendations also for live-in caregiver programs. We know, and it has been discussed many times in the House, that the majority of caregivers, about 80%, are females. What is the government doing about it? Absolutely nothing.

Could my esteemed colleague comment on what she can do to persuade the government to act on this very important report.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that governing has a responsibility with it. By the choice of this opposition day motion, we are making it very clear that the Liberals value the role of women in society and recognize that there is an

appropriate role for the federal government to play in the equality of women and families. There are many female-led households. They are looking for the kinds of changes in legislation that my hon. colleague has just outlined.

Clearly the government has demonstrated that it has no interest in women. It is not a priority for it, which is why it has not acted on the thoughtful recommendations that have come forward from an all party committee and have been supported by the majority of parliamentarians on that committee.

Clearly action is called for and the government has no interest or inclination in stepping up to the plate.

● (1725)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sense there was some misleading of the House when she suggested that women have equality of rights in Canada. I agree with that notion. The problem is with the previous 13 years of the Liberal regime. What happened under that regime? Did the Liberals ever move to extend human rights protection to the aboriginal women of our country? Of course not. Did they ever move to bring in legislation to ensure that aboriginal women finally had matrimonial property rights? Of course not.

Finally, I remind her that it is her party, the Liberals, who oppose our intervention in Afghanistan. This intervention ensures that women in Afghanistan now have the ability to live more freely, to start their own home based businesses, to live lives somewhat similar to what we have, with the freedoms that we enjoy.

Could she explain that?

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I cannot begin to express how appalled I am that an hon. member of the House would say that women's equality is a notion. It speaks for itself.

The government brought in a Speech from the Throne that had nothing about health care, nothing that helped women in the least. Women and families were absolutely left out of the throne speech.

The member wants to talk about aboriginal rights. The Conservatives threw away the possibility and the opportunity of a generation when they got rid of Kelowna. If the government had any concern about aboriginals, it would have taken that fine document, which was negotiated with all parties, including all aboriginal leaders, in respect and it would have implemented it.

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

When I saw this Liberal motion yesterday, I almost laughed. In fact, I thought it was a Halloween joke. But, really, it is no laughing matter. It is a cruel joke, one that the Liberals have been playing on women for far too long. Their actions speak louder than words.

The Liberal track record on pay equity and other supports for women is dismal, at best. While it may appear that they supported women in our fight for pay equity, they were busy over the past 13 years that they were in government, of which 12 years I might add were in a majority position, dismantling programs for women.

Business of Supply

Some credit needs to go to former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau for creating Status of Women Canada. Many gains were made by women in the years following the implementation of that agency, but unfortunately, they did not go far enough.

For years, women called on the Liberal government to make Status of Women Canada its own department. Because of women's inequality in this country, we still need this, but it has not happened.

The former finance minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, made drastic cuts to the budget of Status of Women Canada in 1997. These cuts were announced by the member for Vancouver Centre, who was then the secretary of state for Status of Women Canada. This action slashed programs and supports for women across this country.

Now, the Conservatives have cut it even further, forcing the closure of 12 of the 16 status offices, as well as cutting the funding for much needed advocacy programs for vulnerable women in our communities. As a result of those Liberal and Conservative cuts, the Campbell River Women's Resource Centre in my riding has to constantly apply for grants for its programs on a project basis that is dictated by the minister responsible for Status of Women Canada, instead of receiving the ongoing funding and support that would provide appropriate programs, stability and support for the women in the north island community.

The New Democrats have always stood side by side with women's groups to support equality. Whether speaking out on issues like choice on abortion, breaking the silence on violence against women, pushing for proactive legislation on pay and employment equity, actively encouraging the increased participation of women in politics, or making sure that every piece of legislation is examined for its impact on women, the NDP is the party that has walked the talk when it comes to fighting for women's equality.

However, the Liberals did not stop with cuts to women's programs. In fact, they never even got started on other programs that they promised and never delivered on them, such as a national child care program.

In 1993, the Chrétien government promised 150,000 new child care spaces, but the Liberals never delivered. After much pressure from child care advocates, they finally introduced a patchwork of agreements with the provinces, but no legislative framework that would guarantee the creation of spaces for children and the accessibility, affordability and stability that parents, especially women, still the primary caregivers, are looking for.

The Conservative attitude toward a universal child care system is simply wrong-headed. Twelve hundred taxable dollars a year does not create one space. Because of inaction on the part of both Liberals and Conservatives, parents in Vancouver Island North are paying exorbitant fees and enduring wait lists of up to two years for spaces for their children.

The NDP believes that women's equality is fundamental to this country and is committed to achieving it in every walk of life, from pay equity to child care. In our document "Fairness for Women", the NDP lays out a plan to put the priorities of women first by making Canada a world leader for women's equality.

However, I digress. We are talking today about pay equity and economic equality for women. The Liberal motion before us today cites the need for pay equity and calls on the government to "develop a strategy to improve the economic security of all women in Canada and present this strategy to the House by February 1, 2008".

In 2004, the pay equity task force was set up and did a comprehensive review of federal pay equity legislation since it received royal assent in 1977.

• (1730)

Its news release of May 5, 2004 stated:

—the Task Force commissioned independent research on a wide range of relevant issues and conducted a cross-Canada consultation process seeking the views of a diverse population of individuals, stakeholder groups, and government departments and agencies.

During those consultations the task force had agreement from all sides that "—pay equity is a human right...[and that the] current federal pay equity regime lacks clarity and has resulted in uncertainty, tension and frustration".

The report noted the wage gap for women at that time was about 68¢. Today women earn 72¢ for every dollar a man earns, so we see we really have not come very far on this score. It also noted that women of visible minority groups, women with disabilities, and aboriginal women face even more discrimination in the labour market. Sadly, very little has changed on this front as well.

The pay equity task force called on the Liberal government in 2004 to implement proactive legislation, so that women would not have to make a human rights complaint when they were discriminated against on the basis of pay. The Liberals accepted that report and agreed that pay equity is a fundamental right. Three and a half years ago a majority Liberal government failed the women of Canada. It had an opportunity to raise the economic security of women, but it did nothing.

The pay equity task force was confident in 2004 that its recommendations in its report "Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right" would be taken seriously. It provided a clear framework to ensure the goal of pay equity would be achieved and urged the federal government to implement those recommendations quickly.

I find this motion hypocritical. The hypocrisy is that the Liberals would choose an opposition day to put forward a motion to call on the Conservative government to do something they should have done when they were in government over three and a half years ago.

However, since it is here and we are given an opportunity to speak to it, I would like to say that I will be supporting it. I guess the phrase "better late than never" is appropriate here. Having said that and given the Conservatives' lack of understanding and commitment to supports for women, I would like to tell them why pay equity and economic security is important for women, their families and for all their communities. I am going to do even better.

Business of Supply

First, and because there are maybe some members here in the House who have never heard of it, I will explain what pay equity is. It is the right to equal pay for work of equal value. A woman has the right to be paid just as much as a man for work that requires a similar level of skill, effort and responsibility, and is performed in similar working conditions.

Second, I would like to tell members why this is necessary. On average, women still earn less than men regardless of their occupation, age or education. Today a woman earns 72.5¢ for every dollar that a man earns. For aboriginal women, women of colour and racialized or new immigrant women, the wage gap between their earnings and the earnings of white men is even greater than the wage gap between white men and women.

Historically, work that women have traditionally done has not been considered as valuable as men's work. Caring for children and elders, performing clerical tasks, cleaning houses and offices and teaching, for example, are traditionally considered undervalued and underpaid.

This devaluing of women's work can be explained by many factors including systemic discrimination, racism, the lack of women in political positions and occupational segregation. Pay inequity hurts women and their families. It makes women and children more vulnerable to poverty.

In Canada, more women than men live in poverty and the majority of single parent households are headed by a woman living on a low income. Since pay inequity contributes to poverty, it can have devastating health and social consequences, poor nutrition, inadequate housing, poor concentration and performance at school, and social isolation.

Pay inequity is also related to economic dependence which affects a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship. Women bringing home lower paycheques also receive lower retirement incomes. Too often, senior women are living hand to mouth until the end of their lives.

Pay equity legislation helps to compensate women for this historic and systemic discrimination. Effective pay equity laws are a critical tool in advancing equality rights for all women and other historically disadvantaged groups.

● (1735)

The NDPs "Fairness for Women" document developed by our NDP caucus is available on our website. This will be a very helpful tool for the government. It must use it as a framework in developing a strategy to improve the—

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

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member speaks very passionately about this topic and I commend her for that.

I have read the report of the committee on the Status of Women, and I have read the dissenting opinion of the New Democratic Party to this report. I do not know whether the member has had an opportunity to read that report, but I have a question because it is quite relevant to some of the things that she was saying, and it has to

do with work done by women that is unpaid. I assume that means stay-at-home moms, but maybe the member could clarify that.

I am quoting from the minority report which says:

—nevertheless this work is very important. Unpaid work such as child rearing provides significant value to society. However, because this work can take up a great deal of time without compensation, it may leave some women in a position of economic insecurity.

I understand all that. Are we assuming from this statement that the New Democratic caucus is suggesting that the taxpayer pay all stay-at-home women, or stay-at-home fathers for that matter? If so, does the member have any idea what that would cost?

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, a few years ago in New Zealand a member of Parliament named Marilyn Waring did a study on the value of work. The book was called *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*. She followed that up with a documentary where she placed a value on home care, child care, doing the dishes, doing the laundry, and all kinds of things that were undervalued and not paid work in society. The documentary found that if those jobs that women do, or anyone does, that are unpaid in the home or outside, were added to the GDP, it would make a significant increase.

She also compared that to some of the things that create wealth in our society such as oil spills and accidents. For example, when an ambulance is called out to an accident, people are paid to clean up and things like that. These things are talked about as value for our economy because they create work. It was quite an interesting documentary. I just want to let the member know about it.

What we are suggesting here is that women who are working should be adequately compensated. We are talking about pay equity for already paid work. I hope the member and I can have a conversation about this at some other point.

● (1740)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for raising the issue of the closure of Status of Women offices. I have one of the largest ridings in Canada and I do not have an office within 200 miles. The Conservative government closed that office in its cuts to women's issues.

The member used the word hypocritical quite a few times. Her leader supported the Conservatives in the last election and that is the reason why the Conservative government was elected. It is the height of hypocrisy to say that the NDP wants to support the Conservative government that put in all these cuts and then blame somebody else. The NDP can go back and find credit where it wants. It is ridiculous in this House to blame us for the issues when the NDP in fact supported the Conservative government and continue to do so to this day. How long are those members going to do it with their leader?

Business of Supply

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat myself. Hypocrisy knows no bounds with the Liberal Party these days. That party is best friends with the Conservatives in the House. Those members just supported the government on a throne speech and a mini budget. How much more support does the government need? It seems like we have a de facto majority in the House. It is unheard of. It is a shame.

For all the years that the Liberals had a majority government, they did nothing for women. They could not get it done for women's equality. Here we are today in 2007 having the same argument that we had over three years ago.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because I believe I am the last speaker, I want to sum up by saying that I have been listening to the debate today and what an incredible farce it has been in regard to the motion brought forward by the Liberal caucus.

What a history this motion has. Let us look at the record. Let us look at the record of the 150,000 day care spaces that were promised in 13 Liberal budgets but were never delivered. And the Liberals have the gall to bring forward this motion?

Let us look at the \$25 billion in lost transfer payments because of Liberal governments and let us look at the status of women in this country today.

Then, a few days ago, we saw the so-called mini-budget brought in by the Conservatives, with the biggest giveaway to corporate Canada and with huge rollbacks in corporate taxes. Who sits on their hands and supports the Conservative government? That same Liberal Party.

I have to say that it is pathetic what the Liberals did today and the record will show what they have really done for the women in this country, just as we are now seeing from the Conservative government as well.

In my community of east Vancouver, we recently had a visit from the special UN rapporteur on affordable housing who came to east Vancouver to see that homelessness has doubled in my community. He issued a damning preliminary report, not only of the previous Liberal government but of the current Conservative government, a report that asks why, in a country as wealthy as Canada, we have people who are homeless. Why do we have 1.5 million Canadians who are in need, according to CMHC, of core housing? Why do we have 2.5 million Canadians living below the poverty line? It is because of the Liberal budgets and it is because of the budget brought down just a few days ago that gave this massive rollover to the corporations.

I have to ask what kind of scale it is that is being used here to provide any sense of equity. It is a scale that says if people already have a lot, we will give them more, and if people do not have anything, sorry, we will forget about them. But those are my constituents and those are average Canadians who have been forgotten.

We are here to stand up in the House and to call for the truth on what that motion from the Liberal Party is about, but also to expose what the government's mini-budget is all about. It is about reaping rewards for the wealthiest corporations in this country. They are

profitable, the oil companies, the gas companies and the mining companies, and they do not need handouts from the government.

Maybe the manufacturing sector needs some support. We have heard about the 300,000 jobs that have been lost in the manufacturing sector. We have heard about the workers who have been laid off.

However, I will tell members what we are really losing out on and that is the social deficit that has been built up. It is really shameful that we now have come to the realization that the UN rapporteur has to issue a report pointing out to us, as members of Parliament, to the government and to previous governments that we have a significant issue of poverty. We have a growing gap in this country. Even Statistics Canada shows us that the wealthiest people are getting wealthier while other people are being left behind.

Yes, we do need an economic strategy that puts women first, we do need pay equity and we do need child care, but neither of those parties has had the guts, the political priority or the vision to deliver on that. They both have failed the people of Canada miserably on that score.

We are here today as New Democrats to stand up and be counted. We voted against that so-called mini-budget because we know it is the wrong direction for Canada and we know it is the wrong direction for the vast majority of Canadians.

People want to see a social investment. Women in this country want to see a social investment in education for their kids. They want to see the social investment in child care. They want to see a social investment so they can afford their prescriptions and do not have to take money out of their housekeeping money or food off the table or worry about paying the rent. Those are the basics that I hear about from my constituents. I know that other members in our caucus hear it from their constituents too.

I want to say to the Liberal members who have been debating their motion today, really, what gall, and what a shame it is for them to stand up in this place and peddle this line that they now want to see equality for women after 13 years of downgrading women.

That was not an economic statement that was about an update. It was an economic statement that left more and more people living in misery in this country and those members are going along with it. We know which side we are on, but obviously Liberal members do not know which side they are on, so we say shame on those members.

● (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. It being 5:48 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 13 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Is there an hon. member who is willing to suggest that we see the clock? The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville is rising.

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, we would like to see the clock as 6:03 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 6:03 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1750)

[English]

PHTHALATE CONTROL ACT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved that Bill C-307, An Act respecting bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate, benzyl butyl phthalate and dibutyl phthalate, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, no offence to the distinguished Speaker, but one of my favourite parts of this bill is to hear the various Speakers in the House attempt the pronunciation of the name of this bill, which we did not do, Mr. Speaker, I will offer you that. That was done by some of the drafters of the legislation who worked with us.

All kidding aside, this is a very serious piece of legislation. We have been working through it for over a year and a half now with various supporters from across the non-profit sector and the health community and various members of Parliament. It has received broad support.

While I have to mention a small source of disappointment here, there have been many inspirational moments along the way as we have worked diligently on this bill to see it through. It is something that we believe is good for Canadians and particularly good for the health of our children.

The first point came when we saw that what was meant to be an hour or so of debate in committee turned into four to six hours, with constant foot dragging by some within government, and with some within the bureaucracy itself taking out elements of the bill that, I would remind those in government, have now been adopted in full scale and measure in California law and in the entire European Union.

Somehow the claim that this was dangerous for the Canadian economy was some sort of excuse for stripping out the important aspects of health. Now, tonight, when we have an opportunity, an opportunity we believed we had with all four parties in this place, to move this bill through quickly and get it into law, which all parties claim to want to do, we have the government deciding that it needs to take the full measure of its time to debate.

To debate what exactly? Nothing. The government has nothing to fundamentally disagree with in this bill. We have made the changes. We have listened to department officials. Now the government wants to spend yet more time on it. This is apparently a government in a hurry to not do much, because tonight we have the opportunity to move this bill through and all three opposition parties are willing to do so. The government is not willing to do so and for no coherent reason whatsoever.

Private Members' Business

We have attempted time and time again to work with government officials and to work with my colleagues on the government benches, to allay their fears, to modify the bill and to work this legislation through to a point of satisfaction. We have arrived. The bill is satisfactory to all parties. We expect unanimous consent on the bill.

However, here in an opportunity we have to move it forward, there is some strange alchemy that happens in the deep bowels of the government such that it decides this cooperation just does not feel right somehow, so it has to wind the clock out again.

Nevertheless, we need to talk about the merits of the bill and its prospects of improving the health and welfare of Canadians in regard to dealing with phthalates. This group or family of chemicals is the absolute poster boy for unintended consequences.

Typically when a chemical is designed by chemical manufacturers and producers, they design it for an industrial purpose, to apply it in some commercial product and to perform some function. In this case, it is the softening of plastics. Phthalates allow certain plastics to be more malleable. It seems like a pretty innocuous effort, but unfortunately this type of chemical also leaks out and causes serious and considerable health effects, particularly in children.

Now clearly we took on an issue and wanted to prove a point. We think we have been able to establish that point: the merits of the precautionary principle, the principle that says we must take all precautions before we allow something onto the market and into Canadians' blood. Unfortunately, the sad history of chemical law in Canada has been far too cautious in the other direction. There is an assumption of innocence until proven guilty. Unfortunately, that has led to far too many ailments for Canadians, far too many illnesses and deaths.

In this case, phthalates now have been substantially proven across this whole region, in Health Canada reports and in others in the United States and Europe, to have serious health considerations. We think the bill is measured in its approach to banning this in some of the most serious and significant areas.

It is also duly noted that one of the few ways phthalates can be released from a product is through mastication, or chewing, and the unfortunate convergence of having this material in toys and implements for children that are meant to be chewed has created this awful scenario. That of course was not designed by the manufacturers, but it creates a health worry for Canadians.

Right now in Canada when a parent or a family member buys a toy for a child, there is absolutely no way to know whether it contains these chemicals or not. There is no proper labelling system in this country and there obviously is no proper ban; hence the need for this bill. We also find this chemical in women's cosmetics and certain vinyl sidings and floorings and in some surgical equipment.

Private Members' Business

• (1755)

Through all of this, there is this constant effort to pit the economy against the environment. We heard time and again from some witnesses, particularly those from within the department, what would happen if we banned phthalates in medical equipment. I can remember one official who said that Canadians would die on the surgery tables because there would be no medical equipment available to them because of this bill.

That is remarkable because in that same testimony there were nurses and doctors from the United States who brought products with them that were phthalate free. They had lists of entire hospitals that have declared themselves phthalate free and have banned the chemical entirely from their hospitals with no consequence.

It is an important lesson for us all as parliamentarians when we think about doing our work in this place, that the interests of the people we hope to represent must be first and foremost. Any argument made against those interests has to be verified before we accept it.

When the manufacturing sector, for example, comes forward with a doom and gloom scenario, or a department official for whatever reason presents evidence, too often in this place we are willing to take it as scripture. We are not willing to challenge it to its core and present alternative views and really get to the truth of the matter.

With respect to phthalates, the truth of the matter is that the role and responsibility of government is to protect our citizens. Whatever stripe the government has, its role and responsibility first and foremost is to look after the well-being particularly of those who are unable to look after themselves, in this case children and those receiving care at a hospital.

As these plastic softeners are removed in California and Europe and many other states, Canada must get in line because there will be a reverse consequence on industry. If we do not ban this chemical in our manufacturing cycle, it will put Canadian companies at a disadvantage because they will not be able to sell into those markets anymore. They will only be able to sell to the Canadian market which allows these toxins to be present in materials.

It becomes an absolutely insane scenario. Clearly we have made enough arguments in this place and at committee that this should be accepted.

It is important for us all to look at how the government has functioned to this point similar to the previous regime when dealing with chemicals. It is very difficult for Canadians to get a full grasp of the myriad of chemicals, thousands upon thousands of chemicals, where the studies are often limited and scripted to not necessarily bring us to the full conclusion.

There are studies that have been done over a 24 hour period, nothing longitudinal at all. There are studies that have been done where there is no combination of chemicals given. Two chemicals may appear safe on their own, but combine the two and put them in a breakfast cereal and there is a real problem.

There is no capacity within the government as it goes through its chemical screening to present to Canadians a completely safe product stream with any kind of certainty.

This is a bill which sets a precedent. Health Canada did a study and tested the products not so long ago and came to the conclusion that this was safe for Canadians. We questioned what products had been looked at. Did the study look at children's toys? Did it look at cosmetics? No, it did not.

The study had excluded the very products where the concern lay and yet officials were standing in front of us saying that these things were okay. They said that a certain group of chemicals was okay to apply when the main area of concern, the main way in which they enter the human system, was excluded from the study. It is patently ridiculous, specious and dishonest. It is time for us to take full measure and account for what it is that we accept and what we allow into Canadians on a daily basis.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley how he found the spirit of cooperation in the committee.

I think that he found everyone on the committee actually very committed to seeing the issue of phthalates, particularly with respect to medical devices, handled in a way that would protect the health of Canadians. How did he find the spirit of cooperation which is not normally what we have seen in the committee? In this particular case I found it very encouraging because we worked together to come to a solution. We found the common ground. I just wanted to find out from him how he found that spirit of cooperation.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting. I was speaking to some of my colleagues earlier who sit on the committee with me and I had made a suggestion informally earlier this week. The environment committee had essentially broken down in the last session and become so disharmonious that there were so many problems and tensions it was a fiasco. At various times it was a circus. I said that we were dignified sensible people and suggested that set some principles of how we wanted to conduct ourselves in this session.

I had a good agreement from around the House that we should grab a coffee or some other beverage to our liking and establish some other better intention for the committee because this work is so important for Canadians. We had agreement and then suddenly, the winds blew up to offices in higher places in the House and it was kiboshed, absolutely killed. There was no way the government was going to allow us to meet informally and discuss getting along, so here we are.

In fact, it was raised by my colleagues that the Liberals went offside. For a rare moment they had not. For a rare moment there was this opportunity to actually get along.

The bill works well. We need to find concession points within all four parties. This is a minority Parliament, even though it is de facto operating in a different way now. We need to improve the health of our population and safety of our environment.

Private Members' Business

• (1800)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech on this private member's bill. It is a very interesting piece. I understand there is a bit of a consensus around the room to make sure that this chemical issue is dealt with in an appropriate manner, but part of our job as members of Parliament, particularly on the government side, is to make sure that we put on the record what we want to do in terms of chemical management in those areas.

I just want to know whether there is a reason he does not think it is appropriate that we get an opportunity, as members of Parliament, to speak to his private member's bill. Why is he in a rush to collapse the debate here tonight?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley should know that there are two minutes left, and also his colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore wants to ask him a question, so we have to pack it all in in two minutes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, that is fascinating, coming from a government that has put together an omnibus crime bill and then put a deadline on it with all sorts of serious implications that we have not yet found.

Suddenly we have a bill that we have almost talked to death. If he wants to put information on the record, we have a boxed set of information on the record. There are more records on this bill than we possibly could need. There are no more concerns around this bill. We have answered their concerns. Absolutely, those members can rise in their places and make comments, but for goodness' sake, why run the clock out? Why do this again? Why waste good taxpayers' dollars in this place if we are all agreeing?

Apparently the Conservative government is now a government inclined to waste taxpayers' dollars. I always suspected it, but now I see it in evidence. Let us get on with it. Put it on the record and let us close down the debate and move on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, there is one minute for both the question and the answer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member raised the issue that witnesses came before the committee and gave very misleading evidence. I am just wondering why professional people in their capacity would do that knowing full well that there was evidence contradicting what they had to say.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, sometimes people do not want to see the answers that are in front of them when they have a predetermined solution available. There is an apprehension in government to ban chemicals in general and in the specific. We saw that again in this case. There was a strong case made for this chemical to be banned. Government officials, generally speaking, do not like to do that because they get a whole bunch of grief from a whole bunch of lobbyists. It is time for us to reverse the course of events and make sure that we are doing the right thing more consistently.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the committee for its good work. I also want to thank my

friend and colleague, the member for Abbotsford, for his good work. He sat on that committee and worked hard, as he does in his constituency. He has done a great job on the environment and I want to thank him.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-307, the phthalate control act. I want to thank the member who brought this bill forward for the 20 minutes we heard him speak.

This bill seeks to conduct a reassessment of the risks of the two phthalates, BBP and DBP, within 24 months of the enactment of the bill. Bill C-307 would see the Department of Health publish a document concerning the labelling that is necessary to comply with the requirements of the medical devices regulations in relation to the risks inherent in medical devices that contain phthalates.

The bill would also require that the government take regulatory action under the Hazardous Products Act and the Food and Drugs Act to reduce Canadians' exposure to one phthalate in particular, DEHP, in cases where the risk to human health has been clearly determined.

Furthermore, the bill would require that the Minister of Health undertake a number of actions regarding medical devices which contain DEHP. I am pleased to say that the government supports this bill as amended in committee.

I am also pleased to say that this bill is a great example of what can be accomplished when all the members collaborate. The members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development rolled up their sleeves and worked together to ensure that Bill C-307 is legislation of which all members can be proud.

We put our political differences aside and worked together on the bill for the safety and health of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the environment committee for their hard work and diligence in crafting this bill.

Phthalates are a group of chemicals that are used to make certain types of plastic more soft and malleable. Bill C-307 deals with three of these phthalates, which I will refer to in their common names, BBP, DBP and DEHP.

Phthalates can be found in many places in our society, from ordinary household objects to manufacturing substances. One of the most important abilities of phthalates is to soften plastics, an important and lifesaving aspect for the medical community.

The first chemical, BBP, is a commonly used plasticizer which can be found in food conveyor belts, artificial leather, traffic cones and many other plastic types of foam. DBP can be found in many cosmetic products, particularly nail polish. DEHP is commonly found in medical devices, intravenous tubing, blood bags and other plastic medical instruments.

Private Members' Business

Recently, Health Canada found traces of phthalates in children's toys. I share the concerns of all parents who are being vigilant about chemicals to which their children may be exposed. This bill's emphasis on medical devices which contain phthalates addresses one of the government's priorities, the safety of all Canadians, one of the themes in last month's Speech from the Throne.

Health Canada's document will identify what devices and chemicals contained in devices need to be labelled as an inherent health risk. Canadians need to use these lifesaving devices, but they will not be risking their lives to use them.

The bill as amended by the committee tasks the government to reassess both BBP and DBP for any potential risks. These reassessments will be conducted by Health Canada scientists under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, also known as CEPA 99.

Previous Government of Canada assessments of BBP and DBP found these phthalates not to be toxic as defined under CEPA. However, several years have passed since these assessments were conducted and there will be new science reviewing whether or not these substances pose any risk to human health. This government will reassess these two phthalates to determine if, in light of the new information, there are unacceptable risks and detrimental health impacts.

• (1805)

The reassessments will provide the scientific backing required for any action the government may feel is necessary and warranted. This would include the consideration of human exposure to phthalates through the use of consumer products, including cosmetics, and of any communicative effects BBP and DBP may have on humans.

There are those who may argue that conducting these assessments merely delay action on BBP and DBP. I assure the House that this government takes decisive action on chemicals where risks have been determined. We will take action based on science.

The government will conduct risk assessments of BBP and DBP under CEPA to determine the risks to human health and then, if these phthalates are determined to be toxic, the government has a variety of legislative instruments to protect Canadians. If we do not find a scientific approach to risk management, we put in jeopardy the intent of this bill and could undermine the legislative integrity of the government's actions.

It should be noted that we support the precautionary principle which has been added to this bill. The precautionary principle says in effect that the knowledge does not have to be absolute before intervening but it must be enough to justify our actions.

I should also add that the Canada Health measures survey, which is a national survey involving measures, including blood sampling from 5,000 Canadians, is currently being conducted. This national survey will generate data to help us better understand the levels of chemicals in Canadians. The survey includes 11 compounds that could be found in people resulting from phthalate exposure.

Bill C-307 as amended by the environment committee is a much improved version of the bill. It seeks to assess and manage the risks associated with certain phthalates without undermining the science

based approach to chemical substance management. That is good news.

This legislation will, if passed, support the government's continuing efforts to protect Canadians from exposure to toxic chemical substances with effective science based risk management solutions.

The government will be supporting Bill C-307 and I encourage all members of the House to support the bill.

Before I close, I want to acknowledge the men and women in uniform who have fought valiantly to protect Canada and to contribute in bringing democracy, safety and freedom to the world. My father served in the Canadian army. He was in the tanks division and was a tank instructor. He was a Canadian from Edmonton and went to England and served Canada and the world over there. My father passed away in July of this year and I miss him greatly.

I have been honoured to meet with many veterans. I am so proud of what we are doing in the world and particularly in Afghanistan. One would ask what would happen if Canada was to abandon Afghanistan, as has been suggested by some in this House. Women and children are now being given the opportunity to attend school. I dare not imagine what would happen if Canada were to leave Afghanistan.

I am supportive of us being in Afghanistan and that we stay there until the job is done. We need to honour those who have given their lives and we need to honour the reputation of Canada.

I remind every one of us to visit a cenotaph in our communities and to honour those Canadians who have served our country so valiantly. We must never forget the ultimate price that so many Canadians have given.

• (1810)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to the parliamentary secretary's closing remarks, I share his concern. I share his profound conviction that we are doing good around the world, but it is also important to remind his colleagues in his own caucus that it is very important that as we build the rule of law and democratic traditions and structures in countries like Afghanistan that we work very feverishly here in this country never to undermine them.

I am speaking today about the merits of Bill C-307, Phthalate Control Act. I would like to begin by congratulating the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his ongoing contribution to the toxins debate in Canada, particularly with regard to phthalates.

The bill before us has been carefully examined in committee and the Liberal Party and its members have played some important role in facilitating the successful outcome of our discussions.

Private Members' Business

On background, first let us look at the bill. It deals with three major chemical compounds, part of a large group of chemicals known as phthalates. The three phthalates that were examined under this bill are DEHP, BBP and DBP. What are they? For average Canadians who are watching or reading, they are plasticizers. They are substances that enhance flexibility in plastic compounds. They are used in thousands of products, from children's toys to medical devices to cosmetics.

Studies have linked certain phthalates to infertility and other health issues. However, the three phthalates considered in this bill have been evaluated under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act in the past. One of the substances of the three, DEHP, was in fact designated toxic through the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

We heard extensive testimony in committee that not all types of exposure were in fact evaluated by the federal government studies when looking at the other two phthalates. The proposed bill calls for a more comprehensive reassessment that shall include exposure through the use of consumer products, including cosmetics. This would help ensure the assessment of the cumulative effects of those phthalates on humans.

Something, which we are just beginning to grapple with in the scientific community and that is, for anyone listening or reading, it is really a question of whether or not we are able to measure a multiplicity of exposures of these compounds themselves or how these compounds interact with other compounds that are in our environment at large here in Canada, the cumulative effects of all of these things combined.

As I mentioned earlier, phthalates are found in thousands of products in our environment: toys and medical devices, cosmetics, but also basics, such as shower curtains or the vinyl that we find in vinyl products or the vinyl dashboard in cars, for example. We are again concerned by the multiple exposure to phthalates which perhaps, in isolation, may not have the impact that we fear on human health, but in combination can be particularly toxic. These repeated exposures could be enough to cause harm.

Both speakers who have preceded me have spoken about the precautionary principle which underlies Bill C-307, and they were right in giving it the attention they did. It calls for the introduction by government of cost effective measures to prevent serious or irreversible damage even if we do not have full scientific certainty.

We know that certain other countries, as my colleague from the NDP has mentioned, including the whole European Union, have tighter restrictions on chemicals such as phthalates than Canada does. However, it is also fair to say that when Bill C-307 arrived at committee last March, all members were in favour of closer scrutiny of these compounds but, to be perfectly frank and honest about it, the bill was in an unworkable, unacceptable and, frankly, very unrealistic form.

•(1815)

As I stressed in committee, we need to achieve what the French would call *le juste milieu* to deal effectively with phthalates, the right balance between the reflection of health and safety and reasonable demands on industry, while facilitating products which are important

and useful for our citizens, and ultimately moving to implement tighter restrictions on these risky compounds.

As it was originally drafted, the bill would have banned the three phthalates completely in commonly used applications but government members, as they are want to do, balked in committee, proposing instead to rewrite the bill in its entirety, or worse, throw it out not seeing beyond its face value. I think it is fair to say that the five Liberal members on the environment committee were instrumental in reconciling the two parties that were embroiled in a spat and then helped broker a compromise so the bill would not die in committee.

I had two central concerns to ensure the bill stayed alive. First, I wanted to ensure that it maintained the science based process that exists in the current legislation. We do not invent legislation here that is not science based. That is not the Canadian way.

Parliament needs to respond from time to time to concerns that are raised, as we did by holding hearings on these very compounds, but scientists and the scientific method are best qualified to provide the final recommendation to the minister about what applications are safe based on current research.

Second, the outright ban would have caused users of phthalate products, including hospitals, to scramble to find substitute products that may or may not work as well as the current ones. This we did hear in testimony objectively from witnesses.

We are not in a situation to recommend to Canadian health care providers that they ought not to be using products that play an indispensable role in health care. Risks need to be balanced. Banning a breathing tube, as the NDP sought in its first draft, because it might potentially have a long term hormonal effect, may in fact have a very immediate impact on a patient's survival.

Again, a science based approach that balances these risks is preferable to a political solution on the one hand emanating from the NDP, which is, in some respects, to frighten Canadians about these products, whereas the Conservative Party would have thrown the bill out at first blush for its own political purposes as well.

The amended version of the bill was supported by all five Liberal MPs and ultimately passed in committee. When the bill gets royal assent, it will require that the chemicals in question are reviewed again with the provision that they will be banned from certain applications if they are found to be toxic.

As my colleagues pointed out earlier, substitutes are already available for many of these products. Bill C-307, as it is drafted now, would encourage research into safer alternatives for a greater number of products, including, of course, medical devices, rather than an unrealistic first off approach found in the first version of the bill, which sought an outright and immediate ban on the use of these products.

Bill C-307 does show that from time to time we can cooperate effectively at committee, usually when the lights are dimmed and the cameras are off, and we can achieve a good outcome as this is.

The official opposition will be supporting the adoption of Bill C-307.

Private Members' Business

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the subject of Bill C-307. First, I want to tell my colleagues that I will be using acronyms for the substances affected by the bill throughout my remarks. You will probably understand why just by reading the title of the bill, which is already quite complicated.

Bill C-307, an act respecting the phthalates BBP, DBP and DEHP, essentially seeks to better control, if not to forbid, the use of phthalates in a wide range of commonly used objects because those substances represent a risk to the health of Quebeckers and Canadians.

To begin, let us specify what phthalates are. The phthalates BBP, DBP and DEHP are part of a family of chemical products mainly intended for industrial use. Phthalates are found in a number of common consumer products such as adhesives, detergents, solvents, certain pharmaceutical products, electrical wire and cables and cosmetic products like perfume, deodorants, after-shave lotions, shampoos, and so forth.

The use of phthalates as softening agents is another current application for these products. Most PVC-based rigid, semi-rigid and flexible articles contain phthalates.

The proportion of phthalates can be as high as 50% in some products, for example, plastic bags, food wrap, shower curtains, bath toys, medical devices, and containers for blood storage, to name only a few.

In scientific terms, the toxicity level of phthalates varies depending on the kind of composition. Thus, DEHP phthalates have a higher toxicity potential than other phthalates and some researchers believe that phthalates could be carcinogenic.

According to a report by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, experts have concluded that BBP has no effect or negligible effect on reproduction and development. However, for DEHP and, to a lesser degree, for DBP, the results arouse more concern.

In addition, the use of various medical devices that contain DEHP raises some concern about the development of premature male babies who need prolonged care.

For all these reasons, in our analysis of the bill, the Bloc Québécois has favoured the precautionary principle.

What is the precautionary principle? The precautionary principle was officially recognized and confirmed by the international community in the convention on biological diversity adopted at Rio in 1992, a convention that was ratified by Canada.

According to this principle, when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an activity or a product may cause serious and irreversible harm to health or the environment, mitigation measures must be taken until the effects are documented. These measures may include, in the case of an activity, reducing or terminating this activity or, in the case of a product, banning this product.

So much for phthalates. In terms of the bill before us, the initial text obliged the Minister of the Environment to make regulations prohibiting the use of BBP, DBP and DEHP in certain products.

The bill required a regulation prohibiting the use of BBP in products for use by a child in learning or play, and products that are put in the mouth of an infant when used, including feeding bottle nipples, teethers, soothers, pacifiers and other similar products.

It prohibited the use of DBP in cosmetics, products for use by a child in learning or play, and products that are put in the mouth of an infant when used, including feeding bottle nipples, teethers, soothers, pacifiers and other similar products.

It prohibited DEHP in cosmetics, medical devices other than blood bags, products for use by a child in learning or play, and products that are put in the mouth of an infant when used, including feeding bottle nipples, teethers, soothers, pacifiers and other similar products.

Furthermore, the text amended Schedule 1 to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, to include BBP, DBP and DEHP as toxic substances.

From the outset of committee study of Bill C-307, the Bloc Québécois expressed concerns about prohibiting phthalates in medical devices.

Although it is important to promote the use of devices that do not contain phthalates, this does not mean that we can forego the use of tools required to care for Quebeckers and Canadians.

This position was taken by many intervenors, including Quebec's Institut national de santé publique.

The Bloc Québécois therefore tabled an amendment to meet that objective. Although the wording of our amendment was rejected, the committee nevertheless integrated the Bloc Québécois' concern regarding medical products. Bill C-307 was amended to include a distinct mechanism for medical products. That mechanism centres on safety and risk identification, rather than a simple ban on products containing phthalates.

● (1825)

Thus, the preferred approach is based on identifying the risks associated with medical devices, and allowing Quebeckers and Canadians to make the final decision on refusing medical instruments that contain phthalates.

Products that are free of phthalates are also promoted—and this is key—by drawing up a list.

This is why we, the Bloc Québécois, are in favour of Bill C-307.

There has not been enough research to date on the effects of phthalates on human health. While awaiting more precise answers regarding the health risks associated with phthalates, the government should limit as much as possible the exposure of vulnerable populations to various chemical compounds, as a precautionary measure.

Private Members' Business

We also note that some of the bans proposed in the original bill have been amended, since they went too far, given that reliable, effective and safe replacement products were unavailable for certain medical devices.

We in the Bloc Québécois believe that Bill C-307 responds to our main concerns.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House to speak to the third and final reading of Bill C-307, An Act respecting bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate, benzyl butyl phthalate and dibutyl phthalate. I would like to thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for presenting this to the House.

Although I am pleased to speak in favour of this legislative proposal, it is important to note that, in its original form, the bill was poorly drafted. The government worked hard and is presenting this bill to the House with considerable changes that strike an effective balance between public health and environmental and economic considerations. Our changes have produced a stronger and more practical bill that still achieves its purpose of protecting health, especially that of young children.

As we have heard today, Bill C-307 addresses a group of chemicals known as phthalates. These compounds are commonly used as plasticizers to enhance flexibility in plastics. Phthalates are used in a wide range of products from medical devices such as blood bags and intravenous tubing, to cosmetics such as nail polish, to soft vinyl toys. The phthalates covered by the legislative proposal are known by their acronyms BBP, DBP and DEHP.

During debate at second reading of Bill C-307, the government had concerns about the original bill. It would have banned these three substances from the Canadian market, which was a position we could not support for a number of reasons. First, the peer reviewed scientific evidence did not support such a drastic measure. The three substances were reviewed as to their impact on the environment and on health. The results show that a ban would be neither necessary nor viable, economically speaking. In fact, such a strategy would place an unnecessary burden on manufacturers and could result in significant costs to the consumer and the medical community.

As mentioned during the debate at second reading, studies conducted in accordance with the Canadian Environmental Protection Act of 1999 found that DBP, BBP and DEHP phthalates do not harm the environment. Specific studies of the impact of these three chemicals on health found that two of them, BBP and DBP, do not pose an excessive health risk. However, exposure to DEHP raises serious health concerns, particularly for children.

As my honourable colleague explained, measures were taken to protect the health of those most at risk, including children under the age of three. Canadian manufacturers voluntarily stopped using not only DEHP, but also all phthalates in products for babies that could be put into a child's mouth. Furthermore, Health Canada stated that DEHP is not currently being used in the production of cosmetics.

That being said, DEHP still has a number of important and necessary applications in Canada. For some products, such as medical and scientific devices, there are no viable substitutes for it. That is the second reason we cannot support a total ban, as originally proposed by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. Health

Canada's medical devices bureau has undertaken thorough studies of these compounds and has found that DEHP has a number of advantages that other plasticizers simply do not have.

Despite the potential effects of DEHP exposure on humans, its advantages outweigh the risks. This is the main reason we could not agree to a total ban at second reading. Now that the bill has been reworked, it allows the continued use of these products. It also provides for additional regulations governing the use of DEHP and for further studies of the other two chemicals. The government is prepared to support the bill.

• (1830)

The new provisions in clause 2 of Bill C-307 ensure an important balance within the bill. Clause 2.1 presents a minimum threshold under which a product or device will not be considered to contain any BBP, DBP or DEHP.

Clause 2.2 contains the precautionary principle. Where the threat of serious or irreversible damage results from the use of one of these phthalates, the Government of Canada cannot use a lack of full scientific certainty as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to protect human and environmental health.

Improving the environment and the health of Canadians was a central theme in the recent throne speech. To quote the document, "Our Government believes that action is needed now to ensure our quality of life, particularly for those most vulnerable to health threats from the environment—our children and seniors".

It is from this perspective that we can accept the amendments made to clause 3 of Bill C-307. Clearly, further measures are needed, in addition to the existing voluntary measures, to help reduce Canadians' exposure to DEHP.

In accordance with the precautionary principle previously cited, clause 3 requires the Governor in Council to adopt regulations under the Food and Drugs Act in order to govern the use of DEHP in cosmetics. As already mentioned by my hon. colleague, these measures will specify that DEHP may not be used in new formulations of cosmetics and will allow Health Canada to take quick and decisive action if this prohibition is contravened. This regulation must be in place within 12 months of the coming into force of the proposed legislation.

Also in accordance with the precautionary principle, the Governor in Council is required to make an order under the Dangerous Goods Act prohibiting the use of DEHP in products whose use involves the product being brought into contact with the mouth of a child of less than three years of age. Once again, this order must be made within 12 months of the coming into force of the proposed legislation.

Private Members' Business

Clause 3 of Bill C-307 also establishes certain obligations of the Minister of Health with regard to the use of DEHP in medical devices, including developing requirements for labelling and collaboration with the health care sector in order to develop clinical practice guidelines for the use of medical devices that contain DEHP.

The Minister of Health will also be required to prepare a list of medical devices available in Canada that do not contain DEHP and to consider giving priority to licence applications for medical devices that do not contain DEHP.

Lastly, Bill C-307 will require the government to reassess BBP and DBP under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. These reassessments must be completed within 24 months after the coming into force of this legislative proposal. They will ensure that the government has access to solid scientific evidence to support future decisions about the use of specific phthalates in consumer products.

As I mentioned when I began, the government has made a great deal of effort to improve a bad bill. I believe that Bill C-307 is now more solid and more balanced and can more effectively control these three substances than when it was originally introduced in this House.

I encourage the members on all sides of the House to vote for this bill.

It is especially important to understand that the phthalates in blood bags allow blood to be kept almost twice as long as if the phthalates were not present.

•(1835)

In the end, not only did our government have to adjust to meet a demand, but it also had to take into account medical and scientific constraints regarding the use of this product.

[*English*]

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address the House today to speak on the third and final reading of Bill C-307, the proposed phthalate control act.

When the government took a look at the original bill, it was badly written and, quite frankly, was not a good legislation. However, I am happy to see that the government was able to significantly amend the bill into a form we could support.

As my hon. colleagues have already advised the House, our government supports Bill C-307 in its amended state.

The amended bill would ensure that the substances under consideration, known as BBP, DBP and DEHP, would continue to be managed through the existing process for dealing with substances that may pose a threat to the environment and to human health.

At the second reading debate, the government expressed concern that Bill C-307, as originally drafted, would circumvent the comprehensive scientific assessment of phthalates, by imposing an immediate and outright ban on the use of BBP, DBP and DEHP.

I am very pleased that the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has acknowledged the government's concerns and agrees to respect the scientific assessment process provided for under the

Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, otherwise known as CEPA.

As we have heard today, the federal Departments of Environment and Health have already assessed the risks associated with the three subjects named in Bill C-307. Actions have been taken, where warranted.

Having said that, the government fully supports the reassessment of BBP and DBP within the next two years, provided that these assessments use the appropriate process, the CEPA review mechanism. We are also prepared to support additional regulatory measures to strengthen control of DEHP, which has been proven to have associated health risks.

Both of these measures are included in Bill C-307 and are consistent with the government's commitment to protect human health and the environment, as reiterated in the recent Speech from the Throne. They are also consistent with the government's chemical management plan, which I will discuss in more detail shortly.

I am pleased to confirm that Bill C-307 no longer subverts CEPA, which provides the framework for identifying, prioritizing and assessing existing substances for controlling or managing those considered to pose a risk to Canadians or the environment.

One of the stated goals of CEPA is to manage risk from substances. This recognizes the reality that, from time to time, we will come across substances that may pose a threat to the environment or to health but that also offer important benefits.

DEHP is such a substance. There are health concerns associated with human exposure, but a ban on DEHP could create severe problems for the medical community as there are currently no viable alternatives for this plasticizer in certain medical devices.

CEPA's management process relies on scientific evidence and comprehensive research and monitoring programs. The science around phthalates is constantly evolving, so we welcome the reassessments of BBP and DBP called for in the bill, Bill C-307, as they will help build our knowledge and support sound decision-making.

One particularly important aspect of the CEPA process is that the public and interested groups are given adequate notice about risk assessments that are planned or underway. They have also the opportunity to comment on the results before decisions are made. This public involvement element was lacking in Bill C-307 as originally presented to this House.

CEPA also allows for some flexibility in terms of risk management responses, taking into account not only environmental and health issues, but also social, economic and technological factors. Regulations are sometimes the answer, but not always. For example, Bill C-307 would provide for the development of clinical practice guidelines for using medical devices that contain DEHP.

● (1840)

The government is committed to working with all our partners to ensure that Canada is at the forefront of international chemicals management and that our citizens and our environment is protected.

Last December, we unveiled a chemicals management plan. This plan provides for immediate action to regulate chemicals that are harmful to human health or the environment, and is a key element of our government's comprehensive environmental and human health agenda. We have committed \$300 million over four years to implement the chemicals management plan, which will build on Canada's position as a global leader in the safe management of chemical substances and products.

Taking action now will significantly reduce future costs associated with water treatment, the clean up of contaminated sites and treating illnesses related to chemical exposure. It will improve the quality of life of Canadians and better protect our environment. This plan will also improve the conditions for business in Canada by ensuring a level playing field and a predictable, science based regulatory regime.

It provides for strengthened regulations and enforcement, restrictions on reintroduction and new uses of controlled substances, rapid screening of lower risk chemical substances, accelerated re-evaluation of older pesticides, mandatory ingredient labelling of cosmetics, regulations to address environmental risks posed by pharmaceuticals and personal care products, enhanced management of environmental contaminants in food, health monitoring, surveillance and research, increased risk communications to the public and good stewardship of chemical substances.

Under the umbrella of the chemicals management plan, our government has developed a comprehensive strategy for phthalates that includes many of the measures provided for in Bill C-307. An example of that is the phthalate strategy includes reassessments of BBP and DBP under CEPA, the implementation of controls to protect children under the age of three and the development of clinical practice guidelines for medical devices containing DEHP. It also provides for the addition of DEHP to Health Canada's cosmetic ingredient hot list, as well as the assessment and risk management of other phthalates in cosmetics.

As part of the reassessment process, the government will be reviewing the scientific evidence used to support recent regulatory actions taken by the European Union on DEHP, BBP and DBP, among other phthalates. Our government will also continue to monitor the evolving science on the use of DEHP in medical devices and will take further actions, as required. I should point out that none of Canada's major trading partners, including the European Union, has prohibited DEHP in medical devices such as blood bags and intravenous tubes.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our government will continue to monitor 11 phthalate metabolites and 8 parent phthalate compounds as part of the Canadian health measures survey. In addition, phthalates will be included in a proposed bio-monitoring study for children from birth to six years of age. Data from these studies will inform any future actions by the government.

In short, our government is already taking comprehensive action to assess and control phthalates and other potentially harmful substances. Because amended Bill C-307 is consistent with these actions and with our government's overall commitment to protecting Canadians and their environment, we will vote in favour of this legislation.

● (1845)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member who brought Bill C-307 forward. It is important and I know he wanted me to speak from my heart, so that is what I am going to do. He did not want me to speak from paper, so I am not going to speak from paper. I want to say why it is important.

It is important to my family. I have had a close family member, my mother actually, who has had very serious operations all her life, been in the hospital numerous times as a child, as a young adult and as an adult. She has very serious complications and issues that she has to deal with in relation to her health and the operations required.

Never in my life would I have every thought that we had to worry about the bags that were hanging from the gurneys and in the beds that were keeping her alive, and keeping her well, that there may have been other issues that I was not aware of other than the immediate issue facing my mother.

I appreciate that the member, and members of the House, have taken the time to study the issue, to look at what the problems might be with these things so that the public knows. What we are talking is some of the chemicals that go into those medical devices, and I use this as an example, that make those things flexible, to make them more usable.

The bill, once passed, would make some changes or potential changes based on scientific evidence, that will make it safer for my mother and women like her, that when they are in there for other serious issues, that they do not have to worry, and their families do not have—

● (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper. When the bill is next considered by the House there will be eight minutes left for the hon. member for Burlington.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the secure flight program changes being proposed by the United States government is one of the most significant affronts to the sovereignty of Canada that we have witnessed in recent memory.

In essence, regulations are being proposed which require detailed information from passenger lists for Canadian flights which pass over the United States air space. This is an unprecedented violation of the privacy of Canadians and for non-Canadians who fly on Canadian air carriers.

Let us be clear. This material is not being collected in respect of those Canadian flights that actually land in the United States. This is information relating to Canadian air carrier flights that merely fly over United States air space for a specific amount of time.

First of all, what is it that the Bush administration is looking for from Canadian air carriers? It is demanding that 72 hours in advance of a given flight it receives the names, dates of birth, passport information, booking information and itinerary details, not to mention the possibility of meal preferences, and payment information and seat selection.

All of this information is being requested for passengers on Canadian air carriers who do not actually even land in the United States.

Needless to say, many individuals and groups are concerned about the extent of the information being requested and the circumstances under which it is being demanded.

What about those Canadians who might be flying to the U.S. embargoed island of Cuba? Once the United States has confirmation that they have travelled to Cuba, what happens the next time they enter the United States? Or, what of the American citizen who travels to Cuba on a Canadian carrier?

The problem is that the whole exercise is a massive invasion of personal privacy.

On a related front, the U.S. secretary of homeland security, Michael Chertoff, wrote a letter on July 26, 2007 to the council of the European Union in an attempt to allay fears about personal information the U.S. wished to collect.

In his letter the secretary noted that the Americans would put in place privacy safeguards to protect information that might reveal, “—racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership and data concerning health or sex life of the individual”.

Has the world gone mad? Forget about George Orwell's *1984*, we have George Bush's “2007”.

In recent days we have seen discussions once again about the United States government's conduct in respect of Mr. Maher Arar. We can look at what transpired here and conclude quite reasonably that most Canadians will not be comfortable providing the kind of information that is being asked for under the American secure flight program.

My question is simply this. Why has the government been so quiet and so ineffective in protecting the most basic rights of Canadians and those who choose to fly on Canadian carriers entering United States air space?

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all I can think of is that the member must misunderstand the situation.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments made by the hon. member for Davenport regarding secure flight, a proposed United States aviation security program that would ask air carriers flying within the United States and over the United States to provide basic data on passengers. I would ask that he listen to that sentence again: that would ask air carriers flying within the United States and over the United States to provide basic data on passengers.

International law establishes the right of every state, including Canada, to control its borders, including its airspace, and determine security requirements related to entry by land or by air into its territory. The proposed United States program exists within this context in its air space.

The proposed program applies to all overflights, not only those from Canada. The principle that each state, including Canada, controls its own border and airspace is one worth respecting since we, as a sovereign state, want to keep those rights intact for us, for our families, for all of us.

How are we to respond to a proposed program that, while consistent with international law, raises issues of concern?

Instead of trying to oppose established international principles and law, we are working with the United States to mitigate any negative impacts that the proposed program would have on Canadian travellers or Canadian businesses.

Developing comparable aviation security programs that respect each country's laws and citizens, including passenger protect, a made in Canada solution that this government launched last June, has helped to achieve an exemption of 80% of Canadian flights from the proposed rule.

We are in discussions now with the United States on the remaining 20%.

If it turns out that any Canadian flight will be captured by the rule, and remember that this is a proposed rule not a final one, it will be important to focus on the collection, use and disposal of personal information for air travellers.

It will be important that people know and agree to share their personal information and that they will know the objective of requesting it and how it will be handled. It is an issue of safety and national security.

In security matters, as in many other sectors that relate to the United States, this government is standing up for Canada in a way that respects international law, protects privacy and contributes to productive relations with a key neighbour and trading partner.

Any other course of action would be counterproductive and contrary to Canadian interests and Canadian law.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1855)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter is not just a document but a statement of our values, a statement of our respect for the rule of law and, most important, a statement of our respect for the rights and the privacy of our citizens.

Similarly, the 50th anniversary of the United Nations charter has been celebrated. Once again, this is not just a document but a statement of noble ideals, including basic respect for human rights.

Since the terrible attacks on September 11, 2001, there has been a concentrated effort on the part of some individuals and groups to erode the basic rights, including the rights to privacy.

We are speaking today not about a specific policy but about another incremental step on a road that leads not to where we want to go as a people but where our values and traditions tell us we ought not to tread.

Secure flight is another such erosion of these basic rights. We can only ask once again that the government do what is right: protect the rights of Canadians.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, there is a choice. We cannot dictate the U.S. law, just like we expect the U.S. not to interfere in our internal laws and programs.

The U.S. Congress and the executive remain concerned about a repeat of 9/11-type attacks. Overflights, they fear, could be used to launch this type of attack.

Again, I will repeat. International law permits each state, including Canada, to control its land and air borders and establish security rules to govern flights going over its air space.

I am certain the member is not suggesting that Canada give up its rights to borders and air security. Is that the case?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)

Forestry Industry	
Mr. Lemay	696
Mr. Blackburn	696

Atlantic Accord	
Mr. Simms	696
Mr. MacKay	697

Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Mr. Lebel	697
Mr. Paradis	697
Mr. Atamanenko	697
Mr. Ritz	697
Mr. Atamanenko	697
Mr. Ritz	697

Canada Elections Act	
Ms. Karetak-Lindell	697
Mr. Van Loan	697

Labour	
Mr. Albrecht	698
Mr. Blackburn	698

Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	698

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Veterans Week	
Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	698
Mr. Dion	700
Mr. Perron	701
Mr. Stoffer	701

Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Ms. Bennett	702

Business of the House	
Mr. Goodale	702
Mr. Van Loan	702
Ms. Davies	703

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Status of Women	
Motion	703
Mrs. Lavallée	703
Ms. Demers	704

Ms. Minna	705
Mr. Savage	705
Mr. Stoffer	706
Ms. Minna	707
Mr. Cuzner	707
Ms. Neville	707
Ms. Minna	709
Mr. Fast	709
Ms. Demers	709
Mr. Blackburn	710
Ms. Minna	711
Mrs. Davidson	711
Ms. Minna	713
Ms. Brown (Oakville)	713
Mr. Tilson	715
Mr. Fitzpatrick	715
Mrs. Redman	715
Mr. Silva	717
Mr. Fast	717
Ms. Bell (Vancouver Island North)	717
Mr. Tilson	719
Mr. Valley	719
Ms. Davies	720
Division deemed demanded and deferred	720

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Phthalate Control Act	
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	721
Bill C-307. Third reading	721
Mr. Warawa	722
Mr. Wallace	723
Mr. Stoffer	723
Mr. Warawa	723
Mr. McGuinty	724
Mr. Laframboise	726
Mr. Harvey	727
Mr. Tweed	728
Mr. Wallace	729

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Air Transportation	
Mr. Silva	730
Mr. Jean	730

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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