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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Halifax West.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's government recently announced the deepest tax cuts in a generation. The economic statement announced last month proposes broad-based tax relief for individuals, families and businesses of almost $60 billion.

There will be a $14 billion reduction in the federal debt. Measured against the economy, the national debt has fallen to its lowest level in 25 years.

The GST will be lowered to 5%.

Business taxes have been reduced to make Canada more competitive and investment friendly.

Together, these measures will reduce personal income taxes by more than $400 for a typical family earning $80,000 a year.

I am proud to be part of this hard-working, focused government that is committed to lowering taxes.

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UNITED NATIONS

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations General Assembly has lost its way in the Middle East. Its agenda has become politicized and its authority weakened.

Again this year, some 20 resolutions are dedicated to singling out one member state, Israel, for discriminatory treatment, without even a semblance of balance, undermining the UN's very legitimacy.

Why does the government continue its incremental approach, acquiescing and indulging in this flawed, one-sided process that does nothing to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict?

In November 2005, the previous Liberal government proposed a comprehensive review of these one-sided resolutions being rehashed every year, with a goal of moving instead to a Canadian-initiated omnibus resolution at the General Assembly of the UN that would restore balance and fairness into the process and be conducive to peace.

I call on the government to introduce a Canadian resolution on the Middle East that will move to restore the credibility of the UN so that it can perform true to its mission of fairness and the rule of law.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RUSSELL MARTIN

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and proud to acknowledge Russell Martin from Quebec, who is visiting Parliament Hill today. A member of the Los Angeles Dodgers since 2006, Russell Martin has already demonstrated that he has the calibre of a Roy Campanella or a Johnny Roseboro, two catchers who have marked the history of that prestigious baseball team.

A short while ago, Russell Martin, who was in his second major league season, won the Golden Glove award for best catcher in the National Baseball League. He also received the Silver Slugger award for best offensive player at his position. These honours crown a particularly eventful year for Russell Martin, who also played in last July's all-star game between the best players of the American League and those of the National Baseball League after more than 2 million supporters voted for him.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I offer my heartfelt congratulations to Russell Martin.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Statements by Members

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, shockingly, violence against women still permeates our society. We are in the middle of The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and fast approaching—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, shockingly, violence against women still permeates our society. We are in the middle of The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and fast approaching December 6, a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. It was my private member's bill that created this day, so it has particular significance for me.

Later today, members of Parliament will stand in the House of Commons and vote on a motion which calls upon Japan to offer a formal, sincere and unequivocal apology to the women forced into sexual slavery during the second world war. Several of these so-called comfort women are on Parliament Hill today, and one cannot help but be moved to tears by their terrible stories.

A vote in favour of this motion would be a vote in support of not only these women but all women across the world who have experienced unspeakable violence just because they are women. I urge all members to vote in favour of this motion. It is simply the right thing to do.

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GENOME CANADA

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Genome Canada. Since its inception in 2000, Genome Canada has built a strong research enterprise, allowing Canadian genomics scientists to gain well-deserved respect and credibility for the work they have accomplished on both the national and the international scenes.

The government's investment in Genome Canada will enable this scientific community to continue their important work of providing cutting edge research in key sectors such as agriculture, energy, the environment, fisheries, forestry, health, and new technology development that will help shape the future.

Later this afternoon, some of the world's leading scientists in genomics and proteomics research will be showcasing their projects in the Commonwealth room. During this exhibit, these scientists will demonstrate how they have achieved success in key research areas and also raise awareness of strategic research priorities of importance to the Canadian economy and society.

I encourage all my colleagues to walk down to the Commonwealth room to visit this important exhibit.

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GOLD GLOVE AWARD

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate to have with us in Ottawa today my guest, Russell Martin, a former resident of Montreal West and a member of the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Russell recently won the Rawlings Gold Glove Award as the National League's best defensive catcher.

He also won the Louisville Silver Slugger Award as the best offensive player at his position.

I am proud to say that as a youth Russell honed his skills playing in the NDG Baseball Association in the early 1990s.

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

His determination and hard work to make it to the major leagues serve as an inspiration to all young Canadian athletes.

I would like to congratulate Russell and his family on all his accomplishments and extraordinary success.

[*English*]

They have good reason to be proud.

Canada is proud.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we remember the Holodomor, a crime against humanity that the world has chosen to forget.

More than seven million perished in Ukraine in a planned famine created by Stalin's despotic 1930s regime.

This annihilation was not caused by the ravages of nature nor the scourge of pestilence, nor by the obliteration of war, but by the hand of a dictator consumed with hatred.

Why mankind wreaks death and destruction on its own in such unimaginable numbers might not even have understanding given it by the Almighty in the hereafter.

Ukrainians, starved to death in the “Breadbasket of Europe”, are being remembered in ceremonies across Canada and around the world.

We remember today the victims of the Holodomor, of the dark side of humanity, and by remembering we help the world guard against those who would repeat such genocide.

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[*Translation*]

ROGER LEVERT

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on November 6, Roger Levert passed away at the age of 68. Roger was a city councillor in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield for more than 21 years, receiving an award from the Union des municipalités du Québec after 20 years in that role.

This likeable man had a passion for his work and enthusiastically represented his constituents and neighbourhood, working hard to serve everyone's needs. He was a grass-roots politician and always pushed for development in his neighbourhood, second only to the quality of life of its residents.

Roger was known not to beat around the bush and would best be described as a straight talker. He was an honest and generous man, who will be missed by everyone.

The Bloc Québécois and I would like to offer our condolences to his wife, Jeanne-d'Arc, his daughters, Sylvie and Nancy, and his sons, Dany and Roger Jr.

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BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as its name implies, the "Bloc" is powerless to implement any measures in Quebec's interest. As you can see, all it can do is talk, criticize and block.

As for the ideas it comes up with, André Boisclair said it best: "when one does not have the responsibility that comes with wielding power, one can say whatever one likes".

Not only has the Bloc been wandering around Quebec empty-handed, it has also failed to maintain a consistent position on assistance for the forestry and manufacturing industries. Now it is demanding that the federal government intervene, but the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and his colleagues voted against the Speech from the Throne, which promised to take positive action for these sectors.

Moreover, the Bloc believes that, "historically, the federal government's economic policies have often had a negative impact on Quebec's development". The Bloc should apologize to Quebeckers for its inability to take action.

Fortunately, workers can count on Conservative members because when we make promises, we keep them. We have what it takes to act in the best interest of Quebeckers and Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

UKRAINE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 75th anniversary of humanity's descent into the abyss of the Holodomor, the famine genocide of Ukraine's rural population.

Six to ten million were starved to death in the breadbasket of Europe.

As the famine raged, Ukraine's lush countryside was denuded of its leaves and grasses as people ate anything that grew.

One by one, hundred after hundred, thousand after thousand, million after million, they lay down their starved skin-and-bone bodies and became one with its fertile black soils, life extinguished.

As millions starved, Stalin exported grains from Ukraine's fertile lands to the west, a west which, apart from a handful of brave politicians and journalists, turned its gaze away while eating the bounty, the bread, from these starving lands.

Seventy-five years later, a genocide by attrition continues under our watch in Darfur. On the 75th anniversary of the Holodomor, let us pledge to those who have placed their trust in our leadership: *Beelsh nikoly*. Never again.

* * *

● (1415)

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago we ended Liberal corruption and mismanagement with a vote of non-confidence; no dithering, no abstaining.

The Prime Minister when opposition leader stood up for Canadian families and demanded a clean government that kept its word and worked as hard as they did. Canadians trusted us to clean up Ottawa. We delivered.

We passed the Federal Accountability Act to end corruption. No more Liberal wild spending, or giving taxpayers the leftover crumbs. We have invested smartly in our provinces and the environment and have given billions back to seniors and families.

No more Liberal surrender on our military. No more Liberal soft on crime. No more Liberal mistrust in parental child care. This government supports parents, troops, and tougher penalties for criminals.

The Liberal lust for power will soon force Canadians back to the polls, but it will not force them back to a Liberal future.

Together, we are building a stronger, safer, better Canada that is a player on the world stage. Happy second anniversary.

* * *

NORTH AMERICAN INDIGENOUS GAMES

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2008 North American Indigenous Games, called the "Journey of a Generation", are coming to the Cowichan Valley, thanks to Cowichan tribes.

This event will bring together young athletes from all around North America to compete in games ranging from lacrosse to swimming to baseball, and indigenous games including war canoe racing and hoop dancing.

The games are also a cultural celebration. They begin with a tribal journey of over 80 canoes coming from around the Pacific Northwest to gather for the opening ceremonies which are expected to draw over 20,000 participants and spectators.

Over 8,000 athletes, cultural leaders and performers will find a huge welcome in the beautiful Cowichan Valley. It will be a great preview for the 2010 Olympics in Whistler and Vancouver.

I call on the government to use this opportunity to make an investment in aboriginal cultural awareness and aboriginal tourism in conjunction with the North American Indigenous Games. The rewards will be far-reaching and will benefit communities throughout British Columbia.

MIDDLE EAST

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's record on one-sided United Nations resolutions does not match its rhetoric.

Last year the Government of Canada failed to show a principled approach by continuing to acquiesce in the flawed general assembly resolution process on the Middle East.

Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees is an example of an anti-Israeli resolution that the government supported. Not only does this resolution condemn Israel for its security measures, it falsely accuses Israel of attacking refugee children and UNRWA schools. It does not condemn terrorists for using UNRWA facilities.

This week Canada will be voting on this and many other resolutions condemning Israel. I urge the government to propose a single comprehensive resolution that would seek to advance the cause of peace and restore the integrity of the United Nations.

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[*Translation*]

MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during question period yesterday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois asked the Minister of Justice four times about his discretionary power to delay the extradition of Mr. Schreiber.

The minister would only say that the person in question must be convicted or serving a sentence. As set out in section 42 of the Extradition Act, nothing could be further from the truth. Yesterday, the House legal counsel said that the minister has the power, by merely snapping his fingers, to delay the extradition since it is a political decision.

It is disgraceful that a Minister of Justice would behave this way in the House of Commons and deceive Canadians. What message is he sending? To suit his own purposes, he is making sure that the process will not be used. How can we trust this minister, who was elected under Brian Mulroney?

* * *

[*English*]

PULMONARY HYPERTENSION

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome representatives from the Pulmonary Hypertension Association of Canada, PHA, and the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, CORD, to Ottawa today in recognition of PH Awareness Month.

Pulmonary hypertension is a condition of high blood pressure in the lungs and affects up to 5,000 Canadians, men and women of all ages and ethnicities. There is currently no cure for pulmonary hypertension and untreated, PH will claim the lives of 50% of patients within the first two years after diagnosis. One in ten Canadians will be diagnosed with a rare disorder like pulmonary hypertension and there are approximately 5,000 such disorders in Canada.

CORD is urging Canada to adopt a formal definition of rare disorder or disease and to create a Canadian orphan drug policy to respond to persons with rare disorders.

My grandson, Dylan Hunter Bell, was diagnosed with PH at age two and passed away July 14 this year, the day after his 12th birthday.

As a father and as a grandfather, I invite all Canadians to join in the fight to raise awareness of PH and rare disorders.

* * *

● (1420)

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME LEGISLATION

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Timmins—James Bay trumpeted his party's efforts to block the tackling violent crime act.

He said that tackling violent crime is “not substantive”. He then said that chasing down young thugs who steal handbags from old ladies is an effort that is “not substantive”. He went on to argue that the opposition should block the bill.

We here on this side say that we should raise the age of sexual protection from 14 to 16 to protect kids from adult predators. He said that is “not substantive”.

We want to bring in three strikes and you are out legislation to put away dangerous offenders. He said that is “not substantive”.

If he keeps on blocking our tough on crime agenda, he will find himself on the wrong of his voters and that will be very substantive.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a welcome home gift, the Prime Minister received a motion from the Quebec National Assembly unanimously rejecting his international position on climate change, which represents an abdication of Canadian responsibilities as does his plan, in Canada, that has targets so weak that he will pay polluters rather than make them pay. Tar sands developers, for example, will make hundreds of millions of dollars with his bogus plan.

Will he boast about this fraud in Bali?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday someone said the following: “We believe that binding targets should be imposed on everyone and that countries—including the United States and emerging countries such as China and India—must contribute to the fight against climate change.”

That is the position of the Government of Canada. Those are the words of the Quebec Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister undoubtedly wishes to say that the Quebec Minister of the Environment has contradicted himself. In fact, it is the Prime Minister who is contradicting himself by not offering Canada a serious plan.

[*English*]

He is embarrassing Canada. He is promoting a race to the bottom internationally. Two additional studies confirm once again that his plan here in Canada is a fraud.

I ask the Prime Minister, what is more embarrassing, what he is doing abroad, or what he is doing here in Canada? I reject both, as do the majority of Canadians.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment's plan has the first mandatory emissions reduction of greenhouse gases in Canada: 20% by 2020 and 60% to 70% by 2050.

I was surprised to read upon coming back that the leader of the Liberal Party believed that this government should have signed on to a declaration of the Commonwealth that would have meant that greenhouse gas emissions would double over the next 50 years. That is irresponsible, and it is unacceptable to Canadians and to this government.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister is saying is that he will pretend to do something when in fact he will do nothing meaningful on climate change. His excuse is that some other countries are not doing enough. Instead of pushing the world in the right direction to do more, he will drag everyone to do less and less and less, down and down and down.

Is the Prime Minister sending his minister to Bali to sabotage Bali as the Prime Minister sabotaged the Commonwealth?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question is coming from a leader who raised greenhouse gas emissions 35% when he was in office. Our position is to lower greenhouse gas emissions, not to raise them.

We have been absolutely clear. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally, we must have mandatory emissions targets for all major emitters. That is the position of the Government of Canada. Shamefully, it is not the position of the Liberal Party. That is the wrong position. It is the wrong position for Canada and it is the wrong position for the globe. We are going to fight for a strong international agreement.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tackling climate change means that major emitters must sign on to binding targets, but the Prime Minister said that he will veto binding targets on anybody as long as they do not apply to everybody. This is cynicism masquerading as principle and it is abdication masquerading as leadership.

Will he reverse course now, and at Bali commit Canada to negotiate binding targets for reducing carbon pollution?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. Our position is there needs to be mandatory targets for all major emitters. That is the only way we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally. We need an effective international protocol. The government will not settle for half measures. We will hold out until we get that effective protocol.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under that approach, we will get no measures at all.

[*Translation*]

Global warming will devastate the poorest countries, increase resource-based conflicts, exacerbate water shortages and increase famine and desertification.

In Bali, what concrete and specific measures will the Conservative government put forward to help poor countries?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to do something different than the Liberal Party. We are going to cut greenhouse gas emissions absolutely in Canada. We are going to go to Bali and work to secure an agreement where all major emitters are going to be required to reduce greenhouse gases.

It is interesting that the member would ask a question. This is the deputy leader of the Liberal Party who said that the man sitting beside him, the former minister of the environment, did not get it done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question asked a little earlier, the Prime Minister suggested that the Government of Quebec shared his position on climate change. I will read the proposal, the motion from the National Assembly of Quebec, "that the National Assembly express its disagreement regarding the position of the Canadian Government on climate change—"

Does the Prime Minister think that when the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously expresses its disagreement, that means it shares his position?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was citing the position of Quebec's environment minister, who said all major emitters in the world should have mandatory targets. That is the position of the Government of Canada. Any other position will not reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that would be irresponsible.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, speaking of irresponsible, when the Prime Minister was the leader of the opposition, in every debate on the Kyoto protocol the Bloc Québécois pressured the Liberals to accept it, and the Prime Minister pressured them to reject it. He was protecting the oil companies, saying that it was a socialist conspiracy and that there was no science behind climate change.

Will he admit that he is doing exactly the same thing today that he was doing from the opposition benches? He is trying to put a different, yet equally hypocritical, spin on this than he did when he was on this side of the House.

● (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government has stopped subsidizing the tar sands. It was this government who did that.

In all the years the Bloc Québécois has been here, it has not reduced a single ton of greenhouse gas emissions. The only thing the Bloc Québécois can do is put on its show here in the House of Commons.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the National Assembly of Quebec took a stand today and the Bloc Québécois will take a stand next week in Bali.

That is why the Conservatives are refusing to invite the opposition parties to Bali. The Conservatives are afraid we on this side of the House will stand up and reveal their strategy to the world, a strategy that consists in helping the oil companies instead of the environment.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is taking action. We are acting in a number of ways. We are regulating large companies, which has never been done before. We are working very hard with the provinces. We have given $350 million to Quebec to help it implement its climate change plan. These are things that the Bloc never did in 13 long years.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the government's approach is unacceptable.

The question is simple: will the government abandon its fatalistic, do-nothing approach and will it shoulder its responsibilities as France has done, invite its partners to the international table and promise to make commitments and set binding targets to fight climate change?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important that any agreement to fight climate change include targets that apply to everyone, not just Europe and Canada, but also the United States and countries like China and India. That is this government's position. It is also the position of Line Beauchamp, Quebec's environment minister. It is also the position of André Pratte of *La Presse*. Only the Bloc Québécois does not want to do anything in the vast majority of countries. We are taking action across Canada.

* * *

AIRBUS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a very serious matter when a minister misleads a committee of the House. When the Minister of Justice said that he could not suspend Mr. Schreiber's extradition order, he made either an error in judgment, or just an error. The NDP will raise this question of privilege in committee. Nevertheless, the minister can rectify the situation right now. He can take this opportunity to admit his mistake.

Will he admit that he misled people? Will he say that he really does have the powers—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will do no such thing. We all get legal advice on these matters.

I did indicate to the committee that I would cooperate. I see it has taken a process in place, which was suggested by me yesterday and, indeed, was suggested by his member, the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer is simply not good enough. The facts are very simple. Every day Canadians are tired of the scandals of the Conservatives, then the Liberals and then the Conservatives, and it goes back and forth. They are tired of the delaying tactics.

Let us look at the facts. Mr. Schreiber is coming to the committee tomorrow, but he is being extradited the very next day.

The terms of reference for the inquiry will not even be available until January 11. The minister says that he does not have any powers to stop the extradition, but the facts are clear. He has those powers.

Does the minister truly intend to face the House on this matter?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the ultimate question of the leader of the NDP is. The Minister of Justice will obviously not comment, and neither will anybody in the government comment, on an issue that is before the courts.

In terms of the hearings tomorrow, the Minister of Justice has been completely cooperative in that regard. I think we are all very interested to hear the testimony, and I hope those hearings tomorrow will be a credit to Parliament.

● (1435)

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice showed utter contempt for Parliament when he refused to use the power clearly available to him and to him alone under the Extradition Act. Just think of that. Parliament had to trump the Minister of Justice to ensure the appearance of Karlheinz Schreiber before the ethics committee.

After the ethics committee is done, what assurance is there that Mr. Schreiber will stay in Canada to appear before a public inquiry? Will the minister do his duty, or is he determined to silence Schreiber and ship him out of the country before the public inquiry can be held?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the legal advice I received from the Liberal Party was to the effect that I was to deliver someone else's client without a bail hearing from a provincial correctional institute. The Liberals finally have taken the advice of the member for Winnipeg Centre, and they should let that process take place.

The Prime Minister has set in place a process for a public inquiry. Yesterday we were served by the counsel for the individual with an application for a stay/leave and that will be heard on Friday.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister claims he does not have the power to effect the surrender order to send Mr. Schreiber to Germany. If that is true, by what power did the minister act to prevent Schreiber being shipped to Germany before December 1?

Where is that authority in the law, and if it can be used for December 1, why can it not also be used to keep Schreiber in Canada until he testifies at a public inquiry? If the minister did it once, why not again, why not for the public inquiry?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of interfering with the processes here or in the committee of the House. The court proceeding, as I indicated, will take place before the court of appeal on Friday.

I received a lot of legal advice. A couple of weeks ago the Liberals wanted me to release tax information on an individual. I appreciate getting legal advice from the Liberal Party because usually that is what one is not supposed to do.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, section 42 of the Extradition Act is very clear. It says, "The Minister may amend a surrender order at any time before its execution". As the legal counsel to Parliament said yesterday, it is not a long sentence, it is not a complicated sentence. Section 42 of the act is crystal clear and gives the minister all the authority he needs. The minister's denials are patently false.

Why will he not ensure Schreiber stays for the public inquiry? Why is he so determined to shut him up and ship him out?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Liberals were all in a lather about getting an individual before a committee of Parliament, with the help of the Speaker's warrant. Apparently that individual is on his way. I would think they would be happy about that, but apparently not.

They wanted a public inquiry. When they got a public inquiry, they were not happy about that. This individual has legal advice. The matter will be heard before the court of appeal on Friday, and we should let that take its course.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us now consider subsection 40(3) of the Extradition Act that gives the minister the complete authority to make the extradition subject to "any conditions that the Minister considers appropriate".

Why does the minister not consider it appropriate to make the surrender of Karlheinz Schreiber specifically conditional upon his remaining physically present in Canada for as long as it takes to testify under oath at a public inquiry and parliamentary committee? Or will it be necessary for Parliament to again trump the minister to keep Schreiber from being silenced by that Mulroney infested government?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We are wasting a lot of time today. The hon. Minister of Justice has the floor to respond to the question that was asked. We do not need a chorus of questions.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

● (1440)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has demonstrated over the last couple of days why it is inappropriate and unfruitful to discuss matters like this and negotiate matters of law on the floor of the House of Commons.

I indicated that we will follow all the rules, all the laws. We have indicated our cooperation, but it has become obvious that the Liberals will never be happy.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's National Assembly considered a bill to give salaried individuals the right to take unpaid leave for up to two years if they, their spouse or their child become victims of crime.

Given that a salaried person who exercises this right would have no income for two years, will the federal government make it possible for that person to be eligible for employment insurance?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all parliamentarians have deep compassion for those who have been the victims of crime and their families. We are prepared to meet with this group, and we will meet with it in the next week.

However, if the Bloc is so concerned about this, maybe it should stop filibustering the victims of violent crime bill so we can actually prevent the types of crimes about which the member claims to be concerned.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, putting off decisions has become this government's trademark. They have consistently put off anything urgent. How bizarre. When it comes to seniors, farmers, fishers, the unemployed and victims of crime, this government always finds a reason to delay. This government is heartless.

Does one's name have to be Shell, Imperial Oil or Petro-Canada for the government to take an interest?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I simply must point out that it is the Bloc that is filibustering. It is the Bloc that cannot make a decision on the victims of violent crime bill, which blocks justice for thousands of Canadians who do not want to be victimized by criminals.

I must point out that the entire time Bloc members have been here they have never made a decision that has benefited Canadians. They cannot. They are forever in opposition.

[*Translation*]

HOG AND BEEF INDUSTRIES

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the rising dollar is creating a crisis in the manufacturing sector, but it is also affecting all exporters, such as hog and beef producers. The crisis highlights the shortcomings of the federal government's aid programs.

Does the government plan on doing absolutely nothing, as it has with the manufacturing sector, or will it take responsibility and implement the measures called for by hog and beef producers?

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had excellent discussions with the hog industry across this great country and it has come forward with some proposals. I have taken them to my department officials who will be getting back to me by the end of this week.

We are working with all the provinces and with the industry to come up with solutions that the Bloc never could.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FISHING INDUSTRY

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the rising dollar is also affecting the revenues of manufacturers and fishermen, and this industry has been hard hit. The minister raised a lot of hopes when he promised the world at his big show at the Forum québécois des partenaires des pêches at the end of 2006.

We are nearing the end of 2007. What is he waiting for to present a strategy to the Quebec fishing industry, which is facing the additional problem of the rising dollar? What is the minister waiting for to present the aid plan he promised over a year ago?

[*English*]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had a tremendous meeting in Quebec several months ago. A report on that meeting has been presented to the minister in Quebec. I met with the minister last week. We are working very closely together, as we are with other fisheries ministers, to ensure we look after the people for whom we are responsible, and that includes the fishermen in Quebec.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by now the government should have realized that Canada is facing a manufacturing crisis. As a result, thousands of jobs have been lost as countless plants have been forced to close their doors and yet the government does not seem to care about the impact this is having on Canadian workers, businesses and families in communities and regions throughout our country. I say this because no plan has been laid out and no strategy has been put forward.

Why is the government giving up on such an important sector of the Canadian economy?

● (1445)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite has not read advantage Canada, which is the economic plan for Canada. He has failed to note the accelerated capital cost allowance that we did in March this year, the $1.3 billion to assist manufacturers and the historic tax reductions that we did on October 30. Now we do need tax reductions but we need them in Ontario.

As Jack Mintz said yesterday from the Rotman School of Management:

> Ontario has one of the highest effective tax rates on capital not just in Canada but around the (industrialized) world.
>
> The [Ontario] government has not understood that its policies have hurt capital—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vaughan.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite aware of the disadvantage that workers and businesses in the manufacturing sectors have obtained as a result of the Conservative government. All over the country people are losing their jobs and it is not right to keep repeating that employment rates are high when, in the manufacturing sector, they are falling. It is not right to declare that the government is achieving positive results when more plants will be closing and more jobs will be lost.

Is the minister telling Canadian workers, businesses and families that they should give up—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Not at all, Mr. Speaker. What we are saying, of course, is that the Government of Canada has taken dramatic steps to reduce the taxation burden on business in Canada: the accelerated capital cost allowance and the elimination of the federal capital tax which the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba have not done yet. Those are important steps—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: There's not a tax that can fix every problem, Jim.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: —relax, relax for a while, Ralph. These are important steps that need to be taken in order to reduce the tax burden on businesses so they can reinvest and prosper in Canada.

The Speaker: Order, please. I wish more hon. members would relax but using names is unnecessary.

The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the manufacturing sector, particularly in Quebec, is facing the worst crisis it has seen in the last decade, while the government just idly sits back and does nothing. This sector plays an important structural role within our economy, but this means nothing to them. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake, directly and indirectly; this also means nothing to them. They are completely washing their hands of the situation.

The Government of Quebec has just announced real measures, concrete measures. Why is the federal government hesitating to cooperate with it?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the hon. member bases his facts on. In fact, since this government was elected, 655,000 new jobs have been created in Canada, 345,000 jobs this year alone.

In Quebec, in particular, job creation has been thriving. The unemployment rate is as low as it has been since December 1974.

To quote the Leader of the Opposition, "the Canadian economy is doing very well".

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they should go tell that to unemployed workers and their families.

The Government of Quebec has grasped the seriousness of the crisis rocking the manufacturing sector. It is doing its job. It is taking concrete action to help that sector. Yesterday, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs announced somewhat hastily that she was going to try to organize a meeting with some tea and a few cookies in January, but that is too little, too late. The Conservative government must also provide concrete, significant support as soon as possible, before more jobs are lost.

Where is the Conservative government when Quebec needs it?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we need in Canada and certainly in the manufacturing sector are long range, broad based tax cuts, which is exactly what we did federally on October 30. We made dramatic, historic, long range, broad based tax cuts, reducing the federal corporate tax rate to 15% by 2012.

That is what we need from all the governments in Canada. We would be happy to work with them to reduce that tax burden on business in Canada.

* * *

MIDDLE EAST

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, and Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, agreed to resume long stalled peace talks.

The first formal peace talks are to be held December 12, with Abbas and Olmert meeting every two weeks after that. This will be the first formal direct talks between the two sides in seven years.

What is the government's assessment from the meetings that took place yesterday in Annapolis concerning the Middle East peace process?

● (1450)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is optimistic about the meetings that took place yesterday in Annapolis. Prime Minister Olmert, in fact, called me just before question period regarding those meetings.

I welcomed his recognition that peace in the Middle East will require painful compromises on all sides. I indicated, as did the Minister of Foreign Affairs who was there, that Canada stands ready to assist the process in any way that we can.

This is an important issue. I do anticipate that I will be speaking to other leaders in the days and weeks ahead.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the second world war, 15 year old girls were subjected to torture and rape by countless men from the Japanese army for weeks, months and years on end. Over 200,000 women suffered through that kind of torture.

Four of the survivors of sexual slavery are on Parliament Hill today asking us to join them in asking Japan to give a formal sincere apology. Will Canada be on the side of the comfort women? Will we take a stand?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her interest in this matter and I believe the House will be seized of this matter shortly.

I, too, have had an opportunity, along with many members, to meet with these living witnesses to an unthinkable evil that happened some 60 years ago. We commend them for their courage, bravery and dignity considering what terrible things took place.

They inspire us all, I hope, in all parties, to join together in combating contemporary forms of slavery, sexual servitude and human trafficking.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have faith that all ordinary Canadians and all members of Parliament will join together and say no to violence against women and support the comfort women.

In the words of some of the victims,

[*Member spoke in Cantonese*]

[*English*]

What I just said is that rewriting history is not the answer to a lasting peace and it is not the answer to justice and reconciliation.

When will the Prime Minister publicly ask and encourage the government of Japan to formally and sincerely apologize to these comfort women?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister and the current and former foreign ministers have raised and discussed this matter with their counterparts in Japan.

We in Canada truly believe that as Canadians we acknowledge moments of injustice in our own history but these women come to this country with a story that needs to be heard because we need to learn from the lessons of history to ensure they are not repeated.

We need to do everything we can to be inspired by them to redouble our efforts in fighting similar kinds of violence against women and against children to ensure these things never again occur.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is sitting idly by as thousands of workers are losing their jobs in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, as evidenced by the fact that, in seven working days, the pilot project set up by the Liberal government to provide access to up to five additional weeks of EI benefits is coming to an end. The workers, and seasonal workers in particular, are about to go through seriously tough times because of the Conservative government.

Will the minister do the only right thing and not wait another day to turn this pilot project into a permanent one?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that in parts of the country there are serious difficulties for workers to find full time, year round employment. This is not lost on this government. We are looking for various ways to ensure we provide support to these workers.

We will consider this request in the context of these difficult times for workers in those areas.

● (1455)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is completely missing the point. It is unacceptable that workers have to go on bended knee to the government just to provide for their families. The Conservatives are giving workers a poisoned Christmas gift by not lifting a finger for them.

While the pilot project extending EI benefits for an additional five weeks was proving its worth across the country, an emergency bell rang. A mere seven days before the end of the pilot project, it is unacceptable to put these families through this.

Will the Conservative government immediately restore this excellent Liberal initiative?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member heard my response. I made it very clear that we are very concerned about the situation that these workers are in but it is unacceptable for the member to suggest that the government is not doing a lot for workers.

We put in place the targeted initiative for older workers. We are investing more in training than any government in Canadian history to take advantage of the hottest job market in Canadian history.

The path from poverty is employment. We are ensuring that people are getting jobs.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's ignorance on the economic development front is not only impacting manufacturing, it is also hurting the pork and beef industries.

High feed and fuel costs, dropping prices and the rise of the dollar have Canadian producers facing a crisis that could see the collapse of these industries. Jobs will be lost and farmers will become bankrupt.

When will the government start to help them?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had a fulsome discussion at the federal-provincial meetings in Toronto some 10 days ago. We worked within the parameters that the industry laid out for us, what it felt it required in the near, mid and long term. We have started to address those issues and we are checking them off one by one.

The industry is quite happy with what we are doing. It knows that we are offering cash advances. It knows we have the NISA top up, the $600 million which will be available in January. We always put farmers first.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, farmers are not fools. They know that the plan the government refers to is not even in place yet and will not be until April 1, 2008. Plus, they know the only way that they can benefit from this program is if they put their own cash up front first. Some help.

This is not even close to the immediate assistance that pork and beef producers need. When will the government actually help these industries in crisis?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers certainly made a choice last election day to move ahead and move on, away from the old Liberal programs that did not work for them.

Having said that, the member opposite is right. The new program unfortunately does not take effect until April 1, but we have made cash advances available in the 2007 CAISP for pork producers.

We are looking at other programs. We are looking at other expenses that they are incurring at this point, and we are getting the job done for them.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COLOMBIA

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the human rights situation in Colombia is abysmal. According to Human Rights Watch, the Uribe administration is implicated in major drug trafficking scandals and there has been a marked increase in extra-judicial executions and assassinations of trade unionists.

In view of this terrible human rights record, why does the government wish to sign a free trade agreement with Uribe's Columbia knowing that even the U.S. Congress has refused to ratify the signing of such an agreement?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a free trade agreement is currently being negotiated with Peru and Colombia. This accord will contain a parallel agreement in the area of workers' rights. Discussions are going very well with both countries. This will be one of the most robust free trade agreements we have ever negotiated.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is negotiating behind closed doors with Colombia to obtain a bilateral economic agreement. The Colombian government has one of the worst human rights records. This future agreement is being roundly criticized by human rights organizations because it would imply Canada's support for the Colombian government's abuses.

Will the government promise to not sign any free trade agreement with Colombia until this country provides guarantees that human rights will be respected?

● (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government believes that if we are going to pursue human rights, if we are going to pursue democracy, and if we are going to strengthen the governance and the democratic freedoms in a country like Colombia, we have to provide an economic basis that is legitimate, that is legal, and that takes the country out of the cycle of violence and poverty that it has been in.

That is what we are doing. We are working on trade. We are working across a series of initiatives that will help Colombia build capacity to have a healthy and strong democracy.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot pick and choose which Canadians it will defend when it comes to our citizens facing the death penalty abroad. The government continues to claim the law is clear, and it is. The charter says that Canadians have a right to life. The government is now facing a lawsuit over its sudden change in policy on the death penalty.

Will the Minister of Justice stand in this place and denounce the use of the death penalty in all cases?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we indicated, I think very clearly over the last couple of weeks, the government's position on this matter, and inasmuch as the matter is now before the courts, I am sure she would understand that it would be inappropriate to comment.

CHILD SAFETY

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the father of three children, it is my duty to look out for their well-being. When purchasing products, all Canadians deserve to have confidence that what they buy will be safe for them and for their children. Parents want to know what their government is doing, what action it is taking to ensure our children's safety.

During the 13 long years of Liberal mismanagement, not once did the Liberals take action on this issue. Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health please let us know what the government is doing on behalf of our children?

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is in Beijing where he has met with China's minister of health. They have signed a memo of understanding on product safety. This will establish new mechanisms for information on issues such as regulatory requirements and testing procedures. The government is working to keep Canadian families safe. The government is getting the job done.

* * *

DARFUR

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Darfur is again getting worse. In order for the UN peacekeeping mission to go ahead it needs helicopters. The UN Secretary General recently said the mission will be put at great risk if it does not receive the helicopters it needs.

Yesterday I asked government officials at committee if Canada would be providing helicopters for the new UN mission. The answer was no.

Could the minister tell the House and Canadians what the government is going to do for the new UN mission?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working together with the African Union and with the UN forces to ensure that this country can find the path to peace and democracy. We are working on it. The negotiations began on October 27 and we were there to promote our common values of democracy and peace.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked a very specific question. Where is the money for the new UN mission? There is none. There is none on the books. The government is not giving any new money. We are asking for it. Canadians are asking for it. The world is asking for it.

Could the minister tell the House and Canadians why the government is not going to provide support for the new UN mission? That is the question. What is the answer?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we support the current activities in Africa. We are there with the other UN countries. We have a presence among the UN forces and we are working with the African Union forces to help that country find the path to democracy. That is what we are doing and we are proud of our work.

● (1505)

[*English*]

The Speaker: That will bring to a conclusion the question period for today.

I remind all hon. members of the reception being hosted in room 216 if they wish to attend, the PH reception that the hon. member for North Vancouver and I are hosting and all are invited.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During statements by members, immediately before question period, I rose to speak on a very serious issue, and that is the issue of violence against women. I was interrupted by a total uproar in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, we rely on you to keep order in both the House and in the gallery. I would like to know how this uproar was allowed to happen and I would also like to receive assurances that this kind of uproar will not be allowed to happen again.

I was talking about the horrendous issue of the so-called comfort women and the motion which will be before us momentarily. If we ever needed a graphic example of why these issues are ignored in our country and across the world, this House just gave a graphic example of that.

Twenty-five years ago, Margaret Mitchell, the past member for Vancouver East, stood in this House and raised the issue of wife assault, and she was laughed at.

The same experience happened in this House 25 years later and I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure it never happens again.

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam did get up. There was a round of applause in the House following the member's statement that had been made before, so I stood up and waited until it had subsided and then called on her. Thus, she got her full 60 seconds.

The hon. member says she wants me to stop uproars in the House. I do my best, but all we have to do is sit here through a Wednesday question period, as we have just done, and I think there were numerous uproars in the House throughout the time, despite my efforts to quell these disturbances.

I would appreciate the hon. member's assistance, and that of all her colleagues, in maintaining order in the House. I agree with her that maintaining order is important and I try to do it every time we are sitting, throughout the sitting, as do the Deputy Speakers, whose support I appreciate immensely on this.

[*Translation*]

The hon. NDP whip, on a point of order as well?

[*English*]

REFERENCES TO INDIVIDUALS IN THE GALLERY

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like you to check the "blues" to see why all members stood up for somebody in the gallery.

Last week we had the same experience when the Minister of the Environment referred to somebody in the gallery. This is what it creates. It takes away the privilege of members of Parliament in this House of Commons who get paid to do a job here.

Mr. Speaker, it is your responsibility to keep order in the House. I want you to check the "blues".

The Speaker: I am happy to check the "blues", but my impression as to what happened is that the member who gave the statement made no reference to the presence of someone in the gallery. It is just that members apparently recognized someone in the gallery and the applause followed.

I do not know how the Chair can be responsible for that kind of thing, despite efforts. I will check the "blues" in case there was some reference, but I did not hear one. I thought the member had avoided that quite properly.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

JUDGES ACT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Judges Act.

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

* * *

● (1510)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

In accordance with its order of reference of Tuesday, October 30, 2007, your committee has considered the supplementary estimates 2007-08, Votes 1a, 5a, 10a, 20a, 25a, L40a, 45a and 50a under Foreign Affairs and International Trade and agreed on Tuesday, November 27, 2007 to report them without amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

In accordance with its order of reference of Monday, October 29, 2007, your committee has considered Bill C-9, An Act to implement the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States (ICSID Convention), and agreed on Tuesday, November 27, 2007 to report it without amendment.

* * *

WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-487, An Act to prevent psychological harassment in the workplace and to amend the Canada Labour Code.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to introduce this important bill regarding psychological harassment in the workplace. This bill would fill a gap in terms of harassment, in that operations and procedures would be put in place to protect workers from psychological harassment.

We have seen a number of cases across this country where workers have been intimidated. This bill would correct that by providing the proper justice and making sure there are penalties for those who perpetrate this type of crime on individuals.

This is the first attempt at tabling this bill. I would also note that the provincial NDP is tabling similar legislation in the province of Ontario. As well, the former Saskatchewan NDP government actually passed a bill on psychological harassment.

This is an important issue for workers across our country.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-488, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance Regulations (excluding pension from earnings when calculating employment insurance benefits).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to introduce my private member's bill.

Currently, Canadians who receive pension income and wish to continue to work or go back to work are forced to pay employment insurance premiums, but they would most likely not benefit from the insurance plan if they were laid off. The reason is that their pension income is currently considered as revenue and offsets the insurance benefits. My bill plans to change that so that their pension income would not be in that calculation.

I am bringing this bill forward for two basic reasons. First is the issue of fairness. I do not believe that any Canadian should be paying into an insurance plan when he or she could never benefit from the plan. Second, given the current labour shortage in this country, it is a total disincentive for people to go back to work or to continue working once they are receiving a pension.

[*Translation*]

This is a correction.

This is good for Canadian seniors and Canada's economy. I thank my colleague from Madawaska—Restigouche for his support. I plan to convince my other colleagues in this House to support this bill.

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

* * *

● (1515)

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations with all parties and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move, seconded by the hon. members for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, Scarborough—Rouge River and Vaudreuil-Soulanges:

That, in the opinion of this House:

i. During its wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands, from the 1930s through the duration of World War II, the Imperial Armed Forces of Japan officially commissioned the acquisition of young women for the sole purpose of sexual servitude, who became known as 'comfort women'; and

ii. That some Japanese public officials have recently expressed a regrettable desire to dilute or rescind the 1993 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the 'comfort women', which expressed the Government's sincere apologies and remorse for their ordeal; and

iii. That Japan has made progress since 1945 in recognizing and atoning for its past actions, and for many decades has been a major contributor to international peace, security, and development, including through the United Nations; and

iv. That the Canada-Japan alliance continues to be based on shared vital interests and values in the Asia-Pacific region, including the preservation and promotion of political and economic freedoms, support for human rights and democratic institutions, and the securing of prosperity for the people of both countries and the international community; and

v. That the Government of Canada should therefore encourage the Government of Japan to abandon any statement which devalues the expression of regret from the Kono Statement of 1993; to clearly and publicly refute any claims that the sexual enslavement and trafficking of the 'comfort women' for the Japanese Imperial Forces never occurred; to take full responsibility for the involvement of the Japanese Imperial Forces in the system of forced prostitution, including through a formal and sincere apology expressed in the Diet to all of those who were victims; and to continue to address those affected in a spirit of reconciliation.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table this petition signed by hundreds of people in Laval—Les Îles and the surrounding area. It is addressed to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

The signatories are being seriously bothered by the noise from airplanes taking off from Montreal-Trudeau airport between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. every day, as a result of a route change authorized by the advisory committee on sound management, which did not include representatives of the City of Laval. The petition asks the minister to restore the flight paths out of Montreal-Trudeau airport that were in effect before the advisory committee made the change.

* * *

● (1520)

[*English*]

STARRED QUESTIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call Starred Question No. 73. Due to the length of the answer, I ask that the answer to Starred Question No. 73 be printed in *Hansard* as if read.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

*Question No. 73—**Ms. Dawn Black**:

With regards to private contracting for food services on Canadian Forces Wings, Bases or Stations: (*a*) were requests for proposals (RFPs) issued for private companies to create franchise services for food services on military bases at any time over the last two years; (*b*) if RFPs were issued, was Public Works and Government Services Canada involved during the tendering process and were the tenders administered in accordance with the Financial Administration Act; (*c*) what directorate, group or principal of the Department of National Defence (DND) administered or managed the tendering process; (*d*) if, and when, contracts were awarded, what were the agreements for utility costs such as water, electricity, heat, and sewage with the winning bidders; (*e*) for government-owned infrastructure occupied by private sector franchises or companies, are there lease or rental agreements in place; (*f*) who are the owners of freestanding buildings on military wings and bases, and if the sole occupant and owner is a franchise or company, how are the property taxes assessed and paid, including all utilities for these buildings; (*g*) for government-owned facilities that are occupied either partially or solely by private sector franchises or companies, how are maintenance costs to building repairs or preventive maintenance schedules handled for the private sector occupants, and who performs the work; (*h*) are private sector franchises required to carry and show proof of insurance for personal liability, personal and property damages for these facilities; (*i*) are there service level agreements set up for emergency services such as police, fire and paramedics between franchises, companies and DND; (*j*) who are the contract managers for any contracts let for private franchises; (*k*) what is the length of each contract for all aspects of utility costs, leasing, and rental agreements; (*l*) has there been any loss in income to any base commander's budget because of these franchises; (*m*) if there has been a loss, how are bases sustaining a loss of revenue; (*n*) are there profit-sharing agreements in place between DND and any franchises or companies; and (*o*) are there reciprocal financial arrangements with franchises and companies?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response is as follows:

a) All resale food services on Canadian Forces wings, bases and stations are administered and operated by Canadian Forces Exchange System, CANEX. There have been no RFPs issued to create franchise services.

b) No RFPs were issued to create franchise services.

c) Any tendering processes for resale activities are managed by CANEX, subject to the direction of the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff.

d) Any resale activities are administered in accordance with Canadian Forces policy governing operation of personnel support programs. This policy can be found at: http://www.cfpsa.com/en/psp/messes/docs/APS110001AG002_19840525_CW_CH001_-VIEW_PT01[1].pdf.

e) Any third party providing resale service is governed by a concession agreement in accordance with Canadian Forces policy governing operation of personnel support programs. This policy can be found at: http://www.cfpsa.com/en/psp/messes/docs/AP-S110001AG002_19840525_CW_CH001_VIEW_PT01[1].pdf.

f) The Government of Canada owns all structures on military wings and bases, and is responsible for paying property taxes.

g) Any resale services provided by third parties are governed in accordance with Canadian Forces policy governing operation of personnel support programs. This policy can be found at: http://www.cfpsa.com/en/psp/messes/docs/AP-S110001AG002_19840525_CW_CH001_VIEW_PT01[1].pdf.

h) Any third party resale activities are required to carry insurance as outlined in the applicable concession agreement in accordance with Canadian Forces policy governing operation of personnel support programs. This policy can be found at: http://www.cfpsa.com/en/psp/messes/docs/AP-S110001AG002_19840525_CW_CH001_VIEW_PT01[1].pdf.

i) Emergency services are provided to any resale activity provided by third parties in accordance with Canadian Forces policy governing operation of personnel support programs. This policy can be found at: http://www.cfpsa.com/en/psp/messes/docs/AP-S110001AG002_19840525_CW_CH001_VIEW_PT01[1].pdf.

j) CANEX concession agreements for resale activities are managed within the CANEX national office for business development and services.

k) Terms of concession agreements for any resale activity provided by a third party vary from 1 to 5 years.

l) Not applicable.

m) Not applicable.

n) No. Concession agreements for any resale activity are at market value with funds used to support delivery of Canadian Forces morale and welfare programs.

o) Concession agreements are at market value with revenues used to support delivery of Canadian Forces morale and welfare programs.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 57, 85 and 89 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 57—**Hon. Gurbax Malhi**:

With regard to temporary residence visas (visitor visas): (*a*) in each year during the period of 1986 to 2006, for each Canadian High Commission, Embassy and Consulate around the world, what was the number of visitor visa applications (i) submitted, (ii) approved, (iii) refused and the reasons given for each refusal; (*b*) what regulations are in place with respect to compassionate considerations for visitor visa applicants; and (*c*) in each year during the period of 1986 to 2006, for each Canadian High Commission, Embassy and Consulate around the world, what was the total amount of revenue collected from (i) all visitor visa applicants, (ii) applicants whose visitor visa applications were refused?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 85—**Mr. Charlie Angus**:

With respect to the National Crime Prevention Centre funding over the past five fiscal years (2003-2004 through 2007-2008): (*a*) what was the total allocation of grants in each year; (*b*) which groups, individuals, or organizations received funding and in what amount in each year; (*c*) what groups applied for, but were denied funding in each year; (*d*) how have the criteria for eligibility changed in these years; (*e*) what studies has the government done to assess the success or failure of this program over these years; (*f*) how have applications been processed by the government in each year; (*g*) are any applications sent to the Prime Minister's Office for consideration and, if so, under what circumstances; and (*h*) what role does the Minister play in the approval process?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 89—**Mr. Don Bell**:

How many applications for temporary resident visas made by citizens of Iran were received in the following periods: (*a*) October 1, 2004 to January 22, 2006; and (*b*) January 24, 2006 to April 17, 2007?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Speaker's Ruling

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

BILL C-418—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Before we proceed to orders of the day, I wish to give a ruling on a matter before the House.

[*Translation*]

Members will recall that on October 16, 2007, the Chair made a statement reminding members that our Standing Orders provide for the continuance of private members' business from session to session within a Parliament.

[*English*]

In discharging its usual responsibilities regarding the orderly conduct of private members' business, the Chair reviewed all private members' business items eligible to continue from the first session into this new one. I need to bring to the attention of the House an issue that was noted with regard to Bill C-418, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of remuneration), standing in the name of the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Bill C-418 proposes to amend the Income Tax Act to provide that a corporation may not deduct as a business expense more than $1 million per year in respect of remuneration paid to an employee or officer of the corporation in that year. If adopted, this measure would therefore have the effect of increasing the tax payable by certain corporations. In essence, this constitutes a reduction of an alleviation of taxation. In other words, the bill deals with an issue of ways and means.

[*Translation*]

As indicated at page 748 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, there are two types of Ways and Means proceedings. The budgetary policy of the government is the first of these. The second type refers to "the consideration of legislation (bills based on Ways and Means motions already approved by the House) which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer".

Furthermore, at page 896 of Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, 23rd edition, it states that "the repeal or reduction of existing alleviations of taxation" must be preceded by a Ways and Means motion.

[*English*]

In my view, Bill C-418 imposes a charge on the taxpayer, but it was not preceded by a ways and means motion, which, as hon. members know, can only be proposed by a minister of the crown. I realize that this is a difficulty that ought to have been noticed earlier. In fact, it should have been noted when the member for Hamilton Mountain introduced the bill.

Accordingly, I have asked legislative drafters and procedural staff, working together, to provide early advice to members on their legislative initiatives so that members have ample opportunity to make the necessary adjustments to ensure their draft legislation does not offend House rules.

In conclusion, for the reasons stated above, proceedings on the bill to date, namely, introduction and first reading, have not respected the provisions of our Standing Orders and are therefore null and void. Accordingly, the Chair must now direct that the order for second reading of the bill be discharged and the bill withdrawn from the order paper.

[*Translation*]

I thank hon. members for their attention.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

(Bill C-418. On the Order: Private Members' Bills:)

Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Finance of Bill C-418, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of remuneration)—Ms. Charlton (Hamilton Mountain).

(Order discharged and bill withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1525)

[*Translation*]

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME ACT

The House resumed from November 27, consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in this House on a subject to which I have devoted most of my professional career. When I left university, I became a crown attorney, first at the provincial level, then at the federal level. Then I became a defence attorney. I was even the president of the Association des avocats de la défense. I was the Bâtonnier of the province of Quebec, and then minister of justice and minister of public safety. As you can see, I have long thought about crime in general and effective ways to fight it. I have also thought about the bogus solutions that are sometimes proposed and that have produced disastrous results in neighbouring countries. I would not want this country to follow in its neighbour's footsteps only to end up with the same results.

From the outset, I would say that I think we all share the same goal, and that is to fight crime. Where we differ is in how to go about it. I give my opponents credit and they should give me credit as well, especially since my past has shown that, in situations where I really had power, I could fight crime effectively. Our major victory over the Hells Angels in Quebec is a very clear example of that.

Nevertheless, I often heard from the other side that we were filibustering on Bill C-2. I do not know whether the people who said that know what a filibuster is. In French, the word is "filibusterie". The word "filibuster" comes from the French word "filibustier". This tactic was first used in the U.S. senate by an elderly senator who had serious objections to a bill. At the time, there was no limit on speaking time, as there is now in all legislatures, thanks in part to him. To express his disagreement with the bill, he decided to speak without stopping. He even took the Bible and read long excerpts from it, and he kept on speaking.

Today, we have measures to prevent filibusters and systematic obstruction. We have a set amount of time to present our arguments. Filibustering means using every possible procedural means to prolong a debate.

Bill C-2 groups together five bills that were introduced during the previous session, including the bill on bail. The motion at third reading was adopted unanimously, without a vote, on June 5, 2007. I therefore do not see how we could have delayed that part of Bill C-2.

Bill C-32 on impaired driving died on the order paper, even before the report stage. Once again, I do not see how anyone could accuse us of filibustering.

Bill C-27 on dangerous offenders also died on the order paper, in committee. What does it mean when a bill dies on the order paper? It means that ordinarily we should have resumed the deliberations that were interrupted in late spring, but the session was prorogued. The government prorogued it. It was the government that aborted the process these bills had to go through before becoming law. As a result, these bills could not be discussed any further.

The same is true of Bill C-22. Even worse, this bill had been adopted at third reading. Once again, it had received unanimous approval.

We voted in favour of these four bills. Where, then, is the filibustering, this tactic where members try to prolong the debate so that a bill they disagree with goes nowhere?

One major bill remains, Bill C-10, which provides for minimum sentences for offences involving firearms.

● (1530)

We were against it for a number of reasons, but the bill was passed at third reading on May 29, 2007.

The government decided to group these five bills together for one reason: none of the bills elicited systematic opposition. Knowing that we have some objections to Bill C-10, which I will discuss shortly, the government is trying to say that if we vote against Bill C-2 because we are against this part, we are also against all of the other parts.

This argument keeps coming up in this House, and I do not think it is well founded. I cannot understand why all of the parties keep using this argument. I myself have never used it and probably never will. However, when we vote in favour of blocks of legislation—such as the throne speech, which contains numerous measures—that means we support some measures, but are against others.

We weigh the measures we support against those we oppose. We explain why we vote as we do. For a throne speech, when the negatives outweigh the positives, we vote against it even though we support some of the measures it contains. It is utterly unfair to say that since we voted against a group of measures, we must oppose all of the measures in that group.

The same goes for the budget when they criticize us for voting against measures that we actually want to see in place. We voted against the budget because the cons, the measures we did not support, outweighed the pros. The same applies when we vote for a budget, which does not necessarily mean that we support every single measure in it.

The argument is a faulty one, but the government has come to rely on this tactic to influence public opinion during the coming election, an election that the government seems to want as soon as possible. For example, they will say that we are against changing the age of consent, even though the bill passed unanimously, and so on.

Let us get to the heart of the matter: minimum penalties. We have some objections in principle to minimum penalties. Based on my personal experience, I believe that minimum penalties do not influence crime rates. I think many people who have long been studying crime would agree with me.

First, I think that no member in this House would be able to tell me how many minimum penalties there are in the Criminal Code. People do not know the minimum penalties. In Canada, the most glaring example is marijuana. I passed the Bar exam in 1966. I started working as a crown attorney at the provincial level, and that was the first time I heard talk of marijuana. There was not much at the time. Throughout university, I do not remember hearing about anyone smoking pot. I did not even know that expression, and I was obviously not the only one.

I then became a crown attorney at the federal level and I started to work on cases related to these issues. Let us talk about marijuana and hashish from Indian hemp. The Indian hemp growing here had no hallucinogenic properties. So at the time, all marijuana, hashish and Indian hemp that people have been smoking since the late 1960s to the present day came from somewhere else.

Does anyone know what the minimum penalty was for importing marijuana into Canada? I am sure that people do not know, just like people at the time did not. The minimum penalty was seven years in prison for importing marijuana. It is one of the harshest sentences in the Criminal Code. But it was while we had that minimum penalty that marijuana use started growing, reaching peaks in the 1980s.

● (1535)

Since that time, levels of marijuana use have remained very high. We can clearly see that minimum sentences had little effect. The problem is that people do not know what the minimum sentences are.

On the other hand, we have an example of success, but it still needs to be taken a little further. I am referring to impaired driving. The minimum sentences have not been increased, but we have seen awareness campaigns and increased education. People know that it is a crime to drive while impaired. I remember when I finished my studies and I was buying my first car, no one talked about it. Our attitude was to consider if the person was capable of driving and we did not really see it as a criminal act. This is no longer the case.

The public has become much more aware and we have seen a decrease in impaired driving charges. In fact, they have decreased significantly. When authorities began conducting the first tests on our roads to see if people were driving while impaired, it was not uncommon to stop about 10% of drivers. When road tests are done today, with the same sample chosen in the same manner, less than 1% of drivers are found to be impaired. People have become more aware. I think of my children who drive and who, when they go to parties, have a designated driver, everyone taking their turn. These are habits they have learned without the fear of prison.

Thus, as we can see, the simple fear of a sentence does not have an impact. Plus, people do not know what the minimum sentences are. We must know a little about how the criminal mind works. I practised criminal law long enough to know a little about the subject. Does anyone really believe that criminals think seriously about the sentence they might have to serve if they are caught? First of all, most crimes are committed on impulse. What people want to avoid and what prevents them from committing crime is not the penalty, but rather the fear of getting caught. If there is a good chance they will be caught, people change their behaviour.

I also had another experience in my personal and professional life. When I began practising law in Montreal, it seemed to be the capital of armed robbery. Some of those listening may remember the famous movie called *Monica la mitraille*. It was a very good movie. I do not remember her real name, but I did see her in court. She was the leader of one of the groups who committed armed robberies in Montreal. There was about one a day at the time.

Does anyone remember the last armed bank robbery committed last year? I am convinced that almost no one does. Is it because thieves are now more afraid of the sentence than back when it was harsher? Why did they do it? Why has the number of these robberies decreased considerably? It is because of intelligent preventive measures. Banks are built differently and there is no longer access to large amounts of money. The risk of being caught in relation to the anticipated profits is not worth it. Furthermore, all kinds of measures have been put in place in banks and the efforts of bankers has also decreased the menace of armed bank robberies.

Putting in place a series of measures resulted in a true decrease in crime. Fear does not stop people from committing crimes.

The third example I can give is the death penalty. We abolished the death penalty in Canada 25 years ago. Since then the number of homicides has declined steadily rather than increasing.

I am not saying that we should not have sentences. We must have sentences and for certain crimes in certain circumstances they must be severe. However, the use of minimum sentences does not work.

● (1540)

I have another philosophical problem with minimum sentences and it is worth talking about. A judge hears a case and arguments, then weighs all the factors that need to be taken into consideration when handing down a sentence, such as individual and general deterrents, the seriousness of the charge, the seriousness of the crime, the circumstances under which the accused committed the crime, his involvement in the crime, recidivism if any, his home life, his responsibility or the influence others may have had, and so forth.

Implementing minimum sentences forces a judge, who went over all these circumstances in his heart and soul, to conclude that, even though that person should get 18 months in jail, the minimum sentence is 3 years. He is required by law, in that case, to commit an injustice. I have heard judges say that when they hand down minimum sentences.

We often forget that when we want to impose minimum sentences we are thinking about the worst offenders. When I listen to the examples given by the members opposite who defend this bill, I know full well they are thinking about the worst cases. We have to realize that minimum sentences do not apply just to the worst cases, but also to less serious cases.

I will give an example that I witnessed in my career. This will show that, although the members opposite claim that seven-year minimum sentences are not being handed out, a number of people have, at one point, served seven years in prison for importing marijuana.

I remember a young woman whose capacities were diminished after an accident. She had a daughter and her husband had left her. She met a charming, smooth talking American fellow with an education, like her, and she fell for him. He was willing to live with her handicap. He was very attentive towards her. They were in love. He seemed to have a income, without being very wealthy. One day, he left, saying that he would be sending her parcels. It was not immediately clear to her what he was talking about. Parcels did start arriving. Based on telephone conversations between them, it is obvious that she suspected that the parcels contained something illegal, because he asked that she not open them. She did not import anything. She simply stored parcels in her home. But because she suspected that there was something illegal going on, under the doctrine of wilful blindness, she was undoubtedly guilty, like him, of importing narcotics.

I wonder what sentences my colleagues in the House would hand down to that man and that woman respectively. Does it not seem profoundly unfair that the same sentence be imposed on both of them just because the minimum sentence prescribed is seven years? Since the offence involved relatively small amounts of hashish, the least dangerous drug, he may not have deserved a seven year sentence and she certainly did not. This goes to show how minimum sentences result in unfair situations. Different situations have to be considered.

In addition, the examples of cases raised in the House often appeared very serious, based on the two or three reasons for which the judge imposed such sentences. I doubt, however, that this was the case. The judge probably cited 10 reasons or so, which are not listed, for coming to the decision which is described to us as unacceptable. It is entirely possible that a few of the thousands of sentences rendered every day in Canada seem too heavy handed. In the case of a truly unacceptable sentence, the potential remedy would not come from Parliament, as is suggested by our discussions, but from the appeal courts.

● (1545)

In none of the arguments put forward in support of increasing sentences was an unreasonable decision by an appeal court ever mentioned.

Finally, the most important thing to know concerning firearms: in the United States, they incarcerate seven times as many people as we do, and guns roam freely, so to speak. As a result, three times—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Vancouver Island North for questions and comments.

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my hon. colleague's comments. He talked a lot about young people and the need for education and support for young people to change behaviour over time. That is so important. We in the NDP believe we need to have these kinds of supports and education so that as our children grow up they understand the difference between right and wrong and how to behave in society.

Here is what I have seen from young people today, including my son. The member talked about how young people who go out drinking now have a designated driver. The first time my son said he was going out with his friends to a party, I was quite worried about it, but they had, among themselves, selected a designated driver. I thought that was very responsible.

What I have seen from young people is this type of responsibility, which shows a maturity in people so young, and I think that says a lot about the education system and how we are bringing up our children today. I know there are a lot of young people out there who are very conscious about the environment and society in general and who want to be good citizens.

With regard to this bill and why it is here before us today, we are accused of stalling things, so I just want to know if the hon. member thinks that it is not a little hypocritical of the government to make those accusations against our parties when it is the Conservatives who prorogued this House and put everything back to square one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I agree completely with the member.

In introducing this bill, the government is concerned about appearances and about correcting perceptions. It is positioning the debate so that we look soft on crime, while it is tough on crime. I remember a wonderful expression used by the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who said that the important thing was to be "smart on crime". We have to hand down the right sentences and impose the right penalties on the right people when they need them.

I am also thinking of the detrimental effects prison has on young people who may have committed a crime under the influence of other people and who may even have reoffended sometimes. If you want to rehabilitate these people, prison is the worst place for them. You have to use other methods.

There is also something else to consider. The United States has an incarceration rate seven times that of Canada. I do not remember the exact budget for our correctional services, but to reach the U.S. level, we would likely have to spend seven times more. The worst is that when these young people are sent to schools for crime, they pose a danger to society when they are released.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. A number of the elements in this bill had already been passed by the House and of course they already have been thrown back to square one by this move by the Conservatives.

One of the contentious elements of the bill is the attempt to tinker with the whole dangerous offender provision. There has been some advice given that this law will not actually stand up to a charter challenge. I would like to ask the hon. member what he thinks of that and the likelihood that we are bringing forth a law which at the end of the day simply will not pass legal muster.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, since the charter was adopted, the Supreme Court has surprised me several times. I am therefore reluctant to make any predictions as to what its ruling will be. However, I can say what parameters the Supreme Court will base its decision on.

I believe that the provision many members are opposed to is the provision on reverse onus, whereby when an application is made to declare someone a dangerous offender, that person would have the burden of proving that he is not a dangerous offender. We are talking about someone with several convictions that were all beyond a shadow of a doubt. Consequently, the individual does not have the burden of proving, but the burden of demonstrating. Once an individual has been convicted, the convictions are deemed to have been proven beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Still, I have a hard time believing that having the burden of demonstrating in the case of something that can result in indefinite incarceration—because that is the result—can satisfy the charter criteria.

● (1550)

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin on an excellent speech. It is an honour for the constituents of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin to have a member with so much experience, both professional and political. It is to the great credit of the citizens and voters of that riding, as well as that of the Bloc Québécois, to have among its ranks such a qualified member, someone with the skills, qualifications and experience to guide the members of our party. He has done a great job of that in the House today, as well.

The Chair had to interrupt the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin because his time had run out. At that time, I think he was about to give us a few statistics on firearms in the United States and the number of incarcerations. He was going to draw some parallels between what is happening in the United States, a country with harsher punishments, and what is going on here in Canada.

My question has two parts. The federal government can pass all the legislation it wants concerning sentences, but when a judge imposes a sentence of two years less a day, it must be served in a provincial corrections facility. Thus, the legislation can be passed here in Ottawa, at the federal level, but the sentence might nevertheless be served in a provincial facility in Quebec. If that is the case, the incarceration will be paid for entirely by the citizens of Quebec.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, from the outset, the hon. member has been too flattering. Personally, I think it is an honour for me to represent the riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. I know that almost all members of this House feel the same way about their ridings.

It is true that I have professional experience; however, that has posed a philosophical problem. I do not wish to demonstrate false humility, which is a perverse form of pride; yet, when one knows from experience that the majority of individuals have a false perception of the problem, what is the politician's duty? Is it to respond to the misperception while knowing that the solutions he suggests will not be implemented? Or is it do his utmost to change the public perception?

I completely understand that most people still believe that crime is on the rise, which is not the case. The one constant is the publicity surrounding crimes. People will rarely go and check the statistics at the end of the year. In fact, in Canada, crimes are tracked. There is a uniform crime reporting survey for police. By the way, the crime must be reported, otherwise victims will not be able to claim insurance. So crimes are reported, especially violent crimes, except perhaps in the case of an ongoing domestic dispute. When firearms are involved, or anything like that, it is all reported.

So, who goes to check with Statistics Canada? At the beginning of the year, the service was free, but it no longer is. Nevertheless, they have comparisons. I do not remember the exact numbers. I have them saved on my computer—which is closed—but I have talked about them enough to remember. They can be found at Statistics Canada, but I know a few.

In the United States, the incarceration rate is seven times higher than it is here, and firearms are much more prevalent there. What is the result? There are three times more homicides in the United States than in Canada. Five times more spouses are killed in the United States than here, in Canada. I am told that it is gangsters, but gangsters—

● (1555)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I regret to inform the hon. member that his time has expired. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Timmins—Baie James.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise on behalf of the people of Timmins—James Bay to discuss Bill C-2.

What we are called to do in Parliament, as parliamentarians and despite everything else, is to make laws of the land that will hold up and reflect a sense of jurisprudence and also a belief that the laws will establish a way we should be as a nation. This is the forum in which that happens.

Unfortunately, we have seen over the last number of years, particularly with the Conservative government and its crime agenda, the debasement of debate. There are 308 members to reflect judiciously on serious issues. Then when they stand up and speak, they are ridiculed. We have the cheap cat call gallery in the Conservatives, which is always looking to twist and take words out of context. What we end up having is the notion of debate passing through some kind of spinmeister's message box in search of a wedge issue.

At the end of the day it serves a certain political group very well. It creates a legitimation crisis. It creates a sense that Parliament is not there to get something done, that parliamentarians are sitting on their rear ends doing nothing because they are not responding.

I will speak in particular about the Conservatives' crime agenda. They government has accused basically everyone in the House of stalling on crime and being soft of crime. Conservative members have said at times in the House that members somehow support child pornography. These claims are outrageous, and it is debasement of our role, which is to bring forward reflection on bills that deal with crime.

Nowhere is this clearer than on Bill C-2. A number of the sections of this bill were brought through the House, voted on, discussed and brought forward with good amendments, to the point of being law, particularly the age of consent bill, which at the point of being law. The issue of gun crime sentencing, which all parties worked on, and provisions with regard to bail would all be law now. Yet the Conservatives prorogued the House and allowed those bills to die.

The government then started the whole process over again and began to accuse our friends in the upper chamber of not doing their job. If we even stood and asked questions, we were told we were being soft on crime and delaying the issue. It is a total obfuscation of fact. It really raises question as to why are these laws not already law, if the government were serious on a crime agenda and having laws that would work for people. The bills were ready to go.

What we have is this continual cheapening of political discourse. That leads me to the shenanigans we saw today during statements and question period. My good friend from Nepean—Carleton, who is often a favourite partisan ankle-biter, stood and tried to take the words I said yesterday and spin them into a little wedge issue for the Conservative Party and make it seems that I somehow refused to support the age of consent from 14 to 16, that I tried to block the bill and that we were soft on crime.

I will not respond to the member's comments. I admire his partisan glee, but if he is going to do a hatchet job, he might as well do the job properly. This is unfortunately the problem we see, the debasement of debate. These discussions have become so absurd and silly. I do not know exactly to whom he thinks he is appealing.

I spoke about this yesterday, about how the Conservatives would try to twist facts. The Conservatives will misrepresent what was said. Then the spin doctors will take the ten percenters—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I heard a term, but I did not hear the entire sentence in which it was used. I heard a word used to describe one of the other hon. members. I want to caution the hon. member. I am not sure if “ankle-biter” would be found to be parliamentary. I will give the hon. member the benefit of the doubt, if he would just watch how he describes other members.

● (1600)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, it really speaks to what is happening in terms of these issues. The statement the member made is silly. If that member wants to come up to Timmins—James Bay and run around with a little Conservative ten percenter saying that I am soft on crime, by all means do it.

The people back home sent me here because they want to get rid of that bunch. They do not believe what those members say for an instant. If the Conservatives want to spend money using the public's ink to attack me personally in my riding, they can go ahead. They can send as many ten percenters as they want. They can do their little fife and drum show and say I am soft on crime. People back home know it is not true. They know we are here to reflect on crime bills and try to get them through.

With regard to Bill C-2, it is the misinformation that party has used again and again to try to show that members are delaying. In fact, it was the Conservative government that prorogued Parliament and let those bills die, particularly the age of consent bill, which would have been law if the Conservatives had simply signed, with a stroke of the pen, to revive it.

There is speculation that there might be an election by the time the bill goes through the Senate. The Conservatives know full well that the bill might not become law. I asked yesterday whether they might enjoy that situation and then they could run an entire campaign on how everyone else in the House was soft on crime. That is not doing Canadians any good.

My dear friend from Nepean—Carleton offered $1,000 to young people to write an essay on how to protect themselves from Internet luring. However, there was a catch. They had to take his petition around to people, a petition that blamed the Senate for stalling a bill that his own government had killed. He did not tell those young people about that.

This is another example of how the Conservatives continually put their grubby, partisan fingerprints on the imagination of our young people. What happened with that petition was a real debasement of Parliament. It brought discredit on all of us in the House, because we take these issues seriously. We take the issue of the age of consent seriously. We take the issue of gun crime seriously. We now have to play this little soap opera out day after day in the House.

The government has no national vision. It has no plan. It has been trying to rag the puck on crime bills because it has nothing else in its war chest. We are now involved again in a debate that has already been done. Everything had been settled, yet the government turned the clock back and rolled out the legislation again.

No wonder people do not have any faith in politicians when we look at the government's crime agenda. If a government is willing to be that partisan about issues involving the protection of the public, then how can we have faith in it on anything else? There are so many crime bills coming forward: mandatory minimums for bicycle theft, mandatory minimums for furniture theft, getting tough on whatever. All the government has on the docket are more crime bills. As I pointed out yesterday, this is like a wound that will never heal. All we need is one more horrific crime, one more drunk driver and the government will that say our laws are not serious enough.

This debases the larger issue of what Canada's policy should be in terms of crime. Do we need to get serious on gun crimes? Certainly we do. Do we need to have policies in place to take on gangs? Yes indeed. We need to effectively target the ability of police to serve the regions of our country where we see spikes in crime. However, we also need to have a clear, coherent plan for dealing with criminals and recidivism.

I keep going back to the member for Nepean—Carleton because it was such an amusing piece. In fact, I might send it out as my ten percenter so people can see what they would have if they had a Conservative member instead of myself.

He said that I was opposed to the “three strikes and you're out” policy. Yes I am. I am certainly opposed to what the Conservatives are trying to do with their simplistic “three strikes and you're out” policy. People in California have been sentenced to life for stealing a pizza. That is the direction the government would like to take us.

● (1605)

The Conservatives are detracting from the larger issue. As long as we sit in the House having to defend ourselves about being soft on crime or about supporting child pornographers, or whatever else the government wants to throw at us in terms of its mud, we are not discussing the substantive need for having a forward thinking policy for the nation in the 21st century.

For example, there is a need for a committed infrastructure program for municipalities, whether rural or urban. We have no plan from the government. We are not talking about that because we are running around talking about bicycle theft today and whatever crimes tomorrow.

The other issue detracting our attention from the House by continually having bills brought back, argued again and dragged out is the example this past week of the Prime Minister, who shamed us on the international stage. At the Commonwealth talks he showed that Canada was no longer an international leader, that the government did not represent a national interest. It was a front for the ecological free booters, who are pillaging the tar sands. We need to have a serious discussion in the House about the failure of the government to come forward with an environmental policy that is anything but acting as a shield for big oil.

The issue of crime is a serious issue. We went through this in the House. We dealt with the issue of the age of consent. We dealt with the issue of gun violence. We came forward with coherent elements on which every party worked. At the end of the day, that is our role as legislators. We have to bring forward the experience of our communities so we bring in laws that will actually work, laws that can be applicable on the street, that the chiefs of police will agree with and for people who work with cases of recidivism, laws that are part of a coherent policy.

At this point we are now going through an entire debate process that should have already been done. These laws should be on the books. Why are we debating it again? I am not sure. However, I will not at this point turn around when the Conservatives say to take it or leave it, stand up or sit down. It is my role as a legislator to speak out on bills and I will continue to do that, regardless of the partisan mailings that go into my riding, regardless of whether they get backbenchers to stand to attack me or any other member of the House. Let them do it. It does not detract us from our job in this caucus of reflecting on the bills that are brought before the country. We need to ensure that when we introduce laws, they are workable laws and they are laws that will, at the end of the day, bring us forward as a nation rather than backwards.

I will finish on the "three strikes, you're out" policy. We have seen the complete failure of the crime policy in the United States, a vision for dealing with crime. The rates of violence continue in the United States. Gun crimes continue. People who should not have been thrown into the justice system are eaten up with its mandatory minimums and its "three strikes, you're out". It is a failed policy.

The only thing worse than a failed policy are people who look at that failed policy years later, when they have all the empirical evidence, in the cold light of day, and make a calculated decision to approve a failed policy. That is even worse. It is much worse than the mistake our American neighbours made. If there were gun and gang violence, there would have been reasons for thinking that maybe the approach taken in the United States would work, but we have seen the failure of that approach. We know it has to be balanced and it has to be balanced between the need to ensure there is a way to get people out of the criminal system and into rehabilitation. We also need to have laws in place to take out the gangs, to have the police on the streets and to get serious on offences where need be.

We tried to strike that balance in the House. Having struck that balance, the Conservatives are driving in a much larger wedge. In the end, it comes to protecting our communities, and I have to always take it back to Timmins—James Bay, which I represent.

● (1610)

If the government is serious about getting tough on crime and protecting citizens, why have our communities on the James Bay coast been left almost without policing. The police officers, the service and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation police across the NAN territory are continually put in dangerous situations because there is no funding for them.

When we have one or two police officers in an isolated fly-in community of 2,000 people, that is not a place we should put anybody. We should have proper backup for police. Any other part of this country would take that for granted, but for some reason, in our isolated first nations communities, not only are the police underrepresented but the citizens are underrepresented. We have much higher rates of violence in these communities because of the lack of services, the lack of supports for communities and the lack of policing support. We know the stress that our police officers are under and the stress these communities are under.

If we are to get tough on crime, where is the money? Show me the money that would ensure that in the places where there is violence, which is on the isolated first nations reserves, that we have police, that the police have the necessary social supports and that we have the regional centres for victims of violence they could be taken to. They have none of that on the James Bay coast. I have always said that it is like a virtual third or fourth world.

However, one would think that a government that talks about getting tough on crime and dealing with the needs of citizens would recognize that we cannot simply put one police officer on his or her own in an isolated community with no backup. First, we are hurting the citizens and leaving them without police services, and second, there is not a non-native police service in this country that would put up with that.

Do we have to get serious about crime? Yes, we do. That is our job. Our job is to bring in laws and to ensure these laws work. We will reflect on these laws as they come forward. We will bring forward amendments that will make good laws and we will oppose laws that will not work. However, what we will never do is abrogate our responsibility as legislators to take the time to reflect on those bills.

If the government wants to take the time to prorogue the House for five weeks, that is its business. If it wants to allow bills that should have been law to sit and die, bills like the age of consent and the bills dealing with gun violence, and then begin again from scratch, that is its business. If it wants to take as long as it has to take, that is its business, but it cannot tell us in the House what our business is, which is representing our people and ensuring that any legislation the government brings forward, whether it is wrapped up in an omnibus bill or whether it is called a confidence motion, that it is legislation that will work and, at the end of the day, it has an efficacious nature that we can actually bring back and say to the people of Canada that 308 members of the House brought forward legislation that will work.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed hearing the comments of the NDP member for Timmins—James Bay. I also enjoyed his involvement on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. He has a great sense of humour and he brings a lot of knowledge of the arts to the table at that committee. He is a great piano player and guitar player. In fact, I have heard him play piano and he puts my modest talents to shame.

However, I will say that he is away out of his depth when it comes to addressing the scourge of crime that is plaguing our country.

He took great care and joy in attacking my Conservative colleague for Nepean—Carleton and yet my colleague from Nepean—Carleton was spot on when he accused the member for Timmins—James Bay of being, not only soft on crime, but of trivializing the work that we are doing in the House to try to attack violent crime.

Bill C-2 addresses dangerous offenders who repeatedly offend. These are violent offenders. It addresses the issue of gun crimes. It addresses the issue of protecting the most vulnerable in our society, our children, against adult predators. He refers to the Conservatives as "wanting to run after the kids who steal handbags". Imagine him trivializing that work.

He went on to say in this very House, "Grabbing old ladies handbags; kids tossing litter out on the sidewalks". He refers to not getting serious about mandatory minimums for "furniture theft and bicycle theft".

I would suggest that he should apologize to the House for trivializing the victims of crime in this country and the work that we are doing in the House, the very serious work we are doing to address crime in this country.

● (1615)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my colleague. We have worked well together on committees. I have always told him that I respect him because he normally does his homework, unlike my dear friend from Nepean—Carleton who does not do his homework. I need for him to help his younger colleague.

My sense is that at the end of the day we are dealing with repeat offences here. We had a bill that was already pretty much law and we had to start it over again. I think there is a bit of a reverse onus on the Conservative Party to show us that it is actually serious about getting tough on crime and is not just playing it in the House.

I was more than willing to go through this first round of bills. The member will know that I probably spoke once or twice on the need to raise the age of consent. I am more than willing to speak a lot more this time because I believe there is a reverse onus for the government to get serious, to stop playing games in this House and stop running these bills through again and again.

As far as my friend from Nepean—Carleton saying that I am not onside on raising the age of consent, he obviously does not do his homework. However, that is okay because I did not expect him to. I am sure the member for Abbotsford will know—or wherever it is in B.C. he is from. I get my places all mixed up once I get—

An hon. member: It's all paradise.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am sure it is all paradise out there.

I am sure he would do his homework to know that I do take the issue of age of consent very seriously.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the NDP killed the previous government it killed a national early learning head start program for children. The police have even said that one of the most effective ways of preventing crime is to have an early learning head start program for children.

Why did the member's party kill the previous government and, in so doing, kill the early learning head start program that would have reduced youth crime by 60%?

Would the member support the government's initiative to criminalize low level drug dealers who are actually addicts paying for their addiction through drug dealing and whether those people should be treated as a medical problem rather than a judicial problem, differentiating them from the commercial grow operations and the organized crime gangs that are the real parasites that are trafficking and those are the real criminals in this equation?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the number one rule in this House is that one should not lead with one's chin.

Why would the member continue to give us credit for bringing down a government that the Canadian people were so sick of that they threw out? I think it does misrepresentation to the will of the average Canadian citizen who recognized that the member's government was so hopelessly corrupt that it needed to be thrown out. However, if he wants to put all that credit on the 29 or 30 New Democrats, I am certainly willing to take some of that credit, but I think it is misplaced.

The reality is that the Liberal Party still does not get it. The Liberals misrepresented what they were here to do. They did not deliver on an early childhood education program. They did not come through with an environment program. They ran out of the red book for 12 or 13 years. One of the greatest pieces of electoral spin in history was that they just stripped the cover off the red book each election, put a new date on it and ran with the same issues again.

When the Liberals were in their final dying days, we remember the pathetic example on television of the former Liberal prime minister begging the people to give him until Gomery, to give him 30 days to 60 days and then he would call an election. He begged people to give his government a chance.

The election happened 30 days before that. However, in that period between the 30 days when we helped bring down that corrupt government and the former prime minister would have had his election, that was the moment when the Liberals took every unfulfilled promise that was ever put in the red book and flung it across the country as some great fulfilled national vision. No wonder the Canadian people threw them out.

● (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I just want to remind hon. members about the rules in the Standing Orders relating to relevancy. I hope that all members, both in their questions and comments and in their speeches, stick as closely as possible to the actual substance of the bill.

I think we have time for one more question and comment. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the presentation from the member for Timmins—James Bay. As always, he makes a lot of sense. Hopefully, members in the other three corners of the House will listen to what he said.

We had under the Liberals repeated promises that were always broken, whether that was the child care promise that was broken for 13 years, the aboriginal rights promise that was broken for 13 years or a whole variety of other promises that were broken.

Now we have the Conservatives who made a bunch of promises that they are now breaking and, in fact, on what they are attempting to bring through the House now in terms of justice. The member pointed to a number of measures that the Conservatives could have taken if they had been serious about being smart on crime but they did not.

Does the member believe that the Conservative government governs in the same way that the former corrupt Liberal government governed?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that is such a wide open question, but I will try to stick close to hand to the subject of crime. There are not enough hours in the day for us to go through all the shenanigans of 13 years of Liberal corruption. I am sure the folks back home would love me to do an itemized list.

However, at the end of the day, the problem with what the former government failed to deliver and what it created was a major disconnect between what the Liberals said they would do and what they would actually do. I always take my advice from the best orator in history, the carpenter in Galilee, who said make your "yes" mean yes and your "no" mean no. We do not need spin. We do not need a message. We do not need it to be a wedge issue. We just need to stand and say that we will or we will not do it. The Liberal Party believed it never actually had to do it.

That brings us to the question of crime. We were sent here to enact laws and some of those laws have to do with crime and making sure that gangs are not running wild, that gun violence is being contained and that our police have the resources to deal with that. Our job is to listen to the problem and bring in legislation that actually works, make our "yes" mean yes and our "no" mean no.

Unfortunately, what we have seen here is a political game that has been played out where substantive issues of crime are being reduced to the wedge issues, being reduced to cheap spin and spin-doctoring and sometimes very paltry efforts at attacks by backbench members in the government party against other members who are actually doing their job.

If the government were trying to be different than the old corrupt Liberal Party, it would come forward with a simple plan, make it work and get on with the nation's business. Unfortunately, I have not seen it make that step yet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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, Justice.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to pick up where the member for Timmins—James Bay left off in terms of Bill C-2 and setting the context for what is very clearly hypocrisy from the Conservative government on justice issues.

The member for Timmins—James Bay talked about some of the areas where the Conservatives have taken no action or actually cut back on funding. That is an important starting point because if the government was really serious about tackling crime issues, it would take the NDP lead on being smart on crime. It would take the whole spectrum of measures that need to be taken to reduce crime rates and the number of victims in society.

Indeed, though there are some measures in this bill that the NDP can support, the reality is that this seems to be more political spin than an actual attempt to deal substantively with criminal justice issues and lowering the crime rate.

I will be addressing some of these points later on, but let us look at what is not in Bill C-2 and what has not been part of the Conservatives' justice platform since they were elected.

There is nothing to deal with youth at risk. We know that $1 invested in preventive crime measures actually saves $6 later on in policing costs, penal costs and justice costs. Yet, the Conservative government has done virtually nothing to provide support for youth at risk programs.

With regard to addiction programs, we know that certain countries have managed to achieve reduction rates of about 80% in addictions, particularly drug addicts. Countries, like Switzerland, have made very substantive leaps forward in reducing the number of addicts.

We know that when we reduce the number of addicts, we essentially reduce the crimes committed by those addicts in their addicted frenzy, trying to find their next fix. Many innocent Canadians get hurt and yet the government has done nothing to put in place addiction programs to lower the addiction rate and reduce the crime rate at the same time.

We have seen an utter failure by the government in supporting community policing. It talked about increasing the number of police officers, however, it has done absolutely nothing substantive to support communities from coast to coast to coast that are looking for funding for community policing.

One of the two communities I represent, New Westminster, has an extraordinarily high cost for policing that was passed on to the federal government. The federal government did nothing to support the community of New Westminster and its extraordinarily high policing costs that were undertaken because of actions by the government.

It is the same with the other community of Burnaby because of the refusal by the government to restore the cutbacks that we saw under the previous Liberal governments for the RCMP, where there was a shortage of front line police officers. There is no support for community policing or for the overall crime prevention measures, whether it is safety audits or other community initiatives to reduce crime.

What the government does is it shovels billions of dollars out the back of a truck to the corporate sector in tax cuts. We are talking about record levels of corporate profits and all the government can do is shovel money off the back of a truck to the corporate sector rather than provide support for community policing, youth at risk programs, addiction programs and crime prevention measures.

The government funds none of those programs. It just shovels money to its corporate friends. It is the same old, same old. That is exactly how the former Liberal government acted. We see, generally speaking, no concrete measures being taken.

In terms of the international initiatives undertaken by the government, we see a clear contradiction with the purported aims of Bill C-2. Even today in question period there was a refusal by the government to stop crimes against humanity in Darfur. There was a refusal to do anything about that.

Yesterday, at the trade committee, Conservatives and Liberals were working together to ditch the NDP motion that would put an end to the trade negotiations taking place with Colombia. This is extremely important because we know the Colombian government is linked to crimes. There were summary executions, hundreds of them this year by the Colombian military. Dozens of trade unionists were killed by paramilitaries connected to the Colombian government and yet, instead of the government saying these crimes must be punished and taking a stand, it is actually rewarding the Colombian government linked to crimes against humanity by negotiating a trade agreement.

● (1625)

That is symbolic of just how hypocritical the government is. People can commit crimes. They just have to do it in dress suits or be connected with a right-wing government and then it is all right.

That just does not wash with most Canadians. They understand the hypocrisy that when a Colombian regime, paramilitaries, or the Colombian military commits crimes against humanity, commits murder, instead of being rewarded with a trade agreement, the Canadian government should be condemning them.

That is the hypocrisy between how Conservatives act when somebody is in a dress suit or when somebody is in a military uniform in Colombia, as opposed to how they purport to act by bringing this legislation forward.

Let us look at the process around Bill C-2, which is another symbol of the hypocrisy of the Conservative government.

Sixty per cent of what was in the bill was before the Senate. We have seen with this Senate, though it is Liberal-dominated, that it has done absolutely nothing to stop the Conservative agenda. Liberals work in cooperation with the Conservatives.

The Conservatives essentially have a functional majority in Parliament because the Liberal members have given up their right to be a member of the opposition. They sit on their hands. They do not protest anything. They accept anything the Conservatives hand out, and essentially those justice bills were in the process of being passed by the Senate.

The other chamber passed the softwood sellout, which was clearly not in Canada's interest, in 72 hours. This justice legislation would have been passed, but instead, the government withdrew it, took all the legislation back and now is resubmitting it to the House. It was a delay of months. If that is not hypocrisy, I do not know what is.

Essentially, they were right at the finish line, as we were with the softwood sellout winning in American courts. We were at the finish line and the government said, "No, we do not actually want this stuff to pass now". It prorogued Parliament and reintroduced the bills in order to have the same debates all over the place because it is not really serious about taking action on justice issues. The Conservatives are not serious about community policing or crime prevention measures, dealing with addiction, or dealing with youth at risk. No, they are not serious about that, but they want to pretend that they are, so they are going to reintroduce all this legislation. Now it is here before us today.

The Conservatives said they wanted to deal with dangerous offenders. That is part of what they wanted to do. They said that this bill would deal with it, and as the member for Abbotsford well knows, because he has been doing the same kind of mailings into my riding that the member for Timmins—James Bay mentioned earlier, this legislation will be thrown out under a charter challenge.

It is important to note that the NDP submitted amendments at committee and in this House, and has been consistently saying to the government that since it knows it will be thrown out under a charter challenge, since it knows this legislation cannot work, because we do live under a Constitution, since it knows that, let us do the smart thing and remove the caps on dangerous offender designation.

Let us look at what is in the bill. I will read it because it is important for Canadians to know the intense hypocrisy of the government. It says:

> —an application under subsection (1) not later than six months after that imposition;

It is repeated in paragraph (b):

> —that is not later than six months after the imposition of sentence—

It is still in the bill, the limit of six months. Is that important? Yes it is. The balcony rapist, Mr. Paul Callow, who was released because of these provisions that are currently in the Criminal Code, continued by this Conservative government, was released into the community because there was no provision in the Criminal Code for designation later in sentence of a dangerous offender.

That is important because in this case, this individual did not go through the required treatment programs, and this individual reportedly and allegedly assaulted a nurse in prison.

Under this Conservative justice bill that is before us now, the same situation can arise tomorrow, next week or next year because the six month deadline for the designation of a dangerous offender still exists.

It is not as if the government did not know. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who has been voted by all members of this House as the most knowledgeable member of Parliament in this Parliament, told the government repeatedly, warned the government and sent letters. He went to committee and he brought forward the amendment.

● (1630)

Liberals and Conservatives, obviously not having the slightest understanding of what was actually in the bill, refused to adopt the amendment. Then it was brought forward to the House. There was the same rejection from Liberals and Conservatives.

Therefore, we are now looking at a bill that allows the exact same circumstances that happened earlier this year to happen again because the government does not seem to be serious about criminal justice issues.

When we take a smart on crime approach, we have to look at everything: crime prevention measures, funding for that, funding for community policing, and changes to the Criminal Code that actually address the issues. We do not look at changes to the Criminal Code that are simply there as make-up to pretend that we are doing our job.

Perhaps the most egregious aspect of this whole process of putting forward legislation, of pulling back the legislation, of putting forward the legislation again, refusing to heed the advice that the government received from committee representatives and witnesses who appeared before the government, and refusing to heed the advice of the most knowledgeable member of Parliament in the House, as voted by members of the House of Commons, is that we are back to exactly the same situation that we were in last spring with no capability to provide for dangerous offender designation later in the sentence. That is the appalling thing about this whole process.

It is appalling to hear the hypocrisy when crimes are committed internationally. The Conservatives simply say, "That's fine. You can commit a crime. You can commit a murder if you're a member of the Colombia military. You can do these things. We don't care. At home we are going to pay lip service to some aspects of dealing with criminal justice issues, but by no means all of them and by no means in the comprehensive way that is required".

That is the net result of what we have before us. Some of the elements I have supported and some of the elements other NDP members have supported, but the process disappoints me enormously. The process points to the fact that the government is not serious about these issues. What it wants to get is political spin out of this. It does not want to deal in a concrete way with all aspects of the criminal justice system,

Perhaps the clearest hypocrisy is that the government surely does not want to change its priorities of forking out, shovelling out, billions of dollars to the corporate sector in tax gifts. It certainly does not want to change that focus to actually adequately funding the programs that will reduce the number of victims.

In other words, if there is a victim, there are certainly some enforcement measures in the bill, but the government does not do anything to actually reduce the number of victims through youth at risk, through addiction programs, through community policing, or through crime prevention measures. That is the most appalling thing.

I would like to move on to one of the other elements. Today in the *Ottawa Citizen* it was revealed that the federal Minister of Justice has received studies prepared by his own department that indicate that his own criminal justice measures will not work.

I will read this into the record because I think this is very relevant to the debate we are having on Bill C-2. Some of the provisions of Bill C-2 are improvements, but generally speaking the overall so-called crime fighting agenda of the government is designed for political spin. It is not designed for the kind of practical measures that do make a difference. The article by Richard Foot states:

> [The] federal Justice Minister is pressing ahead with plans to create mandatory minimum prison terms for drug crimes in spite of two studies prepared for his own department that say such laws don't work, and are increasingly unpopular as crime-fighting measures in other countries.

● (1635)

That is from the study for the minister himself: minimum sentences are not an effective sentencing tool with regard to drug crime. That is one conclusion of these reports prepared for the justice department itself.

The report states in regard to mandatory minimum sentences that "while they show success in deterring firearms or drunk driving crimes", and those are measures we have supported in this legislation, "particularly among repeat offenders, they appear to have no impact on drug crime".

Of course, the justice minister did not respond to any requests for interviews on this particular subject.

I think this begs the big question. If some of the measures that are most effective in reducing the crime rate have not been considered by the government, and in fact most of the measures we have outlined today that actually do reduce the crime rate have not been considered by the government at all, and if the departmental studies that the Minister of Justice gets in his own department indicate that some of his legislation is flawed, the question is, where are the Conservatives getting their advice?

The government had recommendations from the most knowledgeable member of Parliament in this House, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. He indicated very clearly that what was needed was the provision for later in sentence designation of dangerous offender. He indicated that it would have an effect and avoid the kind of loopholes that led to the balcony rapist being released into our community of New Westminster with no support whatsoever. He was put into a homeless shelter and, of course, according to the rules of the homeless shelter, it put him out onto the streets every day.

We can imagine the impact on our community of that kind of wrong-headed approach to criminal justice measures, yet not a single member of the Conservative caucus and certainly not the justice minister, no one within the Conservative caucus, actually took action to close that loophole. As we saw, the loophole is very much still there. This legislation that the justice minister is bringing forward and which the Conservatives say we should adopt still has the loophole.

So the Conservative political spin about actually dealing with that issue is very clearly nothing but spin. The studies indicating that some of the other legislation coming forward is ineffective come from the justice minister's own department.

If what is very clearly here in place is legislation that does not do what it is purported to do, that does not deal with the issues it is supposed to deal with, then we have to ask the question, what is the real agenda here? The real agenda appears to be trying to have this Conservative government campaign on crime and justice issues without having done a whole lot on those issues.

The government has flawed legislation, admittedly flawed legislation, that it has not worked to improve. In fact, there is legislation that was almost passed but that the government has now pulled back. The former justice minister was fired because of the admittedly poor nature of some of the legislation coming forward.

Most importantly, the key components of crime prevention in lowering the crime rate and actually producing fewer victims have been ignored or cut back by this government: youth at risk programs, crime prevention measures such as safety audits, community policing funding, which has been sorely inadequate, as it was under the former Liberal government, and addiction programs.

All of those measures would make a difference. All of those measures have been ignored by the government. All of those measures have been simply put aside.

As for the priority of the government, disappointing I think to any Canadian who looked at what was being promised and expected at least that the Conservatives would put into place some realistic funding envelopes that would actually address these issues they campaigned on, instead of having that as the priority, the Conservatives have put into place a priority of shovelling billions of taxpayers' dollars into tax gifts to the wealthiest of Canada's corporations.

That is why the government's real record is so disappointing. That is why when we look at Bill C-2 we can only look at it, with some good elements, as a missed opportunity.

● (1640)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to my colleague from British Columbia, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster. I was astounded to hear him make the categorical statement that this legislation will be turned down by the courts. In other words, it is not going to pass muster at the Supreme Court of Canada.

That is typical. Whenever our government has come forward with legislation that is going to get tough on crime in Canada and make our streets and communities safer, the typical response we get from the NDP is that we are trampling on the rights of the criminals, of the accused. There is one word that we never hear from the NDP—

● (1645)

Mr. Myron Thompson: Victims.

Mr. Ed Fast: Victims. Exactly. My colleague from the Conservative Party got that right. We never hear the word "victims" from the NDP. The victims are the ones who are caught in the middle.

I would suggest that the member for Burnaby—New Westminster consider his position. Again, after all the railing against this legislation, Bill C-2, which he just finished after some 20 minutes of rambling and ranting, I am astounded by the fact of what he did yesterday when he had a chance to stand and say he is against getting tough on crime. What did he do? He stood and voted in favour of the legislation. How can that be? I ask the member that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member for Abbotsford was asleep at the switch again, because he knows full well that the dangerous offender provisions do not do what we need to have in this legislation. Despite the fact that the NDP pushed that legislation and said to close the loophole on the six month limit, the Conservatives refused to close the loophole. So the loophole is in the legislation and the member knows that full well.

The issue is not that the Conservatives are tough on crime. They are stupid on crime, no offence, but what we essentially have here is legislation with none of the funding in place for community policing, none of the funding in place for crime prevention, none of the funding in place for addiction programs, and none of the funding that actually reduces the number of victims.

If the member had been listening, and I wish that for once Conservative members would actually listen to what is being said in this House rather than always reading from their prepared text and their talking points from the Prime Minister's Office and never deviating from that, as I say, if he had actually listened, he would have heard references at least a dozen times to victims.

To say that because the Conservatives have brought forward amendments to the Criminal Code, even if they do not do what they are expected to do, and while they have refused to provide all of the funding that actually reduces the crime rate, such as crime prevention programs and policing that they are strangling by their refusal to fund while they spend billions in corporate tax gifts, what he is doing is simply proving my point: the Conservatives are hypocritical on crime issues.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Vancouver we have a serious problem, as we do across the country, in terms of the epidemic of HIV-AIDS and other blood-borne pathogens that kill a lot of people. Some of that, of course, is driven by the sharing of needles and addictions, particularly narcotics.

I would like to ask my NDP colleague from British Columbia whether or not his party will support our party in trying to convince the government to support not only a longer term expansion for the life of the Insite supervised injection program in Vancouver, but also—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I made a comment earlier today about questions and comments being relevant to the bill before the House. I am afraid that I just do not find anything relating to Bill C-2 in the question. If the hon. member has a question relevant to the bill, I will allow it.

Hon. Keith Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The relevance, of course, is the connection between drug use and crime. I want to ask the member again if he supports the expansion of supervised injection sites across the country and also the NAOMI project, which is a narcotic substitution program that saves lives and reduces crime.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There is just very little in Bill C-2 regarding some of the issues the member has raised. If the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster can answer the question with some relevance to Bill C-2, I will allow him a chance to respond.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver East, who is also the NDP House leader, has been the foremost proponent of issues around Insite. I will take it through its more global context. The reality is that there are best practices around the world and the government could have learned from them.

If the government were sincere about dealing with crime issues, it would not be cutting and hacking back on funding for community policing or crime prevention programs. We know very well that $1 spent there saves $6 later on in policing costs, penal costs and justice costs. It just makes good sense from a taxpayer's point of view. It also lowers the number of victims.

If the government were sincere, it would be tackling those best practices instead of bringing forward legislation that, although it does some good things, and that is why I will vote for it, does not do nearly what is required for the government to reduce the crime rate. That is the issue. It is hypocritical, because those members are not willing to walk the talk.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to sit through a discourse from my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster. He talked about the hypocrisy of why we are at this point in the discussions today and also about the partisan politics being played around these crime bills.

I think it is important to talk about forward-looking leadership on the prevention of crime and the things the NDP talks about. I want to quote my hon. colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh. In his speech, he talked about the five parts of Bill C-2, four of which the NDP is okay with and one we are having some trouble with. He mentioned that quite eloquently in his speech.

The most knowledgeable member of Parliament, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, said:

> —the balance of the bill had provisions in it that either we had ourselves brought forward in the last election in our platform or were prepared to support the government on because we felt that it was in the best interests of Canada. It actually either protected people or met the requirement of having to make amendments to the Criminal Code where it was long past needing these amendments....

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh went on to talk about prevention and named some of those things. A little later on, he said:

> —the greater majority of this bill is a bill that we looked at and said that, yes, these are good provisions, these are provisions that make sense in terms of building a fair, equitable justice system that protects our society.

I want to ask my hon. colleague if he could give us more examples of the kinds of things that could be put in place to reduce crime, examples of the preventative measures that Canadians are asking for.

● (1650)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague from Vancouver Island North is concerned about criminal justice issues and she has been doing a remarkable job in the House of Commons.

She raises an interesting point. We are going back over the same legislation for I think the third or fourth time now. It is much the same legislation. The Conservatives insert it, bring it back to the House, put it in the Senate, prorogue the House, and then reintroduce it in a new form.

The Conservatives have been playing a shell game with Canadians. It is really tragic and unfortunate that they are playing this shell game around criminal justice legislation while at the same time cutting back on what are the key areas to actually reduce the crime rate. We have mentioned some of them: youth at risk programs, community policing programs, crime prevention programs, things such as safety audits for neighbourhoods and apartment buildings, and things like addiction programs. In other countries, all of these measures have led to a substantial drop in the crime rate.

The Conservative government seemingly only takes on legislation very much on the American model. Some of the legislation is good. Some of it is very poorly crafted. The end result is not going to be what it promised Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

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

* * *

BUDGET AND ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2007

Hon. Rona Ambrose (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-28, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007 and to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on October 30, 2007, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to get onto the discussions of Bill C-28. We have all been waiting for this second budget implementation bill to finally get to the House and we are so excited to be discussing all of the wonderful things that are in it. There are some tax cuts for which Canadians have been waiting. We are certainly seeking quick passage of the bill so that we can make sure that Canadians see their tax cuts as soon as we can possibly get this bill through the House.

I am very pleased to present Bill C-28 today at second reading. The first bill to implement measures from budget 2007 received royal assent on June 22, 2007. This comprehensive bill also proposes to implement bold new measures from the 2007 economic statement that will reduce taxes further for Canadians and usher in a new era for Canadian business taxation, while further reducing the federal debt.

The measures in Bill C-28 are key components of this government's strategy to create a tax advantage, one of the priorities identified in our long term economic plan, Advantage Canada. To that end, there is little doubt that our government is well on its way to establishing a proud legacy of tax relief. In fact, we have provided broad based relief in personal income taxes, consumption taxes, business taxes and in excise taxes.

Moreover, we have made tremendous strides in a short period of time, but we are not finished yet. Canadians expect their government to help them build on this legacy. They want a government that sets clear goals and delivers concrete results for all Canadians. We have done that.

The 2007 Speech from the Throne delivered on October 16 outlined how the government plans to build on the action already taken to implement the commitments to Canadians in the Advantage Canada plan. Reducing taxes for all Canadians and establishing the lowest overall corporate income tax and new business investment in the G-7 is part of this government's long term vision of creating a tax advantage for Canada.

With the almost $60 billion in tax reductions for individuals, families and businesses announced recently in the 2007 economic statement, we have reached that goal. That is $60 billion in relief over this and the next five years. Combined with previous relief provided by the current government, the total tax relief over the same period is almost $190 billion.

Mr. Joe Preston: Incredible.

Mr. Ted Menzies: That is incredible, Mr. Speaker. My hon. colleague is reminding me how incredible that is, $190 billion.

Furthermore, the government's plan to reduce the federal budget by $10 billion will bring total debt reduction since 2005-06 to more than $37 billion. That is over $1,500 for every man woman and child in Canada. Not only have we reduced the debt, but through our tax back guarantee, we have further reduced taxes for Canadians.

We are limiting the growth of spending in government and we are balancing the books. We are building modern and accessible world-class infrastructure that will help move Canadian goods to market, allowing our economy to grow and prosper. Our economic fundamentals are solid. We are experiencing the second longest period of economic expansion in Canadian history.

Business investment is expanding for the 12th consecutive year. Corporate profits are at an all time high in Canadian history. Along with that, overall inflation has remained low and stable. Our unemployment rate is the best it has been in 33 years. But we cannot rest on our laurels and we are not about to. At the same time we must be aware of the significant challenges ahead.

Our government is prepared to meet those challenges head-on. Let me illustrate how we are going to do that by outlining some of the key measures in Bill C-28. These measures are many, so today I will focus on the key provisions of the bill.

● (1655)

For too many low income Canadians, working can mean being financially worse off than staying on social assistance. In Advantage Canada, Canada's new government committed to work with the provinces and the territories to lower the so-called welfare wall by implementing a working income tax benefit to make work pay for low and modest income Canadians.

The working income tax benefit will provide up to $1,000 per year to low income working couples and single parents and up to $500 to single individuals. This benefit will help make work more rewarding and attractive for an estimated 1.2 million Canadians already in the workforce, thereby strengthening their incentive to stay employed.

In addition, it is estimated that a working income tax benefit will encourage close to 60,000 people to enter the workforce. Advantage Canada has also committed to foster academic excellence and choice.

Hon. members may recall that in budget 2006 the government fully exempted scholarship, fellowship and bursary income received by post-secondary students. The combination of these measures will help ensure that no Canadian is deterred from accepting and experiencing exceptional education opportunities. This measure will benefit about 1,000 Canadian children and their families.

This government also pledged to increase health spending for sport and physical activity. In budget 2006 we acted on that commitment by introducing the children's fitness tax credit, which became effective January 1 of this year. Parents can claim the credit for eligible fees up to $500 a year for each child participating in physical activity programs.

An important component of this initiative is that substantial additional support will be provided to children who are eligible for the disability tax credit. This recognizes the unique barriers these children face in becoming more active.

Hon. members may also recall that in budget 2006 we introduced the public transit tax credit. The proposals include measures that will help low income individuals who may not be able to afford the financial commitment of a monthly pass to take advantage of the credit.

I have spoken about tax measures in this bill for individuals and families. This government also understands the need to ensure Canada's corporate tax system is competitive. I can assure hon. members that we are delivering on that need. In fact, the economic statement announced that we will move Canada to the goal of establishing the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G-7 by 2011.

Capital taxes increase the cost of investing for Canadian businesses and reduce the competitiveness of Canada's tax system. Recognizing this, the government took action in its first budget, budget 2006, to eliminate the federal capital tax in January 2006. Bill C-28 proposes further action on this front by establishing a financial incentive to encourage provinces to eliminate their capital taxes as soon as possible.

Provinces can qualify for the incentive if they enact legislation after March 18, 2007 and before 2011 to eliminate their capital taxes over that time period. Provinces have an important role to play in improving Canada's business tax competitiveness. This incentive is important because it will encourage provinces to do the right thing and eliminate their capital taxes.

By reducing taxes for small businesses, it will help them succeed in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. However, small businesses also face other challenges, such as handling the paperwork associated with filing tax forms and remitting taxes. This can sometimes be an onerous task for small businesses. Bill C-28 proposes to implement measures from budget 2007 to ease the paperwork burden by reducing the frequency of tax remittances and filings for small businesses. These proposed changes will reduce the filing and remitting requirements of more than 350,000 small businesses by, on average, about one-third.

This government also recognizes the importance of small business owners, such as farmers, fishermen and fisher women. Indeed, these sectors are key drivers of Canada's economic success.

● (1700)

One of the ways that Canada's federal income tax system supports these entrepreneurs is through the lifetime capital gains exemption. Providing a tax exemption on capital gains realized on the disposition of qualified farm and fishing property, or qualified small business corporation shares, increases the rewards of investing in small business, farming and fishing. It also helps to ensure financial security for their retirement.

In recognition of the importance of these entrepreneurs to the Canadian economy and to help them better prepare for the future, budget 2007 proposes to increase the lifetime capital gains exemption to $750,000 from the existing $500,000. This is the first time it has been increased since 1988.

Canada's economy depends on the trucking sector to function effectively. It is all very well to manufacture quality Canadian goods, but if we cannot get those goods to market, where does that leave us?

Increasing demands for highly skilled truck drivers and a rapidly aging workforce are raising concerns that Canada may be facing a shortage of qualified truck drivers. In budget 2007, the government introduced a proposal that is aimed specifically at helping this important industry.

In order to provide better recognition of the significant meal expenses incurred by long haul truck drivers while on the road, budget 2007 proposes to increase to 80% from 50% the share of meal expenses that long haul truck drivers can deduct for tax purposes. To parallel the treatment on the income tax side, Bill C-28 proposes to amend the sales tax legislation by increasing the percentage of available input tax credits for GST/HST paid on meal expenses of long haul truck drivers.

As I have outlined here today, Bill C-28 contains numerous measures that will help businesses. There is one other measure that I would like to mention because it builds on a commitment made by this government to create child care spaces.

Hon. members will recall that in budget 2006 we introduced the universal child care plan, a strategy to provide support for families with children. In July 2006 parents began receiving support of $100 per month for every child under age six, to be used for the priorities identified by parents as they determine how best to balance home, work and other commitments.

By recognizing that parents often choose to use child care services, the government also committed to provide $250 million annually to support the creation of up to 25,000 new spaces, beginning in 2007-08. In budget 2007, and indeed in this bill today, we are further delivering on a commitment to help create child care spaces.

I would now like to outline the measures in Bill C-28 that were announced in the recent 2007 economic statement. These initiatives complement the proposals from budget 2007 that I have just outlined.

Canada's strong fiscal position provides us with an opportunity that few other countries have to make broad based tax reductions that will strengthen our economy, stimulate investment and create more and better jobs.

About three-quarters of the tax reductions will benefit individual Canadians and their families. This includes reducing the GST rate to 5% from 6%, effective January 1, 2008. Building on last year's GST reduction, the combined two percentage point reduction represents some $12 billion in annual savings for consumers. The total savings are significant. Let us look at some of these examples. A family purchasing a new $300,000 home will save $3,840 in GST. Spending $10,000 on home renovations will save a family $200 in GST. A family spending $30,000 on a new minivan will save $600 in GST.

It is important to point out that to benefit low and modest income families, the GST credit will remain at current levels, even though the GST is being reduced.

● (1705)

Bill C-28 also proposes to increase the amount all Canadians can earn, without paying federal income tax, to $9,600 in 2007 and 2008 and to $10,100 in 2009. Furthermore, the lowest personal income tax rate would be reduced to 15%, from 15.5%, effective January 1, 2007. Together, these will deliver relief on next spring's income tax returns and move some 385,000 people off the income tax rolls at least a year earlier than currently legislated.

For Canadian businesses, Bill C-28 proposes a bold new tax reduction imitative that will reduce the general federal corporate income tax rate to 15% by the year 2012, starting one percentage point reduction in 2008 beyond the already scheduled reductions. This move will give Canada the lowest overall tax rate in new business investment in the G-7 by 2011 and the lowest statutory tax rate in the G-7 by 2012.

Canadians want a government that sets clear goals and delivers concrete results. We have set those goals and with the measures in this bill, we are delivering those results.

Once passed, the measures in Bill C-28 from this year's budget, in combination with the tax reduction initiatives announced in the 2007 economic statement, will deliver to Canadians key components of the "Advantage Canada" plan that would help secure Canada's place as a clear leader in the world.

● (1710)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member across recites a number of statistics, which are an acknowledgement of the tremendous situation the government inherited.

I remind the member of the last time we had a Conservative government in Ottawa. When it was voted out, the annual deficit was $43 billion, unemployment was 11%, and interest rates were over 10%. I would like some explanation from someone as to what programs, what initiatives, what policies led to that mess.

However, when I talk to average Canadians in the manufacturing sector, they have either lost their job or they are scared to lose their job. Farming, especially hogs and beef, is not having tremendous times. Tourism is being hit by the Canadian dollar. Students, who have been on the Hill in the last couple of weeks, received nothing at all. City mayors have been here. The infrastructure package is about a third of what it was with the previous government. I listened to question period today and the answer we get to every question, on behalf of every Canadian, is tax cuts.

It is my submission that Canada is larger than this. We have a shared destiny. We need leadership, vision and a party that speaks for all Canadians, wherever they live, all regions and all sectors.

Is the member as disappointed as I and other Canadians are in the direction of the government?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I would love to answer that in one simple word. I thank the hon. member for the opportunity to suggest some of the things he has obviously failed to recognize.

The answer is I am quite excited about the bill we have put forward. I am quite excited about what this government has done for Canadians. I am almost as excited as many of my constituents were when this government took power.

I live in Alberta, in Conservative country. For many years ,y Conservative constituents have asked why the former Liberal government was allowed to slash and burn.

The hon. member talks about those 13 dark years we faced with the Liberal government. He talks about what we inherited from it. More important is the recovery that the previous Progressive Conservative prime minister left for the Liberals. He had fixed it. They inherited that.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only the Conservatives can claim repetitive tax cuts to bring it back to where it was when the Liberals were in power.

My question for the hon. member is very specific.

Last March, the Prime Minister, with fanfare, made an announcement about public transportation. He committed to help the city of Mississauga by investing $83 million to help build the new bus rapid transit. At the time he said that this was part of the 2006 budget.

We are now are talking about the implementation bill for the 2007 budget, and the city of Mississauga, to this minute, has yet to receive the 2006 promise. Will this be another broken promise, like the child care spaces promise, like help for immigrants to get foreign credentials, like the income trust promise or will the government finally send the city of Mississauga the funds promised so the people of Mississauga can have their bus rapid transit?

● (1715)

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that a member of the Liberal Party would stand and ask about supporting public transit. It seems to me that 13 years might have given the Liberals the opportunity to support public transit. I do not think there was anything done until the Prime Minister recognized what had not been done and the finance minister said, "Let's get it done". They budgeted the money to get that done.

There was a little help from local members of Parliament who encouraged their local councils and provinces. There are a lot of things the provinces can do to help initiate these projects.

I am very remiss. In answer to the previous question, I should remind the hon. member that we are investing $33 billion and through public-private partnerships, we hope to triple that by leveraging it to $100 billion. This is the largest infrastructure investment in Canada's history.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the public-private partnership aspect. The government is going down the road of creating another bureaucracy. It has created its own department for this, which is really the sell-off of Canada. In fact, it is getting so bad that it is trying to sell off things that are not even built yet. That is the new border crossing in the Windsor-Detroit region.

Why is the government moving for a P3 project there when we know it is going to be a new toll tax. The Citigroup study, which is a financial group, very much a right wing institution, did an analysis of private border crossings versus that of public. Historically, of the 22 border crossings, most have been public border crossings between Canada and the United States.

Why is the minister and the government moving toward a process that is going to be extra fees for commercial and transport users? This will turn the border into a business with a profit zone. We should reduce tolls and make it more efficient and accountable.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for reminding us of efficiencies and how we need to improve them. This is one thing the government has been very solid on, which is the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars. If we can involve private companies, the provinces and the municipalities, that is the best way to leverage taxpayer dollars to get things done for Canadians.

I know for the NDP "profit" is a dirty word, but fortunately our country is build on that. It is the opportunity for individuals to profit. If we can increase the opportunities and provide the services to Canadians, what is so bad about that idea?

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for his riveting speech. Whereas his delivery was excellent, the substance of the speech was even better.

The moral of this story is Canadians have had enough of a party and a government that was for everything for everybody, but accomplished nothing for nobody.

Now we have a government and a Prime Minister with a vision and leadership to accomplish some of the things he wanted to do, some of the things Canadians taxpayers have begged for us to do.

Could the member comment on several things such as the kept promise of reducing the GST to 5% and reducing personal income tax? However, one of the things I would like the hon. member to concentrate on is the reduction in corporate taxes, particularly for small businesses. People from my constituency and my area have begged for that for years.

● (1720)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. parliamentary secretary has about 25 seconds left.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, that is very unfortunate. I do not think I could get all the exciting news into five minutes, let alone those few short seconds.

We need to recognize the importance of getting the legislation passed and passed quickly. In answer to my hon. colleague's question, small and medium sized enterprises want to see their taxes reduced. Individuals want to see their taxes reduced. Businesses want to see their taxes reduced. We must get on with it. It is very important that we get this bill passed immediately.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-28, the budget implementation bill. I ask for unanimous consent to split my time today with my colleague, the member for Halton.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the member have the unanimous consent of the House to split his time with the member for Halton?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I have had several opportunities to speak on past Conservative budgets and every time I speak on them, the same problem comes up, and that is the lack of vision displayed by this government.

We know it takes months to prepare a federal budget. It involves many hours of research and consultation. However, what good is a budget if it contains no vision for the country? What good is it if it does not set out a plan for Canada's economic security?

As we debate the implementation of the Conservatives' latest budget, I will like to discuss some of the most problematic areas of this document.

[*Translation*]

First, I would like to talk about Canada's economic prosperity and our ability to be competitive in the future. These subjects are important to me, as a member of Parliament, because I believe that without a strong economy and prosperous citizens, our country cannot and will not be able to continue to sustain its generous social programs.

As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, my role is to ensure that Canadians are constantly informed and that we are advancing progressive ideas in order for this government to keep the economic prosperity of our country growing.

[*English*]

These various economic proposals are developed in different ways. The Standing Committee on Finance provides me with one of these opportunities, as we meet with hundreds of business leaders, non-profit organizations, environmental groups, artists, industry stakeholders and many others.

Over the last two years, overwhelmingly experts from these non-partisan meetings have told us that Canada's next major economic challenge will be to improve our productivity. Some of the economic solutions that have been suggested are to allow manufacturers the ability to write off assets in accordance with their useful lives. Other suggestions are to make all research and development credits earned refundable. However, cutting income taxes is at the top of almost everyone's list: first, corporate and second, personal income taxes.

However, no one advocates cutting the GST. Our leader, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, has been clear on this position. He is not advocating increasing the GST. His preference is to cut income taxes and has been on the record since last year. The only people who think cutting the GST will improve our economic prosperity are the Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance.

[*Translation*]

One may ask whether the Liberal Party has any credibility when it talks about the GST. The world has changed since 1993. The economic challenges are no longer the same. The world is changing faster and faster with increased trade. Technology has evolved and has transformed the way we do business.

Goods and services are exchanged more quickly and more efficiently than before. Fifteen years ago, income taxes were the main source of revenue for a number of countries.

[*English*]

The idea was to tax people and company profits. If the companies had physical infrastructures, governments knew that it was unlikely these companies would relocate, so they hit them harder with an endless barrage of taxes. They did not matter. Consumption taxes such as the GST were viewed as a deterrent to spending, so countries stayed away from that form of taxation. They needed spending to grow their economies internally.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

When the Liberals came to power in 1993, they inherited a deficit exceeding $40 billion. They faced a dilemma because the country needed the revenue from the GST and from personal and business income taxes. The Liberal government had to make tough decisions, and all Canadians had to make major sacrifices.

Once expenses were brought under control, the next step was tax reform. Would it not have been a popular and politically smart move to reduce the GST then? Perhaps, but that would not have been the best way to proceed, nor would it have been in the country's best interest.

Let us not forget that our dollar was weak then. So why would companies invest here? Even though they would have had opportunities to make a profit, they would have been taxed on those profits, and the competitive advantage would have been lost because of the weak dollar. That is why the finance minister at the time, the member for LaSalle—Émard, chose to reduce personal and business income tax instead of the GST.

[*English*]

Was that the right decision? The proof is in the pudding. Today, in 2007, Canada has enjoyed a decade of annual surpluses, high employment, has paid down over $75 billion in debt during that same period and has become the country with the lowest debt to GDP ratio in the G-8.

The government now needs a vision to attack the productivity agenda. Instead of formulating a solid plan to improve productivity, the Conservatives have spent most of their time in office bringing in legislation to make short term political gain, never looking beyond the next election.

For 12 years, the Liberal government helped set the vision for our economic prosperity.

What has the present Conservative government done in the last two years? Has it presented a vision of any type? Yes, it has supported a combative role in Afghanistan. It has increased spending, the bulk of which has gone to the military, and in two years the Conservative government has become the highest spending government in the history of Canada.

Economically, Canadians have seen no vision. The finance minister says that Canadians are overtaxed but in budget 2006 he increased personal income taxes at the lowest rate from 15% to 15.5%. During his economic update, the minister announced that he would lower the tax rate back to the original Liberal rate of 15% and he had the audacity to call it a tax cut.

With regard to this bill's corporate income tax cuts, they merely match the ones proposed by the Liberal government in 2005. These cuts have been advocated by our party's leader, the member of Parliament for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville during the last year.

[*Translation*]

Furthermore, last year, the Minister of Finance decided to tax income trusts despite his campaign promise not to do so. Because of this, Canadians lost between $25 billion and $30 billion overnight.

A lot of Canadians were affected by that broken promise, but many had no idea what was going on because most of the losses were in pension funds. Individuals can ask the people in charge of their pension funds or their brokers to explain the situation.

The energy and resource sectors are looking for ways to finance expansion. Just a few months ago, our weak dollar encouraged foreign investors to buy up Canadian income trusts at fire sale prices.

[*English*]

We can take the example set by Nordic countries where social spending in these countries has always been a priority and now income taxes are being lowered to continue to attract foreign investors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member will have two minutes left to conclude his remarks.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADA EVIDENCE ACT

The House resumed from November 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-426, An Act to amend the Canada Evidence Act (protection of journalistic sources and search warrants), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-426, under private members' business.

Call in the members.

● (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 16)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Arthur
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Barbot
Barnes	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bigras	Black
Blais	Bonsant
Boshcoff	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brown (Oakville)
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe

Eyking
Faille
Freeman
Fry
Gagnon
Gaudet
Godfrey
Godin
Goodale
Gravel
Guarnieri
Guay
Guimond
Holland
Hubbard
Ignatieff
Jennings
Julian
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Kotto
Laforest
Laframboise
Lalonde
Lavallée
Layton
LeBlanc
Lee
Lemay
Lessard
Lévesque
Lussier
MacAulay
Malhi
Malo
Maloney
Marleau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse
Mathyssen
Matthews
McDonough
McGuinty
McTeague
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna
Mourani
Mulcair
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Nash
Neville
Ouellet
Pacetti
Paquette
Patry
Pearson
Perron
Picard
Plamondon
Priddy
Proulx
Ratansi
Redman
Regan
Robillard
Rota
Roy
Russell
Savage
Savoie
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Sgro
Siksay
Silva
Simard
St-Cyr
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Steckle
Szabo
Telegdi
Temelkovski
Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Turner
Valley
Vincent
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj
Zed– — 147

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allen
Allison
Anders
Anderson
Baird
Batters
Benoit
Bernier
Bezan
Blackburn
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie
Casson
Chong
Comuzzi
Cummins
Davidson
Day
Del Mastro
Devolin
Doyle
Dykstra
Emerson
Epp
Fast
Finley
Fitzpatrick
Flaherty
Fletcher
Galipeau
Gallant
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Grewal
Guergis
Hanger
Harris
Harvey
Hawn
Hearn
Hiebert
Hill
Hinton
Jaffer
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake
Lauzon
Lebel
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunn
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie
Mayes
Menzies
Merrifield
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
Norlock
O'Connor
Obhrai
Oda
Pallister
Paradis
Petit
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Scheer
Schellenberger
Shipley
Skelton
Smith
Solberg
Sorenson
Stanton
Storseth
Strahl
Sweet
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Van Loan
Vellacott
Verner
Wallace
Warawa
Warkentin
Watson
Williams
Yelich– — 117

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from November 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-357, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (Employment Insurance Account and premium rate setting) and another Act in consequence, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-357 under private members' business.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 17)

YEAS

Members

André
Angus
Asselin
Atamanenko
Bachand
Barbot
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance
Bigras
Black
Blais
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brunelle
Cardin
Carrier
Charlton
Chow
Christopherson
Comartin
Crête

Crowder
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Faille
Gagnon
Godin
Guay
Julian
Laforest
Lalonde
Layton
Lessard
Lussier
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McDonough
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mulcair
Nash
Paquette
Picard
Priddy
Savoie
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Vincent– — 75

Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Duceppe
Freeman
Gaudet
Gravel
Guimond
Kotto
Laframboise
Lavallée
Lemay
Lévesque
Malo
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathyssen
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Mourani
Nadeau
Ouellet
Perron
Plamondon
Roy
Siksay
St-Hilaire
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Anders
Arthur
Bains
Barnes
Bell (North Vancouver)
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Blackburn
Boshcoff
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Chong
Comuzzi
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Devolin
Dhalla
Dryden
Emerson
Eyking
Finley
Flaherty
Fry
Gallant
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Guergis
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jaffer
Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lee
Lukiwski
Lunney

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison
Anderson
Bagnell
Baird
Batters
Bennett
Bernier
Bezan
Blaney
Boucher
Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Chan
Coderre
Cotler
Cuzner
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dhaliwal
Doyle
Dykstra
Epp
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Galipeau
Godfrey
Goodale
Gourde
Guarnieri
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Ignatieff
Jean
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lemieux
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Marleau
Matthews
McGuinty
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Pacetti
Paradis
Pearson
Poilievre
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Robillard
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Sgro
Silva
Skelton
Solberg
St. Denis
Steckle
Strahl
Szabo
Temelkovski
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj
Zed– — 189

MacKenzie
Maloney
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mayes
McTeague
Merrifield
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pallister
Patry
Petit
Preston
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Scheer
Scott
Shipley
Simard
Smith
Sorenson
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Telegdi
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Tonks
Turner
Valley
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Williams
Yelich

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[*English*]

PHTHALATE CONTROL ACT

The House resumed from November 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-307, An Act respecting bis(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate, benzyl butyl phthalate and dibutyl phthalate, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-307 under private members' business.

● (1810)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations between all the parties and I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to pass the motion for Bill C-307 unanimously.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the request of the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

The House resumed from November 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (residency requirement), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-362 under private members' business.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, you would find acceptance in the House to pass Bill C-362 at second reading on division.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the request of the hon. government whip that this motion be passed on division. Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from November 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-378, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and the Food and Drug Regulations (drug export restrictions), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-378, under private members' business.

● (1820)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 18)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra
Asselin
Bagnell
Barbot
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett
Bigras
Bonsant
Bouchard
Brunelle
Cardin
Chan
Cotler
Cuzner
André
Bachand
Bains
Batters
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Blais
Boshcoff
Bourgeois
Byrne
Carrier
Coderre
Crête
D'Amours
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dhalla
Duceppe
Faille
Fry
Gaudet
Gravel
Guay
Holland
Jennings
Kadis
Kotto
Laframboise
Lavallée
Lee
Lessard
Lussier
Malhi
Maloney
Matthews
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Pacetti
Patry
Perron
Plamondon
Ratansi
Regan
Roy
Savage
Scott
Siksay
St-Cyr
St. Denis
Szabo
Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Tonks
Turner
Vincent
Wrzesnewskyj
Demers
Dhaliwal
Dryden
Eyking
Freeman
Gagnon
Godfrey
Guarnieri
Guimond
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Laforest
Lalonde
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
MacAulay
Malo
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McGuinty
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Ouellet
Paquette
Pearson
Picard
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
St-Hilaire
Steckle
Telegdi
Thi Lac
Valley
Wilfert
Zed– — 116

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anderson
Arthur
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Blackburn
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Charlton
Chow
Comartin
Crowder
Cummins
Davies
Del Mastro
Dewar
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Godin
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Ablonczy
Allen
Anders
Angus
Atamanenko
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bernier
Black
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Comuzzi
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davidson
Day
Devolin
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton

Hubbard	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Layton	Lebel
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathyssen
Mayes	McDonough
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mulcair
Nash	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Preston	Priddy
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Savoie	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Simard	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich– — 143	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being 6:20 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There is a ruling by the Chair relevant to Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions). There are two motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-253. Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the Table. I will now propose Motions Nos. 1 and 2 to the House.

● (1825)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-253, in Clause 2, be amended by deleting lines 10 to 24 on page 1.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-253, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing lines 8 and 9 on page 2 with the following:

"(b) the RESP lifetime limit minus the total of all contributions made by the taxpayer into a registered education savings plan in previous taxation years."

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today. If I may, I will take the opportunity to congratulate you on what I believe is a very well deserved citation by all your colleagues in the House as the most honourable of our members. I realize that you have said you will be leaving at some stage, but clearly you are just coming into your own stride and I suggest that you may want to reconsider that position.

Bill C-253, now at report stage, is an act to amend the Income Tax Act in relation to the deductibility of RESP contributions by the contributor.

As colleagues know, I have proposed two amendments to this bill as a result of changes in the RESP regime created by the 2007 budget. People who are watching and in fact listening will know that there were changes made subsequent to changes in the RESP regime, as well as with respect to the last budget.

I will discuss these changes and the necessity of my amendments in a moment, but I note that registered education savings plans allow taxpayers to accumulate funds for their children to use toward the high costs often associated with obtaining post-secondary education.

Technically, an RESP is a contract between an individual, the subscriber, and a person or organization, the promoter. I should point out that the subscriber or the person acting for the subscriber generally makes contributions to an RESP, and the contributions, as we know, earn an income. The subscriber names one or more beneficiaries, one's child or children who are eventually going to attend post-secondary institutions, and agrees to make these contributions ultimately for them.

These contracts are then registered with the Canada Revenue Agency. From a tax perspective, which should be known, contributions made to an RESP are not deductible by the subscriber. Further, leftover funds in an RESP, after amounts are paid to a beneficiary, that are returned to the subscriber are not included in the subscriber's taxable income. Instead, contributions that are paid to a beneficiary of an RESP become taxable income of the beneficiary.

Before the 2007 budget, subscribers were limited in both the annual and the lifetime amounts they could contribute to an RESP. I should point out that after the 2007 budget implementation act, Bill C-52, was passed in the first session of this Parliament, the RESP annual limit was removed and only the RESP lifetime limit remained.

What that meant was the occasion to necessitate an amendment, and an amendment to Bill C-253 put forward by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance created a deduction for the subscriber, the contributor, for the taxable income for contributions made to an RESP.

This deduction, however, was limited to the RESP annual limit as defined in the former provisions of the Income Tax Act and prior to the passage of the budget in 2007.

Finally, Bill C-253 ensured that leftover funds in an RESP that are returned to the subscribers become taxable income of the subscribers themselves. The amendments I have proposed simply remove the proposed provisions in the bill that contain a reference to the RESP annual limit.

Bill C-253 nonetheless retains the tax deduction for contributions made to an RESP, but this annual deduction amount is now limited by the RESP lifetime limit, rather than the RESP annual limit.

That annual limit, for the benefit of all my colleagues here, will remain, and under the pre-RESP regime it was certainly there, at $50,000. A provision, paragraph 2(4)(2.01)(b), is also added for accounting purposes to ensure that contributions made in previous years are taken into account in determining the annual contribution deduction so that the RESP lifetime limit is not exceeded.

Members will know that in my last speech on Bill C-253 I made it abundantly clear that existing provisions of the Income Tax Act as concerns RESPs provide harsh penalties for anyone who tries to use an RESP as a tax shelter. Let us be clear on that. One cannot use this as an RESP shelter, much in the same way that the guidelines exist with respect to RRSPs.

● (1830)

While I will not rehash the details as I have only a limited amount of time, I must point out and will again repeat that should a beneficiary of an RESP, a child, not attend a post-secondary institution, in this case the funds accumulated in that RESP account are returned to the contributor and the moneys earned beyond the actual contributions made are indeed taxed. They are taxed significantly.

The tax rate, so everyone will know, would be 20% over and above the regular tax paid on the income. Like many other people, I feel that rate more than adequately deters anyone from using the RESP as some scheme or tax shelter. The lifetime limit of $50,000, in addition to the 20% penalty, further detracts from the usage of an RESP as a vehicle to avoid taxes.

I also mentioned in my previous remarks the soaring costs of post-secondary education in Canada. I did put a great deal of emphasis on that then and it clearly has not changed. By some estimates, there is now a cost of over $100,000 by the year 2010 for a four-year degree program.

That is a lot of money. I cannot see how families are going to be able to make ends meet without having some kind of opportunity, one that does not take away from the public treasury but in fact contributes to the development of our young by providing them access to post-secondary education in a way that uses the existing system but builds and improves on it.

There is also the issue of the fact the RESP is not being used by a majority of Canadian families to offset the rising cost of post-secondary education. I should point out, as all of this has been taking place in the past, that we have seen a number of examples where Canadians have not had the benefit or the opportunity of ensuring their positions and their ability to become more meaningful members of society in terms of adequate attention to education. It has not been made available, as we can certainly see by the fact that many have not had an opportunity to provide the savings.

While a large number of savings opportunities exist for parents and families, they are always, frankly, after-tax opportunities. Therefore, I am looking to Parliament to look much deeper, to use an existing system that I believe works for all Canadians. I believe we need a system so that Canada is able to meet the competitive edge, as so many are pointing out we will need to do in order to provide a continuous education and a reformed idea in terms of our education system. We need to allow young people and people throughout the course of their lives to make the kinds of transitions that I think are very much a necessity in terms of building a modern, adaptable and flexible society.

In the two minutes I have left, I would also like to point out that a few other areas have come to our attention very recently. One is with respect to the ability of many of our universities to continue to attract high calibre and state of the art types of equipment and technologies and to bring in professors and staff who will allow our young people to benefit at our universities and at any post-secondary level of education and to get the very best. To do that, I note, we are living in an increasingly competitive international market. It can hardly be blamed on our universities, colleges or polytechnical schools if they do not have the ability to bring in these people without higher tuition fees.

[*Translation*]

The reality is that post-secondary education is not accessible to a vast majority of our students. For a good many, it is a challenge that they will never be able to take on.

I was speaking earlier with a few members of this House who are concerned about this limit. With the amendments I am proposing here today, which affect the annual limit for contributions, I wanted to do everything I could. In the end, the clerks informed me that it would be impossible for me as a backbencher, through a private member's bill, to amend a budget that was adopted by a vast majority of members. Thus, I cannot repeal the legislation to change the limit, which is currently set at $50,000. However, the principle remains.

Access to higher education is limited to some 20% of students. That number should be 100%. This bill proposes ways to improve the system to ensure that people can contribute to their RESP. I look forward to hearing other members' comments.

● (1835)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has always spoken very positively about the need for education, the need for students in Canada to have access to good education and, in our discussions in the foreign affairs and international development committee, the need to incent young students coming from other parts of the world to get their education in Canada.

However, we have some very grave concerns with Bill C-253, which initially contemplated that the deduction would be limited to an RESP annual contribution limit of $5,000, indexed after 2006. However, budget 2007 eliminated the RESP annual contribution limit and raised the lifetime contribution limit to $50,000 from $42,000.

Amendments to the Income Tax Act to implement these changes were made in Bill C-52, which was assented to in June 2007, to which the hon. member has alluded.

These changes were extremely well received. Indeed , Peter Lewis, chair of the Registered Education Savings Plan Dealers Association of Canada, called the changes "a very positive leap forward for Canadian families". He went on to say:

> These improvements will benefit all Canadian families, and provide even greater incentive to invest in their children's college or university education. And that's good for everyone.
>
> We sincerely commend [the] Finance Minister...for recognizing the value and importance of encouraging families to save for post-secondary education.

The proposed amendments adjust the bill to reflect the elimination of the RESP annual contribution limit. The effect of the proposed amendments would be to allow a taxpayer to claim a deduction for RESP contributions of up to $50,000. The amount of the deduction would be reduced by the total RESP contributions made by the taxpayer in previous years.

As we have stated in analysis provided previously, the behavioural impact is uncertain. If the RESP contributions were to increase by 20%, the total fiscal cost of Bill C-253 would be $765 million per year, including a CESG cost increase of $85 million per year.

The proposed amendments, if adopted, would not allow RESP contributors any more leeway in allowing up to an annual $50,000 deduction for their contributions.

While it is uncertain how much this would exactly increase total RESP contributions and the specific long term costs of Bill C-253, it is likely the proposed changes could again increase the cost of the deduction in the early years following implementation.

Therefore, we will not be supporting Bill C-253.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the bill before us here today. This bill was examined in committee and my colleague from the Liberal Party who introduced the bill did a good job summarizing our discussions and the current situation.

I would like to give a bit of background on the evolution of this bill, which basically aims to establish deductions from taxable income for any contributions made to a registered education savings plan, in order to help our young people and our children meet their needs when they are studying. For what it is worth, it is not only a matter of paying tuition fees, but also of paying our students' living expenses. These young people often have to leave the family home, especially if they live in areas that do not have a university. Students must then rent an apartment and have a car, or some means of getting around. We must have measures in place to support them.

To encourage this type of investment in our youth, we want to create a system where contributions would be tax deductible. Currently, the money that is invested in a registered education savings plan grows tax free. In other words, income generated from this investment is not taxable, but the investment is not tax deductible. Of course, the interest is taxed later, when the student withdraws money from the fund.

As far as the progress of the bill is concerned, it was first introduced in this form and in a slightly different form where there was a general credit, equivalent to the same ceiling as the registered retirement savings plan, or 18% of income up to a maximum of $18,000. The Bloc Québécois had a problem with that because we felt this was really a disproportionate tax incentive that essentially benefited the wealthy. When a beneficiary withdraws money from their RRSP, that person pays the tax. An RRSP, is used to defer income tax until a later time. The taxes saved when a person invests in the RRSP are paid at the end, when they withdraw the money for retirement.

This is not the case for a registered education savings plan, or RESP, since we can save taxes and it is the beneficiary, a student, who receives the money and will have to pay taxes. Obviously, since students are in school, for the most part, they will not pay taxes.

I will give a concrete example based on the current state of things with the amendments proposed by the Liberals. For example, in a given year, a taxpayer could earn $150,000 and contribute $50,000 to an RESP. Therefore, he would have a tax refund of $14,500. Then, in the next five years, his child could withdraw $10,000 from that RESP without paying taxes on the money withdrawn. Ultimately, we would have given $14,500 to the rich.

To avoid that, it was proposed in committee to set the yearly maximum at $4,000 or $5,000, adjusted for inflation. Proposals were made, but they no longer work, since they referred to a section in the legislation that, in the meantime—as my colleague explained—has been amended by the ways and means motion on the budget.

● (1840)

At that point, the law became ineffective.

As such, we cannot support this bill in its current form. That is why, at the end of my presentation, I will propose an amendment to the bill to make it acceptable to all.

I am sure that the sponsor of the bill will support this amendment, which limits the amount that a person can contribute in a given year so that the person is obliged to contribute over time. This will benefit the middle class, not just the rich.

The Conservatives will also be able to support this amendment to the amendment because it will limit the cost of the measure by preventing taxpayers from claiming a $50,000 tax credit all at once, for example.

The NDP is also concerned about education. Like the Bloc Québécois, the NDP does not want to bring in tax breaks that will benefit only the rich, not the middle class, so it will surely support my amendment to the amendment.

The committee did a lot of work on this. The vagaries of procedure often yield unexpected results. Nevertheless, I am sure that we can come up with a good version of this bill. The amendment I wish to propose would limit the maximum yearly contribution, or at least the maximum yearly tax deduction, to $5,000, which is better than letting the credit reach the lifetime deduction limit, as set out in the present bill. The Bloc Québécois will not support the bill without this amendment. I am sure that this condition will enable all parties to support this bill.

Consequently, seconded by the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, I move:

> That Motion No. 2 be amended by adding after the word "years" the following: ", to a maximum of $5,000."

● (1845)

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment to be in order.

The debate is on the amendment to the amendment.

[*English*]

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to support Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions). I would like to commend my hon. colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East for his efforts in promoting this bill and for his dedication to expanding access to post-secondary education in Canada.

This issue is of particular importance to the many young families in my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton. In these families I see much joy, laughter and hope, but at the same time I see parents who are concerned for the future. They worry that the rising cost of post-secondary education will hurt their children's ability to get the training they need to succeed in the increasingly competitive global economy.

Every parent wants what is best for their children. However, the day to day costs of running a household and raising a family all too often push to the back burner the task of planning for the future. The purpose of this legislation is to make payments into registered education savings plans tax deductible in order to give Canadians an increased incentive to invest their hard-earned money in their children's post-secondary education. By doing so, the process of education planning will be made easier for Canadian families.

The current trend of sharply rising tuition fees has made planning for education after high school more important than ever before. According to the most recent numbers from Statistics Canada, the average cost of tuition at Canadian universities rose by almost 400% between 1988 and 2007. Residence, textbooks and other fees are also going up, adding to the undue financial stress felt by post-secondary students and their families. The increase in fees over the past 20 years has been far beyond the rate of inflation and is part of a trend that seems likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations estimates that a four year degree and associated fees will cost approximately $77,000 for students commencing their studies in 2010. By 2020, the same degree will cost over $130,000. Incredibly, these are only the estimated costs for undergraduate programs, not for professional and graduate degrees. Students who decide to pursue a career in medicine, dentistry or law can count on paying even more in order to obtain their qualifications.

Current government grant and scholarship programs only go part of the way toward helping students cover the extraordinary cost of education after high school. Although there are a number of federal and provincial programs intended to counteract the increasing cost of post-secondary education, not all students who need help qualify for government financial assistance. Many young people are unable to attend a post-secondary institution, not because they are unwilling or academically unable, but because they are essentially forgotten under the current student assistance regime.

Under the present student aid system, there exists a middle income gap. In this gap are families with incomes high enough that their children do not qualify for need based grants and loans but not high enough to pay for their children to attend university. The middle income gap is a considerable barrier to post-secondary education for many students and could be offset by encouraging increased investment in RESPs.

● (1850)

Even for those who qualify for financial assistance, loans can only be considered a stop-gap measure. While federal and provincial student loans help some families cope in the short term with the rising cost of education, this increased reliance on loans as a funding mechanism is leading to an alarming level of student debt.

Statistics Canada reports that between 1999 and 2005 the amount of student debt held by Canadians rose by 15.8%. In the same period, the overall amount of debt held by individuals and families in Canada increased by an astonishing 47.5%.

Shouldering such a large amount of debt is stressful not only for individual families but also for the economy as a whole. In a society with more debt than any that came before it, parents must be given the chance to plan for the future in order to avoid saddling students with tens of thousands of dollars of debt before they even enter the workforce. Enabling young people beginning their careers and starting families to embark on their adult lives with a lower amount of debt is a worthwhile goal, one this bill can help to achieve.

Of course, care must be taken so that RESPs do not become attractive to dishonest individuals looking for an easy tax shelter. Fortunately, even with the changes proposed in the bill, adequate regulations are in place to discourage individuals from abusing the RESP system.

Education assistance payments can only be paid out in the event that the beneficiary is enrolled in a qualified program at a post-secondary institution, is unable to enrol in a post-secondary program due to medical incapacitation, or is deceased. Furthermore, in the event that the beneficiary does not attend a post-secondary institution and the subscriber withdraws accumulated income payments, a 20% penalty is levied in addition to the usual tax payable on the income. Finally, although the monthly limit on contributions has been removed, the lifetime contribution limit of $50,000 ensures that RESPs are not attractive to individuals simply looking for a tax deferral vehicle.

This bill is not intended to completely solve the problem of access to post-secondary education. Continual efforts must also be made to expand need and merit based initiatives such as the millennium scholarship program, and to increase access to government student loans. But for families who would otherwise find it difficult to commit to minimum monthly RESP contributions, this bill would make it easier to invest in their children's future.

By raising the rate of participation in RESPs, more Canadians will be able to afford the education they need for the jobs of today and the future. Registered retirement savings plans use similar tax incentives to encourage Canadians to plan for life after work. It is time to give the same advantage to families planning their children's education.

● (1855)

Although the government seems determined to provide the wrong kind of tax incentives for Canada's future, I hope my colleagues across the floor will join me in supporting this legislation. We have before us an opportunity to empower ordinary families. By supporting this bill, Parliament can help Canadians secure a bright and prosperous future for their sons and daughters and for the country as a whole.

In my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton, there are many new immigrants who cannot afford to send their children to university. If we pass this bill, all people will be pleased and at least they will have an opportunity for their children to attend university in the future.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this issue and support my colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East with whom I have served on the industry committee for a number of years. I applaud him for this bill. I personally support the bill.

It does not completely address the current post-secondary education affordability situation for our youth, but it is one tool that could be effective in allowing more contributions and better planning for families. That is important.

In the riding of Windsor West we have the St. Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology which has been very successful, not only in terms of training young people, but also in making sure they have the right tools to succeed in employment. We also have the University of Windsor which is well known for its law programs, as well as other different types of institutions which have been successful in the past years. However, successive governments have attacked young people far too much by downloading the cost of education onto the backs of young people. The recent budget was another example of that.

Until there is a real fix, Bill C-253 would at least provide an opportunity for people to plan to save in order to gain access to education. The New Democratic Party has been calling for an overhaul of the education system. That is important. This country has lagged behind the developed world and other G-8 nations in providing affordable education. In fact it is one of the biggest scandals that has happened.

Our youth are being fettered by the tax cuts and benefits that have been given to other people. Training has been put entirely on the backs of our youth. There are record tax cuts for the oil and gas industry and the banks. At the same time students are expected to pick up the full cost to get their training and degrees, which do not pay a wage at the end of the day and they have to pay off their loans. That is unacceptable.

Government members should be embarrassed and ashamed for their obstruction attempts on this bill. It has gone through several machinations at committee. I was a participant at one of those committee meetings and I saw that the government members were trying to do anything they could to unplug any type of benefit.

It is important to note that we are passing on a legacy of debt and a problem that relates to our overall productivity in our society. Students come out of university and college having worked hard, having done everything they could to get the grades necessary to be competitive. They made a choice about which institution they wanted to go to. They made a financial commitment and they come out of the post-secondary institution literally with mortgages that they have to pay off. It is unacceptable. On top of that, the current government and the past one let the creditors become predators. Students are paying high interest rates. It is unacceptable.

We can look toward other nations that have increased their productivity by lowering the cost of post-secondary education. That is one of the most effective things we could do to make sure we have a trained society.

We hear all the rhetoric from the current government and the previous government about a new emerging economy but they will not do anything to improve the accessibility to the necessary training. We need to help put the skills into the hands of our young citizens. They are the future providers of our country which continues to need the development to sustain our quality of life.

This bill is an opportunity to do something. It is important to note that besides the government's trying to stop this bill from going forward, the Conservatives were the ones who stole half a billion dollars from students in the student debt program which we negotiated with the Liberals in a former deal, because the Liberals never passed the legislation and procedures to get the half a billion dollars to the students. The Conservatives took that debt money, and they still owe $500 million to students across this country to lower their debt. The Conservatives took that from them.

Not only have the Conservatives not provided the proper programs or structure related to having affordable education and the payment of it after that, they actually took money away from students. They took it away from them and put it toward other priorities such as corporate tax cuts, or whatever those priorities might be, and at the same time we are witnessing our young people treading water in our education system.

● (1900)

What does it mean? From experience, I remember the first interview I had when I was first elected in 2002. I was asked what I would do with all the money I would be making as an MP. I said that the first thing my wife and I would do is pay off our student loans, and that is what happened. My wife and I had worked every single year. I had actually worked since age 9. We worked all the way through university. My wife has a couple of post-secondary degrees. However, we still had to borrow some money to get by and to afford our education.

That is the normal experience and that is what is happening right now. Students are misunderstood and the government does not even get it. Those people who actually have to pay for their education are working. They are working one and two jobs. They work not just during the summer, but during the year. They are learning and providing for themselves, and trying to reduce their debt burden for the future.

The Conservatives have instituted and helped provide the lightest coverage of the last 10 years of a system that has downloaded onto the backs of young people an awful burden with significant social consequences. As a result people come out of school with a larger debt load. It is okay for students to have to borrow, but not the government. They actually have to pay the interest on their debt.

People in my riding and across the country with this debt burden are paying the interest on their loans, which is being compounded. At the same time, they cannot buy a home. They cannot buy a new car. They cannot start the lifestyle they want at this point in time because they are paying off that debt. It is unnecessary.

We have a challenge in this day and age. There has been a lot of debate in the House of Commons over the last couple of years about pensions. I know right now that the people I serve in my community have a lot harder time getting a job with a pension.

When individuals begin their education, they have to go to school longer to get higher qualifications, which not only takes a longer period of time, but costs more money. These people are finishing later in life. They are delaying starting a family. They are delaying purchasing their first home and so forth, and they do not have the money to invest in their own retirement because they are paying off all that debt. The government is passing on that burden to them and it is doing it with no sense of accountability. That bothers me.

Here in this bill there is a modest attempt to deal with the situation, to provide some tools to those who can actually afford it and who will be successful for themselves and their families. That is why it should be supported.

I cannot understand for the life of me why the government does not understand that right now. It does not understand the value of education. It does not understand the value of having people come through an educational stream and not having a huge debt burden after that.

In the current economic situation, there is a good chance people will require more training. More people now go back to school for training, whether it be college or university, after they have a degree than ever before. They are picking up new skills. They are picking up new types of knowledge. That is important for our productivity and how we will be measured against our competitors across the globe.

We should be encouraging that. An educated civil society that is able to respond to the new economic challenges is an important feature, but it has to be coupled with being affordable to those individuals.

Instead, we have other priorities. Earlier this evening, the Conservatives talked about wanting to create a new bureaucracy for public-private partnerships. They will shovel $25 million into a new bureaucracy so they can sell off Canada as it currently exists, and future projects. It is done straight from ideology. They could reverse those resources and put them toward education. They could put them toward a whole series of other things. They are more concerned with those things. and that is troubling.

When we look at the OECD nations and what they are doing, they are being very successful at making sure that students and people in their society are receiving good training and good skills. They are well educated and they are productive. It is not just when they are young, but they can return to those institutions like mine, St. Clair College and the University of Windsor, and pick up additional competitive skills and get back out into the labour force and make Canada successful.

Why the government does not understand that it is a value-added commodity for our productivity that will allow us to compete is beyond me. The Conservatives would rather put the burden on the shoulders of a few people and expect them to get by. That is unacceptable.

I would encourage members to support the bill because once again, it is at least something to fight back with on this issue. Once again, we cannot allow the government to continually download this burden of debt on to individuals and their communities.

● (1905)

It is a cycle of failure to allow post-secondary education costs to continually escalate through the ceiling and, at the same time, not provide students with the resources to be successful.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add my comments to this very important debate on education and the tools that are required by families to make sure that their children have the financial requirements needed to receive a post-secondary education.

This bill, Bill C-253, that has been put forward by my hon. colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East is a very important piece of legislation. It is, I think, worthy of this House's attention. Also, we hope that we will have it go forward, both to committee and then to the Senate.

Bill C-253 is an act to amend the Income Tax Act respecting the deductibility of registered education savings plans, RESPs, contributions.

There is nothing more important than the future prosperity of Canada's youth and having a highly educated workforce. All of us in this House, on a number of occasions, have spoken of the importance of higher education and the importance of education for our young people. It is unfortunate that so many of our young people are getting themselves into debt.

I was looking at some statistics that I would like to share with this House. The average undergraduate tuition fee has almost doubled, from $2,023 in 1993-94, to $4,025 in 2003-04. An increase in tuition fees is partly responsible for an increase in student debt.

It is a terrible shame that in a country like Canada where we have incredible wealth and resources that so many young people are in debt.

I have always compared Canada as sort of in the middle between Europe and the U.S. Many of the western European countries have almost free education. It is not the case of course for all of them because some of them do have high fees for their education. However, overall Canada is the middle ground between the European system and the American system, which is very costly.

I was speaking to a colleague of mine at Oxford, where I am taking a masters degree in international law. She told me that tuition fees for her children would be about $200,000 at the end of four years. It is an incredible amount of money to pay for one child to go to school and if a person has four children, which she does, it is an enormous burden. She said she will be working until she dies in order to help her kids pay for the outrageous tuition fees.

We are not in that situation in Canada, and I thank God for that, but we are not quite like the European model, which has a very generous education system which allows their young people to attend higher levels of education.

We have to do more as a government, as a society, as legislators, to make sure that our young people are getting the tools, the resources they need, for higher education and to make sure that it is affordable higher education as well.

Because of the soaring costs of education, more Canadians are unable to attend institutions of higher learning and that is deeply concerning, especially in a society like ours which requires highly trained individuals to meet the demands of the labour force.

It is projected that by 2010 a four-year degree program could cost in excess of $100,000. That is certainly getting more closer to the American model and that is very worrisome because that American model is one that we do not want to emulate. It is extremely costly and it is a huge burden to families for their children's education. They have many burdens and obstacles in the U.S., from health care to education and many other issues.

● (1910)

We cherish our friendship with our American neighbours, but there are many things they can learn from us, and on this aspect they can certainly learn a great deal.

I commend my hon. colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East for putting forward this important and valuable private member's bill to hopefully address some of these concerns. We realize that it is impossible to have all these concerns and issues addressed. We also need our provincial partners assisting us.

All of us know that Canada is one of the few members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that does not have a federal minister of education. Most countries around the world, certainly most western democracies, have a federal minister of education.

We do not have a federal minister of education because that responsibility rests in provincial hands and that is, of course, a relic of our historical past, a relic of our Constitution, which put the issue of education strictly in provincial hands. We can have arguments about whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, but at that time it was needed to probably deal with issues both linguistic and religious.

In today's society one would wonder if there should not be some type of minister at the federal level, if not a minister of education than at least somebody who would have authority and responsibility for post-secondary education. We need some coordinated efforts. We need a minister who could, in fact, deal with provincial members and his or her counterparts to address the ever rising costs of tuition in this country.

All of us in the House are deeply concerned, but we need a coordinated effort. This legislation would be one piece of the pie, a tool we could say, that would go a long way toward addressing the concerns that we have. Clearly, it is not enough. A lot more has to be done.

Rising student debt is deeply troubling. I am the official opposition's critic for the Treasury Board and I do not know if it was a pleasure, or a burden, to look through the estimates. It was quite tedious work. Going through the estimates, I noticed that the government is spending huge sums of money, in fact millions of dollars, to go after students for not paying their loans. We realize that students have to pay their loans, but it seems a bit ludicrous to spend millions of dollars when the government has not ceded to students across this country.

The millennium scholarship fund was brought in by the previous Liberal government under the leadership of the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien. The prime minister at that time envisioned this as a great opportunity for many young people, especially those who are disadvantaged in our society, to receive this type of funding in order to assist them to attend post-secondary education.

Millions of dollars have gone into my riding of Davenport for students' post-secondary education through the millennium scholarship. I am very pleased that scholarship was put into place. I am hoping that the government will see the benefits of this scholarship program and renew it because it does need to be renewed.

Students across this country are calling for the government to renew this important fund that has helped thousands of students across this country to deal with some of the financial burden facing them in post-secondary education.

Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions) is an important piece of legislation that the House should support. I congratulate my hon. colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East for his efforts on behalf of students across this country. I hope this will pass so that future generations can benefit from this important piece of legislation.

● (1915)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague for Pickering—Scarborough East for bringing forward this bill.

The whole area of post-secondary education is one that should concern all Canadians when we look at the situation we are faced with in this country, with a looming skills shortage in many areas. We have to look at the issue of productivity and the need for our country to remain competitive in the future as large numbers of Canadians get older. It is what we call the "grey wave" as the baby boomers age.

This creates a huge problem for our society. The fact is that people are going to be retiring at a much faster rate than they are coming into the workforce. It is partly a result, of course, of our low birthrate in Canada. We are not reproducing ourselves, so to speak.

Mr. Ted Menzies: If we could go home, we would.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, some of my hon. colleagues across the way seem to be anxious. They seem to be interested in this concept, but I will not go any farther in that direction. I think I will stick to the topic at hand, that of youth and the economy and the clear importance of investing in education.

In my riding, I find that many families have a tough time affording a university or community college education, yet it is so important for individuals and young people to have the opportunity to go to university or a community college and gain from that experience. They end up with a much better opportunity and a much better chance not only of being employed full time for the rest of their lives, but also of having a higher level of income. In both respects, it is very important to have that background.

One of the problems we face is that lower income families in particular, but young people generally, when they look at the options before them, may say that if they go to university it is going to cost an awful lot, they will have to borrow money, and they will have a huge debt. They ask themselves if they will get a good job after university that will allow them to pay off that debt, or if they should go somewhere right away where they can get some other kind of job that may not be as good in the long run but gets them a decent salary right away and gets them into the workforce.

The problem is that too many young people will say that they do not want to take the risk of incurring that enormous debt. For so many students today, it is an enormous debt. It can be as much as $100,000 or more after four or more years of university. If a person takes more than one degree, for example, if he or she wants to become a professional such as a doctor, or for other reasons a second degree to become a lawyer, et cetera, that can be incredibly costly for young people.

Students look at that and some turn away. They say no, they cannot afford it, it is too much, they are not going that route and they are going into the workforce. The fact of the matter is that in the future we face shortages in a whole range of skill areas and a whole range of careers. We already have seen it starting in our country. There is no shortage of people running to be members of Parliament, but that is another issue.

Mr. Ted Menzies: We need more.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We do need more on this side. That is for sure.

Last year the human resources committee was looking at the issue of employability, which broadly includes the issue of the skills shortage and also the issue of people who are left behind, people who are unable to fully take part in our society and unable to benefit from our prosperity in the way they should because they do not have the skills they need or they might have disabilities or other kinds of social problems that affect them.

The challenge we face as a society is to find ways to ensure that everyone in our society has a chance to take part, that no one is left behind.

In the case of people with disabilities, for example, we heard at our committee that there are often times when an employer, with a few small adjustments in the workplace, can make it possible for a person with a disability to come in and work and make an enormous contribution. At committee, we had examples of employers who talked about the fantastic benefits they had from getting terrific people. They would not have had those people if they had not made a few adjustments to their workspace to make it possible for them to work there.

More and more, as employers have difficulty getting the people they need with the skills they need, they are going to have to look at various options, but also we as a society have to make sure that people are ready to take the jobs that are available now and in the future.

This is an enormously important challenge for us, because if we do not do that, we face a number of potential problems. One of those problems is inflation as there are fewer people available to do jobs. For instance, if we want renovations done to our house and we are looking to get—

● (1920)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I know the hon. member for Halifax West will be devastated that his time has expired and that the time provided for the consideration of private member's business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is an old proverb that most of us were taught as children. It states, "actions speak louder than words".

The government's actions in regard to the issue of the death penalty speak much louder than its words. It says one thing on the issue of the death penalty but acts completely differently.

With respect to a Canadian citizen, Mr. Ronald Smith, who is on death row in Montana, the government breaks with long-standing traditions and policies and declares that it will not seek clemency for this man.

I have with me a letter that was sent to the governor, Brian Schweitzer, from the leader of the official opposition expressing the conviction of millions of Canadians who want to see Mr. Smith's sentence commuted.

The government also abandoned a long-standing policy by having Canada withdraw sponsorship of a United Nations Human Rights Commission resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty worldwide.

From 1998 to 2005, Canada co-sponsored the resolution each year, along with countries like Britain, France, Australia and the European Union nations, among others. One of those nations, Portugal, actually abolished the death penalty on July 1, 1867, the date on which our country was founded.

Those who opposed the resolution, and in fact intensely criticized the co-sponsors, were countries like China, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan and the United States which, coincidentally, account for 90% of the world's executions. In Iran, for example, we know that Iranians are regularly executed for clearly political reasons and even due to their sexual orientation. Human rights in many countries like Iran are either unheard of or intolerably curtailed.

The death penalty is inhumane and incompatible with basic human rights and errors cannot be corrected. The United Nations resolution itself states, "...any miscarriage or failure of justice in [its] implementation is irreversible and irreparable".

The Canadian government's decision spurred Canada's former Supreme Court justice and the current United Nations Human Rights commissioner, Louise Arbour, to state:

> The High Commissioner believes that not seeking clemency is very troubling, and so is the fact that Canada is not among the co-sponsors of the draft resolution of the UN General Assembly on a global moratorium on capital punishment.

The government is, by its actions, indirectly accepting the death penalty as a means of punishment. I remind hon. members of the words of former prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, who stated:

> Are we, as a society, so lacking in respect for ourselves, so lacking in hope for human betterment, so socially bankrupt that we are ready to accept state vengeance as our penal philosophy?

To borrow words from our former prime minister, I would maintain that we should not "accept" capital punishment anywhere in the world.

Adjournment Proceedings

When the history of our age is written, let us be remembered as people who built a world, not upon cruel relics of the past but rather hopeful pillars of the future.

The words of Nelson Mandela are succinct in summarizing this issue when he stated, "The death sentence is a barbaric act".

Why is the government taking Canada backwards with regard to this barbaric act?

● (1925)

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to have the opportunity to address this issue. The Minister of Justice has repeatedly stated in the House that the government is not changing the law in our country with respect to the death penalty.

In 1976 Canada abolished the death penalty from the Criminal Code, and continues to encourage countries around the world to do the same. However, the government acknowledges that the legal systems of foreign jurisdictions may have differing views on this issue.

Although the government recognizes the sovereign decision of each state to determine its own laws, the government also continues to advocate for the full respect for international safeguards where the death penalty is still in use. On November 15, the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution that called for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Canada supported that resolution and voted with the co-sponsors against efforts to undermine the purpose of the resolution.

As the House can see, Canada is taking a stand internationally on this issue.

With respect to clemency, as the Minister of Justice has said, our government will deal with the issue on a case by case basis. Potentially, if another country will only grant clemency on the basis of the offender being repatriated to Canada, we may have difficulty inasmuch as an offender who has committed murder abroad could potentially be eligible for parole in Canada and subsequently be free to live in our communities.

As is evident from our ambitious justice agenda, our government's first priority is to protect Canadians. We would be abdicating that responsibility by the potential release of a murderer, particularly one who has committed not one but multiple murders.

I am confident that Canadians do not want murderers free to roam our streets, especially if they have not served a sentence proportionate to the seriousness of their crime.

As the Minister of Justice has said in the House, "This country, and this government in particular, has an outstanding record with respect to human rights at home and abroad. It is a record for which all Canadians can be very proud".

We will continue to fight for Canadians and ensure that our families are safe.

● (1930)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and the government clearly do not understand the issue. This is not about safety. It is about our moral responsibility as a society, as a country and as a nation to say no to the death penalty.

It is absurd to hear the member say that the minister will deal with this on case by case basis. That is totally wrong and against every tradition our country has ever fought for and believes in. This is totally irresponsible.

The government tries to play semantics and uses all sorts of measures to avoid accountability for what it is doing. The reality is by failing to seek clemency for Canadians and by failing to back the UN moratorium resolution, the government is taking Canada backwards with regard to the death penalty.

Recently the journal of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, the *Jurist*, stated unequivocally that the Canadian government action on the death penalty marked a sharp departure in Canadian foreign policy. The reality is more than clear to observers in Canada and across the world. The government is moving away from Canada's traditional opposition to the death penalty and our deep commitment to human rights.

I ask the government to acknowledge its misguided policy as a first step toward correcting itself on this most fundamental issue. Restore our country's noble and honourable position on the death penalty, and let us once again embrace the beliefs of Diefenbaker, Pearson and Trudeau and leave in the past views that should only find their home there.

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite incorrect. The government has done more to advance human rights in the last two years than the previous Liberal government did in thirteen years.

I will give one particular example of that. What is really ironic is we never hear members from the opposite side, members from the Liberal benches, mention victims of crime. We never hear them mention protection of society. We are doing that. It is what Canadians told us to do. They told us to act to protect Canadians. That is why we brought in justice legislation and that is why we will continue to stand up for the rights of Canadians, both here and abroad.

The Minister of Justice has been very clear on this issue. It will be considered on a case by case basis, but we will not repatriate, in this case, someone who has been convicted of multiple murders.

The Deputy Speaker: A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1)

(The House adjourned at 7:33 p.m.)

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