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Monday, April 7, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 7, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

INCOME TAX ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-207, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

• (1100)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Order, please. There are two motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-207. Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 and 2 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ) propose:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-207 be amended by restoring the title as follows:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions)”

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-207 be amended by restoring clause 1 as follows:

“1. The Income Tax Act is amended by adding the following after section 118.7: 118.71 (1) The definitions in this subsection apply in this section.

“base period” means the first 52 weeks of the aggregate of all periods each of which is a period during which the individual

(a) holds qualifying employment; and

(b) ordinarily performs the duties of the qualifying employment at an establishment of the individual's employer situated in a designated region or is ordinarily attached to such an establishment.

“designated educational institution” has the meaning assigned by subsection 118.6(1).

“designated region” has the meaning assigned by section 3 of the Regional Development Incentives Act.

“qualifying employment” means an office or employment that the individual begins to hold in the 24-month period that follows the date on which the individual successfully completes the courses and, where applicable, the

internships leading to the awarding of a recognized diploma, or the date on which the individual is awarded a recognized diploma that is a master's or doctoral degree under an educational program requiring the writing of an essay, dissertation or thesis, if

(a) the individual begins to perform the duties of the office or employment after January 1, 2007;

(b) at the time that the individual takes up the office or employment, the establishment of the individual's employer at which the individual ordinarily performs the duties of that office or employment, or to which the individual is ordinarily attached, is situated in a designated region; and

(c) the knowledge and skills obtained during the individual's training or educational program are related to the duties performed by the individual in connection with the office or employment.

“recognized diploma” means a degree, diploma or attestation awarded by a designated educational institution.

(2) For the purpose of computing the tax payable under this Part by an individual for a taxation year, there may be deducted an amount equal to the lesser of

(a) the amount that is 40% of the aggregate of all amounts each of which is the salary or wages of the individual for the year from qualifying employment and attributable to the individual's base period; and

(b) the amount by which \$8,000 exceeds the aggregate of all amounts each of which is an amount that the individual is deemed to have paid to the Receiver General under this section for a preceding taxation year.

(3) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(a), an individual who was resident in a designated region in Canada immediately before the individual's death is deemed to be resident in a designated region in Canada at the end of December 31 of the year in which the individual died.”

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss Bill C-207 again today at the report stage and I would like to thank everyone taking part in today's debate.

Bill C-207 is designed to fight two problems that affect the regions facing economic challenges: the exodus of young people and the shortage of skilled labour. Briefly, Bill C-207 would give an income tax credit of up to \$8,000 to recent graduates who accept employment in a region that is facing economic and demographic difficulties.

I would like to use the short time I have to respond to some of the concerns regarding Bill C-207 raised by my colleagues at the Standing Committee on Finance meeting held on February 27, 2008. Above all, I would like to appeal to the two Conservative members from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, who are fully aware of the benefits of this measure, to support Bill C-207, which will hopefully help convince their colleagues to also support this bill.

All the members of this House know that the most isolated regions are the ones losing the most residents. In many cases, they depend on one type of industry—we call these single-industry regions. There is often little room in the traditional economic base of these regions for skilled jobs. So with the forestry crisis, the economy of a single-industry region will experience distinct ups and downs.

Private Members' Business

To compensate, new businesses in other fields must be developed to diversify the economy. Unfortunately, there are not enough workers in these regions to make it possible to create new businesses in new fields.

When the Government of Quebec examined the regions that depend on a single industry, it set three criteria: a decline in the economy, a shrinking population and the need for diversification. It looked at six administrative regions, in addition to some regional county municipalities that are part of certain administrative regions. For example, the RCM of Mékinac, in the north of Mauricie, was included because it is a single-industry community, its economy is declining, its population is shrinking and it needs diversification.

In Quebec, the total population of the regions where the tax credit for new graduates would apply is approximately 900,000 people, out of a total population of 7.5 million.

There is no denying that other areas, such as northern Ontario, are experiencing economic hardships. That region has lost a lot of young people in recent decades. These regions have a hard time staying vibrant and strong. Northern British Columbia is also experiencing economic difficulties, as well as the Cape Breton region of Nova Scotia, and northern Manitoba, an area where the economy is weak. This proposal would not apply only to Quebec. On the contrary, almost all the provinces could benefit from it.

This bill is not designed to discriminate against new graduates in major centres, as some Conservative members are implying, but simply to put in place a proven measure to help regions with declining populations.

Last week, in the newspaper *Progrès-dimanche*, MigrAction, an organization in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean that encourages young people to settle in the region, said that the Government of Quebec's program is an excellent way to encourage people to come back to the region and that young professionals really seem to appreciate it.

We propose to use the Regional Development Incentives Act to determine the designated regions. In the part entitled "Designation of Regions", this act sets specific rules for designating regions. First, the federal government and the province have to agree on the designated regions; a region must have an area of not less than 12,500 square kilometres; and the region must be in economic difficulty.

There are communities in every province that meet these criteria.

We must take action to prevent hundreds of cities and towns from disappearing in future because no one is settling there. This is the danger facing many communities in Quebec and Canada.

I am counting on the Conservative and Liberal members from Quebec to make their Canadian colleagues aware of the how effective the Quebec legislation has been and what a positive impact it has had.

To allay some Conservative members' fears that such a measure will cause a loss of productivity, I want to point out that the Government of Quebec set up the Gagné commission to study tax measures targeting the regions. The commission found that

productivity increased much more slowly in resource regions than in urban and central areas. Productivity rose by 2.5% from 1998 to 2005 in Quebec as a whole, by 3.5% in metropolitan areas, but by only 0.2% in resource regions or remote areas.

The Gagné commission found that growth in the highest value added businesses, in other words leading edge, secondary and tertiary processing businesses, was behind the increased productivity. It also noted that the difficulty attracting skilled labourers to remote areas prevented leading edge and processing businesses from opening in those regions. The purpose of this measure is to avoid that type of situation and to resolve the problems of low productivity in the more remote regions or regions that are far from major centres.

As far as the cost of such a program is concerned, based on the new criteria established by the Government of Quebec in 2006, this Quebec program cost \$30 million in the first year. In 2007, the estimated cost of the program was \$45 million and, in 2008, the cost is estimated at \$60 million. The cost should then level off at around \$60 million for subsequent years.

When economists were asked to estimate the cost of such program for all of Canada, they estimated it would be \$90 million the first year, \$135 million the second year, \$180 million the third year and roughly \$180 million in subsequent years.

I am calling on all hon. members of this House of Commons and the hon. members from Quebec—specifically the two Conservative members from Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and Jonquière—Alma in my region—who are well aware of the effectiveness of such a program, to help our regions support their young people. We have to put a stop to this population hemorrhage and start allowing the processing industry to develop by giving our entrepreneurs the chance to get the skilled workers they need.

I will close with a summary: if the majority of hon. members voted in favour of Bill C-207, it would provide tax credit of up to \$8,000 over a certain number of years that a young person could use to pay off student loans or as a down payment for a home. These are measures that would encourage our young people to move back to the regions where there is a dwindling population, an economic downturn and economic difficulties.

● (1110)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand in this House and speak to this private member's bill.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Get the PMO notes gathered up.

Hon. Maria Minna: Can't speak without them.

Mr. Ted Menzies: It is wonderful to be back here and hear the accolades coming from the other side so early in the morning. It is nice to see that they are up and atom.

Private Members' Business

I do welcome this opportunity to continue the debate on private member's Bill C-207, on which, by the way, we heard the witnesses who appeared and we debated at the finance committee, so we do actually understand what is in this legislation.

This bill is sponsored by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. As the hon. members are aware, it proposes an income tax credit for new graduates taking employment in certain regions. The credit would be equal to 40% of earnings from the first 52 weeks of qualifying employment, to a maximum credit of \$8,000.

Qualifying employment would be employment in a designated region and employment duties would need to be related to the graduate's education. A designated region for purposes of the credit is an area defined in section 3 of the Regional Development Incentives Act.

While I can appreciate the intent of this proposal to a certain degree, I have to make it very clear that I consider there to be a number of significant practical problems associated with this bill, issues that should be of concern to members of this House and which should preclude them from supporting it.

One of my first concerns is that there appears to be no coherent rationale or specific identifiable necessity underpinning the proposed tax credit. In other words, the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has not demonstrated that there is in fact a shortage of skilled workers in the designated regions targeted by this bill.

Is there any evidence, for example, that employers in these regions cannot find the skilled workers they need, even if they offer competitive compensation and working conditions? Even if there is, why then would the measure only target new graduates and not all qualified skilled workers relocating to these designated regions? Why propose a credit available to all recent graduates, regardless of occupation? Above all, what is the rationale for providing significant federal government support to entice recent graduates to work in certain regions instead of others?

The designated regions that the bill references are drawn from a list that has not been updated in over two decades and which simply does not account for economic changes that have taken place in the interim. The credit proposed in this bill would also introduce very serious inequalities in the tax system between recent graduates and those who graduated earlier, and inequities between new graduates who work in different regions.

Finally, the credit would incur a substantial fiscal cost to taxpayers in terms of forgone revenue for a tax measure that may ultimately not result in any new jobs for any new graduates anywhere in the country. This is simply not consistent with the government's approach of dedicating federal resources to where they will have the greatest positive economic impact.

If anything, this bill would, if passed, divert fiscal resources away from programs that actually do support regional economic development and that do foster the kinds of economic conditions under which all regions of Canada can grow and prosper.

This bill would only provide tax relief with respect to a new graduate's first 52 weeks of qualified employment. This raises a fairly obvious question in my mind. If the proposed credit were

actually needed to encourage new graduates to work in designated regions, what would happen after the initial 52 weeks when the credit is no longer available? Moreover, why not provide incentives to other skilled workers who are not new graduates, if the member's concern is truly skills shortages in these regions?

• (1115)

All of these issues raise significant questions about whether this bill would yield long term benefits to the intended target regions and whether it would even have an impact in the short term beyond reducing taxes for certain groups of workers.

The bill is inadequate in meeting its intended objectives in a range of areas. It, for example, does not even make any attempt to target skill sets that are in short supply in a designated region or which could assist in its development.

I would like to take a moment to return to the concerns I outlined at the outset with respect to the bill's definition of "designated region".

As we all know by now, the credit is only provided to new graduates who take up work in a designated region, a term taken from the Regional Development Incentives Act. The term refers to a region in which, to quote the act, "existing opportunities for productive employment in the region are exceptionally inadequate".

As I said, the list of regions specified in the act has not been updated in over 20 years. This list simply does not reflect the current economic reality of Canada's regions. I might add, as an example, 20 years ago the oil sands projects were very much in their infancy, and that is one of the highest demand regions for skilled labour that we have in this country now.

Let us take a couple of glaring cases in point.

I will draw hon. members attention specifically to the fact that the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are included on this list in their entirety, yet both provinces have recently displayed unemployment rates that are below the national average. If anything, Saskatchewan is one of the country's recent economic success stories with its economy booming as a result of the ongoing development of its extensive energy reserves.

That being the case, and given the significant economic challenges being faced elsewhere in the country, it would be inappropriate to dedicate limited federal resources to ensuring new graduates in these provinces pay up to \$8,000 less in federal income tax than those not working in regions designated as having inadequate opportunities for productive employment 20 years ago.

Clearly, Bill C-207 would lead to some unfair and almost surreal regional de facto subsidies if it were adopted.

The bizarre inequities introduced by this bill would not only occur between regions but also between individuals or groups of graduates. For example, graduates who finish their respective programs roughly concurrently but who live and work in different regions could face completely different income tax burdens in their first year of employment. At the same time, two graduates working in the same job and region but whose graduation dates are a year apart would also face that \$8,000 gap in their respective tax burdens.

Private Members' Business

Canadians simply cannot and should not be expected to support a program that introduces such inequitable outcomes into our tax system.

What is more, the tax credit proposed under Bill C-207 is also incredibly expensive. Estimates suggest that it could represent up to \$600 million in forgone revenue each year to the federal government. As I have suggested, these are funds that would no longer be available to other priorities for which there is a great deal of public support.

In the real world, the conditions that Bill C-207 is trying to address would not be solved through temporary and arbitrary tax benefits like those proposed.

For these reasons, I am unable to support this private member's bill and would encourage hon. members to simply reject it, so that the significant financial resources that it entails can be more effectively dedicated to meeting the priorities of Canadians.

• (1120)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join the debate this morning on private member's Bill C-207, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions), in other words, particularly in rural regions or regions of the country that have economic challenges, that face real problems in terms of people leaving those regions for other parts of the country, moving to, for instance, urban areas or other provinces to find work and opportunities.

These are also communities that are losing some key people they need, whether it be doctors or other professionals whom they need in those communities. We need to have measures to encourage young people to go back to those communities to work in those communities.

I am actually speaking today as a replacement. I am here because I received a call on Friday from my good friend and colleague, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who sadly had to remain in the riding for a very good reason, and that is for the funeral of Mr. Jim Connors.

All members from Nova Scotia would probably know Mr. Connors as a very distinguished person in Nova Scotia, a very well liked person, who fought a hard struggle with cancer over the past while. I know that colleagues will all join me in expressing our condolences to the family of Mr. Connors and his friends, who are gathering today, as is my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, for that funeral.

I am pleased to be here on my colleague's behalf to talk about the bill. Let us recognize that clearly there are hot spots in our economy.

[*Translation*]

For example, in large cities, the economic situation is usually stronger, and the economy is growing. We often see youth leaving their small rural communities for urban centres such as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and so on. It is their right to decide where they want to live, where they want to stay. However, at the same time, we need to have young people in rural communities, in the regions. It is very important to have young professionals and youth with a lot of skills. They have gone to university or community college, and we

need to recognize that taxes paid by both rural and urban taxpayers help universities and community colleges to exist, to pay their costs. They have the same interest in seeing the graduates from these institutions return to their communities.

[*English*]

We should be looking at this measure because we have seen across the country a movement from rural to urban, out of regions like mine in Atlantic Canada to other parts of the country.

There are two challenges. One of the challenges that the bill does not really address directly is the challenge of economic development in the regions of this country, particularly regions that are facing greater challenges. This bill does not respond to that challenge but proposes a measure that would assist in getting young people to go back to those communities. The way it does that is by providing a 40% tax credit up to a maximum of \$8,000 for the first 52 weeks a young person works after getting a degree.

I am concerned about some aspects of this bill. There is a question about whether young people would actually go for one year, then depart and take advantage of the \$8,000 or the 40% tax credit to lower their tax payable and to have that benefit in the one year. The intent is that they would be active in the community, get jobs in the community because of this and would stay there.

It is reasonable to assume that many would in fact stay in those communities because of the encouragement and incentive to go there to begin with, where they could get jobs and further the contacts they have had from their youth. This could be a beneficial instrument, although perhaps it would be better if it were a longer period. I am not sure that one year is adequate.

I suppose one way to do this could be to have a declining level of some sort, a process where they could get so much in the first year, maybe the next year 30%, then 20% and so forth so that it encourages young people not only to go to a community or region of the country to begin with but to stay there a longer term. We also need to have in those communities the kind of job creation that makes young people want to be there.

It is important to recognize that in the less developed or challenged regions of this country there are communities that are thriving. Rural communities are thriving, although there are not enough of them. A lot of communities in Atlantic Canada have seen many people go down the road, as they say, to Toronto, Alberta and so forth, for opportunities. We need to be very concerned about that.

A few years ago I had the occasion to visit the riding of Labrador with my hon. colleague, the member for Labrador. We visited his home community of Williams Harbour which has a population of 40. They are 40 of the friendliest people one would ever meet. It was a wonderful, short visit. In fact, as we flew in to Williams Harbour in a little twin prop plane, it looked like the runway was not nearly long enough. The landing strip looked like it was not nearly long enough to actually land and stop. It made us feel like the plane was going to fall into the water after the short runway, but we managed. It is a bit like Pangnurtung in Nunavut. Once one is on it, it is longer than it looks like from above, thank goodness, and planes can land there.

The same day we also visited the community of Black Tickle, Labrador, which, 15 years ago, had a population of 400. Today, it is 200. It is a community that has clearly suffered because of the downturn in the fishery.

Throughout Atlantic Canada, we have seen many communities suffer because of the decline in finfish, particularly the cod of course. We hear a lot about groundfish and cod is the prime example. What that has meant is that with less cod there have been more shellfish.

When one catches a lobster, generally speaking there is not a lot of onshore processing. In other words, what often happens is that lobster goes in a box, which is shipped off to Boston, New York, Paris or wherever and it does not create the kinds of jobs where, for instance, cod would go onshore to a plant where it would get gutted, filleted and processed in various ways, which involved a lot more work in those coastal communities that today are not seeing nearly as many of those kinds of jobs. They are seeing a decline. There are people there still who need doctors and young people to be the bankers and to do the many important jobs that are still required in those areas.

• (1125)

It seems to me that this bill would assist in encouraging those young people who want to reside in one of those areas. It is really a question of choice. They have the right to go where they wish. A very important part of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms is to have the freedom of mobility.

However, the idea of offering young people a little encouragement if they choose to reside in one of these economically challenged areas makes absolute sense. It will not mean they will go if there are no jobs there. We need to do more to support the development of jobs in those areas. However, it will mean that some of those young people will try to go back to their home communities or other communities in rural and less developed parts of this country to give it a shot and get involved in that community where they can make a difference.

It is not only those communities. It is this country as a whole in terms of the fabric of our society that benefits when our rural and remote communities are thriving.

The feeling I got in the communities of Williams Harbour and Black Tickle was a very warm one. Those are wonderful people and they are an important part of the fabric of this country.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-207, which seeks to amend the Income Tax Act in order to encourage new graduates to return to their region of origin, and therefore better support the regions and curb the exodus of young graduates.

I am a little bit confused by my Liberal colleague's speech because he does not seem to agree with his colleagues on the Standing Committee on Finance where, unless I am mistaken, the Conservatives and the Liberals attempted to gut this bill.

Private Members' Business

I support the original bill which provided a non-refundable tax credit of 40% of the graduate's salary to a maximum of \$8,000 for the first 52 weeks of employment in the region.

[English]

This bill is based on the Quebec tax model that has helped 1,300 people a year in that province at an estimated cost of \$21 million. The amount that was cited by my Conservative colleague seems to be an exaggerated amount if extended across Canada.

There were, indeed, problems with the bill but none of those problems were insurmountable.

[Translation]

It is said that there is none so deaf as he who will not hear. I am afraid that the Conservatives simply did not want to have anything to do with it. I will speak about this in more detail later.

First, I would like to talk about a few problems with this bill, including the definition of the regions. As pointed out, the definition is based on an act that has not been amended for a number of years, specifically since 1982. That is a problem. When we refer to new graduates, do they have to have graduated very recently or could it simply mean graduates?

As I mentioned, these are not insurmountable problems. They could have been fixed in committee.

[English]

It does not surprise me that the Conservatives did not understand the possibilities of this bill. It could be a step, in my view, in the right direction in terms of levelling the playing field and possibly bridging the divide between rural and urban areas which have a significant advantage right now in attracting qualified workers.

For example, we know that urban areas depend on good food. Concerns about food security are increasing in Canada. This would be a way of encouraging value added industry related to food production in rural regions by motivating young people to go back to rural areas.

This bill could have had a positive effect on low and middle income families in those regions. Canadian communities need the economic and social conditions to thrive. All regions in Canada need those conditions.

One of my colleagues on the finance committee made a statement.

• (1135)

[Translation]

I have a copy of the document, from which I will quote. He indicated that Canada presently has a productivity problem, according to the statistics. He said, "Now, typically speaking, Canada is a country that suffers from a productivity challenge." I do agree with that.

And then he continued, "We have economists come forward and talk to us about that all the time. This bill would seem to set up a counter-intuitive incentive to improving Canada's overall productivity."

Private Members' Business

I do not agree with that. It may not be an intuitive solution but if our goal, in Canada, were simply to send workers to the regions that are already thriving, this would not help all Canadian regions to flourish, and that is the point of this bill.

[English]

In my opinion, the role of government is not simply to send workers as widgets to fill a need for industry. It is also to ensure that all regions in Canada develop and are allowed to maintain their integrity. This is where a law such as this would help assist workers to encourage them to go back to their region.

In British Columbia there is a very strong economic growth right now but that there are also smaller regions, for example, forestry regions where workers are unemployed and suffering from the beetle kill, where this law would assist those small regions.

I would ask my colleagues to think about this, and those in Alberta perhaps know it better than anyone else, the impacts of the tar sands and the development of the oil industry, which has produced riches no doubt, but it has also created terrible social and economic problems.

I do not think the objective that we should have as government leaders is to only feed those industries, continue to feed that one part of Canada that is going full steam. Certainly that should be part of it but there are other regions in Canada that should be better supported.

The bill offers one small piece of the puzzle. It is not the total answer but it would help encourage graduates to go back to regions or to go to rural areas and provide some of the technical knowledge they have acquired at university, the expertise, the ingenuity, the creativity that would bring an enrichment and renewal to these regions that may be economically depressed.

Therefore, I am pleased to support the amendment to re-establish the integrity of the bill and to reject the amendments of the finance committee. I understand that there is a new amendment that will be coming forward to further make this bill more acceptable. I hope my colleagues from the Liberals and the Conservatives will be supportive.

We did not support the gutting of the bill at committee. As I said, we saw it as a first step to draw young graduates to economically depressed regions. It could act as an incentive to motivate regions toward greater economic development within the context of an overarching regional government strategy.

As I said at second reading, when I spoke to the bill, it does require a regional development plan but I could see very easily where a bill of this kind could be paired with a good regional development plan that would really allow the region to grow in a way that it would not without the bill.

In conclusion, we support reinstating the bill's content. We would have proposed that it could have been strengthened with specific definitions but that in itself is not adequate to vote it down.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today

about this bill that would increase the impact of an existing Government of Quebec measure giving recent graduates a tax credit when they move to a remote region, to a region that truly needs this type of additional resource.

I would like to congratulate the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his initiative on this. It truly reflects who he is—a regional member who works for the people in his region, people he hopes will be able to keep their region alive. This is the exact opposite of another member and minister from this same region who said that if someone is looking for work and cannot find it in his area, he need only go to Alberta.

Luckily, this bill offers a different version, a version that is more in line with what Quebec wants. It is not a measure invented by the Bloc; it has already been used in Quebec for a number of years and has produced good results.

In the region I represent, the Lower St. Lawrence, this is one of the measures, although not the only one, that have started to reverse the trend of a constantly dwindling population. The population decline that had been seen for several years has been reversed. For the past year, we have begun to feel the effects and have even seen an increase in the population, particularly with the influx of young people. Thanks to such a measure, young people are settling in the region, often with their spouses, and some are even deciding to raise a family. Thus, we are reversing the trend of devitalization and moving instead towards a revitalization of the regions. In that regard, the initiative put forward by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord should be commended.

I find it absurd that the Conservatives are opposing this bill so unconditionally, although that is pretty much their style. I would like to thank the NDP for their support this morning. As for my Liberal colleague's speech, I am rather surprised, but somewhat encouraged. In fact, it would seem that members from the regions have managed to convince the entire party to change its position, even though the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance told us there were some problems in the legislation and some issues to resolve.

As I recall, these amendments could have been proposed at the Standing Committee on Finance and the text could have been corrected in order to improve it. That was not done, and in fact, someone decided to gut the bill. Perhaps this parliamentary procedure is not very clear for our viewers at home, but in committee we can decide to gut a bill without killing it by voting against all the clauses of the bill. That is what the Conservatives did, with the support of the Liberals. We will now have to see what this means when it comes time to vote.

This measure allows us to send a message to young people who often leave their region to study when there are no universities or colleges in their area that offer the programs they want to take. The same is true for occupational training. This bill sends them the message that if they return to their region, they will be eligible for an income tax credit. This message has produced positive results in Quebec and we would like to see it continue.

This measure would give people an opportunity to choose a society, to choose where they want to live, instead of letting the market regulate everything and decide where they will go. We must not say that if jobs move because of the energy industry in western Canada, then people simply have to move out there. This is not the reality in Quebec. We are the only francophone nation in North America, and we need to ensure our survival and continuity. Simply relying on the rules of the economic market is not a solution for us.

This is why we have made proposals like the one in this bill. After the debate that started today, we will have to vote to decide whether we will restore the bill to its original form. That would be the best thing that could happen, since this is a good bill.

Since the majority of members in committee voted to gut the bill, I would hope that we can study it and see if it is possible to make some amendments.

We are told, for example, that the list of regions is based on a 1982 statute. But this act says that regions are defined by and after consultation with the provinces. So if such a bill were passed, each province would simply have to update its list of regions, and the tax credit would be more advantageous. This can be done without having to make amendments.

However, it may be useful to amend some other parts.

• (1145)

In line with what my Liberal colleague was saying earlier, if I understood him correctly he said that if the tax credit were to apply over three years, he might be interested in voting in favour of the bill. The Bloc Québécois has a constructive attitude toward this and hopes that hon. members will be open to possible amendments that could respect the spirit of the legislation and help achieve results. We are not closed-minded about this and we are open to possible corrections.

In that vein, I am putting forward an amendment that I will now read. It is quite long and rather technical so I will get started.

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain:

That the motion proposing to restore clause 1 of Bill C-207 be amended by deleting all the words in paragraphs 118.71(1) and (2) and substituting the following:

118.71 (1) The definitions in this subsection apply in this section.

“base period” means the first 52 weeks of the aggregate of all periods each of which is a period during which the individual

(a) holds qualifying employment; and

(b) ordinarily performs the duties of the qualifying employment at an establishment of the individual’s employer situated in a designated region or is ordinarily attached to such an establishment.

“designated educational institution” has the meaning assigned by subsection 118.6(1).

“designated region” has the meaning assigned by section 3 of the Regional Development Incentives Act.

“qualifying employment” means an office or employment that the individual begins to hold in the 24-month period that follows the date on which the individual successfully completes the courses and, where applicable, the internships leading to the awarding of a recognized diploma, or the date on which the individual is awarded a recognized diploma that is a master’s or doctoral degree under an educational program requiring the writing of an essay, dissertation or thesis, if

(a) the individual begins to perform the duties of the office or employment after January 1, 2008;

Private Members' Business

(b) at the time that the individual takes up the office or employment, the establishment of the individual’s employer at which the individual ordinarily performs the duties of that office or employment, or to which the individual is ordinarily attached, is situated in a designated region; and

(c) the knowledge and skills obtained during the individual’s training or educational program are related to the duties performed by the individual in connection with the office or employment.

“recognized diploma” means a degree, diploma or attestation awarded by a designated educational institution.

(2) For the purpose of computing the tax payable under this Part by an individual for a taxation year, there may be deducted an amount equal to the lesser of

(a) the amount that is 40% of the aggregate of all amounts each of which is the salary or wages of the individual for the year from qualifying employment;

(b) \$3,000; and

I will now finish reading the amendment:

(c) the amount by which \$8,000 exceeds the aggregate of all amounts each of which is an amount that the individual deducted under this section for the purpose of computing the tax payable, or that the individual is deemed to have paid to the Receiver General under this section for a preceding taxation year.”.

I apologize for being so tedious, but I am required to read the text. I therefore move this amendment, which should support the argument presented by my Liberal colleague and allow us to get the Liberals' support.

• (1150)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I have listened carefully to the reading of this motion, and I declare it to be in order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burlington.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to talk about Bill C-207.

Canada's Conservative government takes seriously the challenges of ensuring that Canada is equipped to succeed in an increasingly competitive world. Our vision for success includes all regions of this great country. This vision is set out in our “Advantage Canada” economic plan and has been acted on in real terms.

“Advantage Canada” sets out a blueprint for the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world, and it does so on the understanding that all of our young people need to be given the opportunity to acquire the skills and training they need to give Canada the knowledge advantage it needs to succeed.

When Canada succeeds, we all succeed. That is why Canada's Conservative government brought forward its vision in “Advantage Canada” and that is why we are acting on that plan in real terms, delivering real results for Canadians.

Our plan is about achieving a higher standard of living and a better quality of life for Canadians as the world economy continues to transform. It is about helping people reach their full potential and ensuring that they have the incentives, opportunities and choices they need to achieve a better quality of life.

Private Members' Business

This government understands that high taxes limit Canadians' opportunities and choices and hinder economic growth. With a more focused government, we can lower taxes to create incentives for all Canadians to succeed, regardless of where they live and work.

An essential element of our "Advantage Canada" plan to secure Canada's economic future involves attaining one of the most competitive business tax regimes in the world. The Government of Canada has made enormous strides in this regard.

With the \$60 billion in tax cuts announced in our fall economic statement, including another one percentage point reduction in the GST, the total actions taken by this government to date are approaching \$200 billion in tax cuts over this and the next five years. This will bring federal taxes to their lowest level in nearly half a century. The federal tax burden measured by the total federal revenues as a share of the economy will fall to 15.1% by 2011-12, the lowest ratio in nearly 50 years.

Key to our objectives for a strong business environment is the reduction of the federal corporate income tax rate from 22% to 15% by 2012. This will make Canada's corporate income tax rate the lowest among the world's major developed economies. This will give Canada a substantial tax advantage over the United States, with a statutory tax rate advantage of over 12 percentage points and an overall tax rate on new business investment advantage of more than 9 percentage points by 2012.

Along with a reduction in corporate income tax, we also have eliminated the corporate surtax for all corporations. This not only reduced the corporate tax rate by 1.12 percentage points in 2008, but also simplified the tax system.

We eliminated the federal capital tax two years ahead of schedule.

We provided an incentive to encourage provinces to eliminate their capital taxes.

We reduced the small business tax rate to 11% from 12% beginning in 2008.

We increased the small business limit to \$400,000 from \$300,000.

This competitive tax regime will be a powerful brand for Canada globally and will leverage economic growth and the creation of employment opportunities for all Canadians, regardless of which region of Canada they choose to live and work in.

Bill C-207 proposes to use a tax credit to encourage young people to stay in a particular region. Yet, unlike "Advantage Canada", it would not help to create the types of employment opportunities that would provide an incentive for a young person to stay.

• (1155)

The bill ignores the very nature of Canada's economy. Economic adjustment is an ongoing reality of a healthy, dynamic, diversified economy.

The Government of Canada supports regional economic development and devotes significant resources to programs that are responsive to local needs, make strategic partnerships with other stakeholders, and are multi-faceted in their approach. Our government proposes a visionary plan to improve the standards of living

and quality of life of Canadians and to make Canada a world leader for today and for future generations. Bill C-207 would do nothing like this. Instead it proposes to spend up to \$600 million on a tax credit that does not help create a single additional job.

For these reasons, I am unable to support this private member's bill. I encourage hon. members to similarly reject it as the significant financial resources that it entails could be more effectively dedicated to meeting the priorities of Canadians.

With the time I have left, I want to go over some of the issues we had with the bill. As a member of the finance committee, I had the opportunity to discuss the private member's bill with the member who brought it forward and with some of the staff he had brought forward to help with those decisions.

There were four or five key points that were made during those meetings. As we can see, the bill has been changed considerably since being brought to committee. I will explain the reasons why we believe those changes are important.

For example, no particular professions or skill sets are targeted. The bill said that no matter what the job was, if people worked in the region, they could get the credit if they came from that region. If people were in a profession that was well represented in the area and there were no particular skills set that they brought to the table, the bill did not address that. The credit would effectively go to all post-secondary and university graduates.

The bill did not do what the member wanted it to do in terms of creating jobs in the home area from where the young people came. If the area is already saturated with that type of employment and has those opportunities, there is really no need for that tax credit. That money could be used to target, as we have done "Advantage Canada", opportunities for people across the country and not in specific areas. Since regions with high economic growth are also likely to witness shortages of skilled workers, encouraging graduates to remain in economic depressed regions could aggravate these shortages.

That is exactly one of our points. I come from an area in Ontario that is doing well. There are areas in the country that are not doing well. However, I have always believed in the mobility of labour. I want young people from my region to be able to work in any region in Canada where they find satisfactory and challenging work. This has economic benefit not only to them, but to the country as well.

The bill does not encourage that. In fact, it does the opposite. That is another reason why, at committee and here in the House, I did not support the original bill brought forward by the Bloc member. The credit would provide tax relief only with respect to the first 52 weeks of qualified employment and would not necessarily provide long term solutions. This is the specific comment I made at committee. It is a very short term, short-sighted solution. Areas that need help do not need it for only 52 weeks. They do not need people who are just there to get a tax credit. They need a longer term vision.

Government Orders

I would hate to see young individuals, who make these moves to these areas to get these jobs, stay at home for 52 weeks for the tax advantage. I do not think it does anything for the economic development.

Those are just three of the things I spoke to at committee. There is a variety of others.

I will not support Bill C-207 when it comes to a vote in the House of Commons. I did not support it at committee. There are better ways to proceed, such as what the Conservative Government of Canada has done. We will proceed with "Advantage Canada", making a difference for all Canadians in all regions of the country.

• (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008

The House resumed from April 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night I flew into Canada from the United States. On the runway approach into Toronto, we fly over literally hundreds, possibly even thousands, of manufacturing establishments. As the jet descended onto the runway, we came closer and closer to a huge basis for Canada's economic well-being.

When I flew over these buildings on our approach to landing, my mind was cast back to a conversation I had with a friend on the weekend. My friend is an owner and president of a fairly significant manufacturing entity. It is a family business that he inherited from his father. It employs quite a number of people in the Mississauga area and it ships internationally. His primary business is in the domestic market, but it is also international. He uses wood products as the basis for his manufactured product.

The conversation was to the effect that he did not know how he would survive. He would have to make a fairly significant decision, in a very short period of time, as to whether he would de-camp from Mississauga, Ontario and from Canada and move his operation offshore. At this point, it is the only alternative he can see. This would result in an obvious loss of quite a number of jobs in the Mississauga area, which would have the ripple effect into the other areas of Canada from where he gets his base resources to build his product.

It was not a very happy conversation. It was a difficult one, one which he had done a lot of thinking. In some respects it was reflective of the difficulties that many people in Canada currently have and speaks to why Bill C-50 is such an inadequate document.

The previous speaker talked about "Advantage Canada", and the Conservatives beat that drum every time. I raised with my friend some significant tax relief contained in previous budgets and he somewhat scoffed at it. He was not terribly interested in tax relief because he had no income on which to be taxed. We went through other initiatives that had been put forward by the government and said that there was really nothing there for him.

It is somewhat confirmed by the government's materials in the budget document. I would direct attention to chart 2.2 on page 31 of the budget plan 2008. It shows very clearly a significant decline in employment, both on a regional basis and on a national basis, with respect to those who are employed in the area of manufacturing.

Probably hardest hit in manufacturing is Quebec, although Ontario is neck in neck with Quebec. Although it may not be in the future, manufacturing is such a significant component of the economies of both of those provinces. It gives, in graphic terms, a classic illustration of the conversation with my friend over the weekend about the decision he has to make to lay off quite a number of people, close his business in Canada and move it offshore, with obvious losses all the way around.

• (1205)

This shows the indifference of the Conservative government to these difficulties. It also shows the indifference of the government and its lack of a plan to address these difficulties. We can see this directly in its budget documentation in Bill C-50.

This is a very difficult issue. We layer this on to the reality of manufacturing loses and the personal conversations and apparent hostility of the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister to the aspirations and desires of the people in the province of Ontario, suggesting to them, and indeed to the world, that Ontario would be the last place in which one should invest. I do not think that particular comment by the finance minister was appreciated by my friend. It has reduced his alternatives to try to keep his manufacturing facility in Mississauga. He could bring in a partner who would help him survive this period of economic turmoil in this country.

When the finance minister says that Ontario is the absolute last place in the world that one should invest in, we have to wonder what he is thinking about.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: That's nonsense.

Hon. John McKay: He seems a bit upset with me, but I cannot really help that. I think he would, upon reflection, wish to take those remarks back and possibly have a bit more sympathy and interest in the plight of the people of Ontario and Quebec.

Hon. John Baird: What did they say about Stéphane in Windsor? Is he as popular in Windsor as he is in Ottawa?

Hon. John McKay: I hear one more member of the attack pack from the Conservative Party chirping away. He is more worried about his own political skin than the people of Ontario, who he purports to represent.

Government Orders

I appreciate that the hon. member gets most of his briefing notes from *Frank* magazine, but it would be a bit more useful if he actually read his government's budgetary documents. I know he has no interest in the environment, but at least he could appreciate the fact that the budget is a rather important document and it will impact the people of Ontario.

I also direct the hon. member's attention to table 1.2 in which, after having inherited a \$14 billion surplus, his government has basically shrunk it to a rounding error in this fiscal year to \$2.3 billion and to \$1.3 billion in the next year. I do not know whether hon. members opposite pay any attention to the "Fiscal Monitor", but my guess is no. The member will notice that in the past issue it was very concerned the government was spending its way into a deficit.

It would be one thing to reduce the government's revenues and have some fiscal discipline about its expenditures, but in the period of time in which that lamentable government has been in office, it has increased its expenditures from \$188 billion in 2009-10 to \$218 billion, which is about a \$30 billion increase or something in the order of about 15% as a rough calculation. This expenditure increase over a period of four years would exceed the increase in GDP. No household or individual can expect to spend that way and continue on to financial solvency.

First, Bill C-50 makes no provision for people like my friend, who has deep serious concern with respect to the survival of his entity. Second, the government has almost spent its way into oblivion, and we are staring down the barrel of a deficit.

• (1210)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech.

I come from Windsor, Ontario, where we have suffered incredibly with manufacturing job losses. Not just this year but for the last four to five years we have seen a significant downturn. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost in my community while government policy has been very much absent. People basically have to make decisions about whether to keep their homes or whether to send their kids to college or university. We have witnessed a downturn that is so significant it has undermined the fiscal capacity even of this country. We used to have economic earners that would contribute quite a bit to the tax coffers of this country.

We have not seen any government policy. We have been fighting this nonsense for a number of years, with the current Conservative regime and with the previous Liberal one, where they thought that if they just gave general corporate tax cuts without a strategy, we would see economic development and growth. That is not the case for the automotive industry. It is not the case for the tool and die and mould-making industry. The best on the planet, in Windsor, is actually going under because of the fiscal problems and the borrowing practices.

They are being undermined by the unfair competition of trade barriers, be it particular ones or non-tariff trade barriers that are implemented. They cost Canadians jobs, and they are the best in the world.

I listened to my colleague. He understands that have a corporate tax cut when companies do not make a profit does not help them rebound. The same holds true with research and development, if they do not have access to the grants that are available through the SR and D program. Because they did not make a profit, it does not lead to the changes that are necessary, or it does not provide the capital that they need to advance into alternative types of competitive industries, transforming, for example, from the auto sector to some other sector. They do not have that availability even to compete.

My question for my friend is simple. He sat on the plane thinking about this. Why does he not support his friend and vote against this budget bill so we do not undermine the fiscal capacity of this country and instead put in programs that actually work for him and his friend?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has the luxury of being able to oppose everything at all times, at any place. It has no aspirations to actually form government. It is a great place to be.

On the other hand, he does make a rather valid point with respect to tax relief. Tax relief which is misdirected is basically wasted fiscal capacity. The government has in fact run us up to the precipice of a deficit and we may well enter into a deficit.

He is right with respect to manufacturing and well paying jobs. That is the basis of our economy and has been the basis of our economy for many years. We would layer on to that, particularly in Windsor, the thickening of the border. The Americans can seem to be so excessively concerned with terrorism that they actually wish to cut their own economic throats. In so doing, they are doing us no favours and making it very difficult for our people to compete as well.

He may also recollect that our leader put forward a very concrete and specific policy with respect to R and D and training, and the allocation of funds with respect to the difficulties that manufacturers are facing. He may also recall that when we were in government, not only did we run fiscal surpluses, not only did we do tax relief, but we also invested heavily in R and D, so that in fact we reversed the brain drain and became a brain gain.

Under this particular government, anybody with any sense, as the finance minister has said, is just going to leave the country in the first place or they are never going to invest here. Welcome to Conservative freakonomics.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it should come as no surprise to anyone if I state that the Bloc Québécois cannot support this budget, much less its implementation. And why can we not support it? There are a number of reasons, and I will do my best to explain them in less than 10 minutes.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois' idea of a fair and balanced society is not the same as that of the Conservative Party. As a first example: the government had ample means to help many people in society, but they decided they would only help their friends in the oil business, banks and arms companies. There was a surplus of \$10 billion, and the Conservatives decided to put that amount against the debt instead of helping those who need it right now. They gave some crumbs, but they decided to take \$10 billion and pay down the debt at a time when people needed them.

When people in society are in dire straits, a government should be there to try to help them. Unfortunately, the Conservative ideology has always been one of laissez-faire. Leave the economy to its own devices, and you have the law of the jungle.

Here is another example. The government says that it has given companies tax breaks; people need to understand that these tax breaks are for companies that are turning a profit.

Where are companies turning a profit at present? In the three main sectors I named earlier: oil, banking and defence. People in these industries are making a huge amount of money, and they are the ones who are benefiting from these tax breaks. The manufacturing and forestry industries are not benefiting from these breaks, because companies in these sectors are closing.

Not only are companies closing, but workers are not receiving any assistance. It is a disaster. As for helping the manufacturing and forestry industries, the federal government is going to give \$1 billion for the entire country. It has even gone so far as to say that it will distribute this money on a per capita basis. Did Alberta need this money? Did British Columbia? Perhaps to some degree, but Alberta certainly did not. The provinces that needed the money the most—Quebec, Ontario maybe and British Columbia—are suffering because of the way in which the \$1 billion is being distributed.

What is \$1 billion in a budget like the one the Minister of Finance has brought down? The Government of Quebec has allocated \$2 billion to try to help people affected by closures in the manufacturing and forestry industries. What the federal government is offering is peanuts. And as I just said, it is not distributing this money properly. Clearly, we cannot support these policies.

What is there for forestry and manufacturing workers who are losing their jobs? For ages we have been calling for improvements to the employment insurance system, and for ages the government has given us absolutely nothing. The government has done nothing, and the surplus in the EI fund has grown steadily larger, year after year.

This year, the government has had a brainwave. Yet we have been asking for this for a long time. The government should not be involved in employment insurance; there should be an independent commission and an independent fund. The government said that we were right and that it was going to create an independent fund.

But what is happening to the \$50 billion surplus that has built up in that fund over the past 10 or 12 years? The government is not saying anything about it, even though it is money that belongs to workers and employers, who could use it right about now.

What happens to workers in the manufacturing and forestry sectors who lose their jobs and are 55 or older? Just try to find a job

in the Gaspé when you are 55 and the big employer in your village is a sawmill that has closed. There are very few jobs.

However, the government had the means to help these workers by implementing the POWA, a program for older worker adjustment but refused to do so. Only a small amount of money was required: \$60 million would have done it. Once again, the government ignored the problem and turned its attention to other matters. It is more interested in looking after the big banks and oil and defence companies.

Speaking of defence companies, what about the fact that it is much more interested in the American defence companies?

● (1220)

It buys expensive tactical and strategic lift aircraft with taxpayers' money and there are virtually no spinoffs for Canada or for Quebec, where 55% of the aerospace industry is located. This is a flagrant injustice.

With regard to seniors, we all heard the current Prime Minister say, when he was the leader of the opposition, that he would retroactively reimburse individuals to whom guaranteed income supplement payments are owed. As soon as he crossed the floor and became Prime Minister, he reneged on his promise. These individuals are among the lowest paid and receive the smallest income from our society and yet no one wants to help them.

We were able to identify and inform individuals who were entitled to the guaranteed income supplement. Grandparents phoned me to tell me that they would finally be able to buy a present for their grandchildren because they did not have the money to do so before. A good number of individuals did not realize for many years that money was being withheld from them. Now that we could help them, tell them that a mistake was made and that they would be paid retroactively, the government—now that it is in power—has forgotten the promise it made when in opposition. We find that completely unacceptable.

We have seen how the Conservative government seems intent on going after women. I have lost track of how many Status of Women Canada offices it has closed. But in this day and age, women are still not at the same income level as men, even if they have the same level of education. There is work to be done. We need to advance the cause of women. If we can do this, then society advances. But once again, the government is turning a deaf ear.

It is frustrating to see this government's attitude towards the environment. It has the means to do something; it could decide to put a surtax on the oil companies that make huge profits. Our planet is crying out for help. The best legacy we could leave our children and grand-children is a clean planet, green or blue, but not brown. The oil companies are squandering our environment.

Government Orders

I remember a time when things were going well for our planet. When we see what is happening these days, it is very worrisome. This government has the means to do environmental research and development, but it does nothing. On the contrary, it is trying to convince people that everyone must share the cost of paying for those who have done the most environmental damage. Yet Quebec is probably one of the cleanest provinces, thanks to its hydroelectricity. Since the petroleum industry was once given a \$77 billion subsidy to help get it off the ground, while nothing was given to Hydro-Québec, why must we now pay a quarter of today's pollution costs?

There are a number of reasons why we cannot support this budget. We do not agree with the Conservative government's definition of a fair and just society. I gave some examples. I could have given many more, but I have only 10 minutes, since we have unfortunately reached the stage when we have 10 minute speeches. However, I could go on about this at length. There are many other things that we do not like about this budget.

It is really too bad that the government has ignored the appeals from the planet, manufacturing and forestry companies, workers and women's groups. We find this completely unacceptable, which is why the Bloc Québécois will gladly vote against this budget. It is not our definition of a fair and just society.

• (1225)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech, which describes what is happening in the manufacturing sector in my riding.

In my riding, it is primarily the furniture sector that is experiencing serious problems, because of competition from Asia and the strong Canadian dollar. This industry requires more support in order to remain competitive, to survive and to help ensure the survival of rural communities. Small manufacturing firms and agriculture will enable our rural areas to revitalize and survive.

However, this Conservative government does not seem to want to help these industries or agriculture, nor to help these communities, which are presently grappling with depopulation, the exodus of youth and other problems.

I would like my colleague to explain why the Conservative government is incapable of doing anything even though it inherited a Liberal surplus, which has continued to grow over the past few years. Why are the Conservatives not taking action to help our communities? These communities are in difficulty and the life is draining from them. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I agree with him: communities are in serious trouble. A few years ago, an article entitled "Quebec cut in half" was published in Quebec. The article was about how young people were leaving small towns for large urban centres and how the population in towns and villages was declining. When a small town has only one sawmill that employs most of the people in the town and that company closes, there is a very real risk that the town will also close. This is a tragedy.

My colleague is right: the government had the means to help these people, but the Conservative ideology dictates that this money be used to pay down the debt. That is why we are criticizing the government. It could have done both. My finance colleague also knows this, because we suggested helping these people over two fiscal years.

In addition, even after these two fiscal years, the government could have paid down the debt. But when a government is totally closed-minded and expects people to look after themselves and towns to close, when it does not support the manufacturing and forestry industries but uses \$10 billion to pay down the debt, then it is not doing its duty. This government is not doing its duty. People in our towns and cities needed support, but the Conservative government abandoned them.

[*English*]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on the topic of this bill. I would like to divide my time approximately equally between the budgetary side of this budget implementation bill and the immigration side.

It is very simple really to deal with the budget itself because it really did not do anything. The budget was an analogy, so it would hardly be worth bringing the government down and causing all the expense associated with a general election for a budget which did next to nothing.

The best illustration of that point is the so-called centrepiece of the government's budget, a savings plan, which, when compared with my colleague's alternative savings plan, the member for Pickering—Scarborough East, his plan looked bold and imaginative and of great benefit to Canadians. The government's so-called centrepiece would make very little difference to the vast majority of Canadians.

One does not need to spend too much time talking about the budget itself. The more interesting economic questions come when we combine the economic statement of October with the budget because there we see the fiscal irresponsibility of the government.

As we all know, the government, when it came to power two years ago, inherited surpluses without precedent in the history of our country for any incoming government. Then it proceeded to spend so fast when economic times were good, earning the Minister of Finance the title of Canada's biggest spending finance minister from none other than Andrew Coyne.

It took \$12 billion a year out of the fiscal framework through cuts in GST. Having inherited billions and billions of dollars in surpluses, two years later, when times are becoming difficult and more uncertain, the government is virtually without money and it is a SARS crisis or an Asian crisis away from returning to deficit.

For our government to spend crazily when economic times were good, leaving nothing in reserve when economic times become less good and more uncertain, is definitely not what one would call sound economic management.

Government Orders

The other point I would make about the budget is the question of corporate tax cuts versus investments in training, infrastructure and things of that nature. We alone in the Liberal Party understand that good government requires both the creation of wealth and the redistribution of wealth or social programs.

The Conservative government perhaps understands the creation of wealth but has no concept of social justice. The NDP is the other way around, never having been government, occupying what can be called the neanderthal stream of the global social democratic movement, it has no idea of wealth creation and no concern for wealth creation, so it necessarily lives in the class conflict context of the 1960s or even the 1930s, and regards any cut in corporate income tax as evil. Whereas, the Conservatives see cuts in corporate income tax as the panacea.

We, on the other hand, have a balanced position. We see corporate tax cuts as a necessary condition for Canada's competitiveness and prosperity, but not as a sufficient condition. I might refer back to the NDP and the finance critic for the NDP. The deputy leader of the NDP the other day was talking about the NDP opposition day motion and went out guns blazing with a press release saying we Liberals did not know our numbers because unknown to us, corporate tax rates in Scandinavia and U.K. were actually higher than in Canada and we had been saying the opposite.

This just shows the economic incompetence of NDP members because what did they do? They compared the national corporate tax rate for Sweden, Norway, Denmark and England with the federal only corporate tax rate for Canada. They ignored provinces. Once the provinces are included and we look at Canada's national corporate tax rate versus those of Scandinavia and United Kingdom, we find the truth, as we said and as the IMF says, that indeed Canada's overall corporate tax rates are significantly higher than those in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. In fact, one of the very highest corporate tax rates in the western world is in George Bush's United States.

• (1230)

The point is not that this is a left-right fight. Because otherwise, why would we find the highest corporate tax rate under George Bush and the lowest under the social democratic governments of Scandinavia?

The point is that this represents a sensible policy for any responsible government concerned with productivity, competitiveness and jobs in our highly competitive world.

Let me turn now to the question of immigration. A great concern among members of the Liberal Party is the arbitrary powers that the minister has committed to herself under this bill.

We have other examples where the Conservative government has stated that it will take decisions behind closed doors and simply said to Canadians, "Trust us". We see this with the Wheat Board. We see this with the censorship bill. Now we see this with the huge changes in immigration, giving vast powers to the minister to make decisions behind closed doors.

Are Canadians wise to trust this government, to trust this minister, to do what is right for Canada behind closed doors? Are they right to

give this trust to this government on the Wheat Board? I would say definitely not.

Are they wise to give this trust to take decisions behind closed doors to Conservative ministers or their appointees on the question of censorship? No.

And, similarly, in questions of immigration where constituents in my riding, for example, have been waiting for years to reunify their families and to bring their loved ones into this country, the Conservatives are saying to them, "Trust us. Your family reunification won't be in jeopardy. Trust us to do the right thing behind closed doors."

I would submit that this government has not earned the trust of Canadians to be given such discretionary powers behind closed doors, whether we are talking about the Wheat Board, whether we are talking about censorship or whether we are talking about immigration.

When this comes to committee, there will be so many questions to ask because the details of this bill are entirely unclear. For example, the immigration department is receiving only a pittance in additional resources, something on the order of 1% or 2% of the budget. If we are going to clear up the backlog, common sense would suggest we need more civil servants to process that backlog.

So, immigration is getting essentially no additional resources. At the same time, it is fast-tracking certain groups. What is the logic? If it has essentially no more resources and it is fast-tracking certain groups, does that not necessarily imply that it is slow-tracking other groups?

Does that not mean that if we put additional resources into getting certain preferred types of people, and we do not yet know from the government who is preferred and who is not, that, given there is no net increase in resources, others who are not on the preferred list, like people wanting to reunite with their families, will have to wait even longer? So, it sounds to me that those who are on this waiting list will perhaps wait even longer.

We do not know the answers to these questions. The Conservatives have been hiding behind a very short new bill without telling Canadians the details.

One of the advantages of getting it into committee is that, I hope, we would hear many representatives of immigrant groups, many experts, who can tell us, for example, how it is possible to fast-track certain groups without slow-tracking other groups given that there are no additional resources.

Let me give, one final example. I do not know how this is going to work. Suppose that the government in its wisdom decides that one certain trade is needed in greater numbers; carpenters, for example. Is the government going to take these carpenters from the new list of people who apply after the budget date or go into the backlog and pick out the carpenters? If it is the former, then the backlog will simply—

Government Orders

• (1235)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member, but I have given him signals.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with much of what the member had to say about the immigration component of Bill C-50. Newcomer communities right across the country are hugely worried about the impact that this hidden agenda in a budget bill will have for potential immigration patterns in this country.

I wonder, though, if you feel this strongly that we cannot give the government a blank cheque and that we cannot give the Minister of Immigration a blank cheque, can you commit today, for all of those people who are watching this debate, that you will stand up in this House and vote against Bill C-50?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain will remember to refer to other members in the third person, not in the second person. I am the only guy who gets the second person.

The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should know by now, there are two distinct questions: whether the Liberal Party opposes a bill and whether the Liberal Party thinks that now is the appropriate time to cause a general election.

As our party has indicated very clearly, we do oppose this immigration bill, for the reasons I gave in my speech and with which she seemed to agree. We are in agreement on whether we oppose the bill: we do oppose the bill.

As for the second question on whether it is the appropriate time to cause a general election to occur, that decision will be made at the appropriate time by the leader of the official opposition.

However, the member should also know that if we vote against a bill, even if it is in small numbers because we do not want to provoke an election, we are putting a marker down, so that as and when a Liberal government comes to power we will have indicated our opposition to that bill, which is just as strong as the opposition that we would have if we had voted in our full numbers. At that time, as and when a Liberal government again comes to power, we will be in a position to reverse any number of bad laws that the Conservative government will bring in.

• (1240)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Markham—Unionville used the word “trust” quite often. I would like to give him an opportunity to talk about this, if he could, because I have grown up to listen always very carefully, and when people use the word “trust” more than three times, I begin not to trust them.

I remember that the Prime Minister in the campaign said to “trust us” on income trusts, trust us on the Atlantic accord, trust us that there will be no more bickering with the provinces, trust us on

Kelowna, trust us that we will treat all the provinces fairly—and look at what has happened to our province of Ontario—and trust us on veterans. Now the government is saying to trust it and it will take care of immigration.

Over the weekend, some friends asked me a question. On these numbers that the Conservatives are pointing out in regard to the backlog of 800,000 immigrants, they have had over two years in government, so why did they not take care of it? Now, after two years, they are coming to us with some suggestions. Can the member for Markham—Unionville elaborate on the trust factor with regard to all these points that I have indicated?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is an excellent one. I do believe that trust is critical. I believe that a government that wants to earn the trust of Canadians has to demonstrate by its actions that it is indeed trustworthy.

The reason I say we should trust the Conservatives no more on immigration than we should trust them on censorship or on the Wheat Board is because of the very record that my colleague has pointed out. The Conservatives have not earned that trust.

Perhaps the biggest of all sources of mistrust is income trusts. The Conservatives said repeatedly during the election campaign that never ever would they tax income trusts. As a consequence, Canadians by the thousands rushed to buy income trusts, secure in the knowledge that the Prime Minister had committed never to tax them. Then, one Halloween, he broke his word, and the next day \$25 billion of Canadians' hard-earned savings went up in smoke in a single day.

That is just one example. I do not think I have time to go into many others. However, it illustrates the point that this is not a government that has earned the trust of Canadians. If it breaks its promise on income trusts, why in the world should Canadians trust it with enormous discretionary power in an area as critical to Canada as immigration?

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate today in the debate on Bill C-50, the budget implementation act. As the name suggests, this is the bill that will implement the Conservative government's vision for the future of our country.

To date I have listened to the debate on both the budget and Bill C-50, and I know that many members, particularly on the Liberal side of the House, have decried the budget as having no vision at all. The *Toronto Star* echoed that sentiment in its headline of February 27, which said the budget was “devoid of big ideas”.

In fact, quite the opposite is true. This budget does have a vision. It is one of the most ideologically driven budgets in the history of this country. The problem is that it represents a vision that the majority of Canadians would categorically reject if they were to become aware of it.

Government Orders

That is why the Prime Minister muzzles his Conservative colleagues and scripts their every word in the Commons. Fortunately for Canadians, he forgot to muzzle his top dog. The Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Tom Flanagan, who remains one of the key advisers, let the cat out of the bag. He praised the Conservative government for pulling off "quite a performance", achieving radical changes with successive revenue cuts without ever tipping its hand about what it was up to.

Flanagan described the Conservatives as "turning the screws on the federal government" and "boxing in the ability of the federal government to come up with new program ideas". If that sounds familiar, it should, because the Conservative government has taken a page right out of the playbook of the Bush administration. It is simultaneously increasing the military's budget and cutting government revenue to set the stage for future cuts to social programs.

I can see the government members of the House starting to squirm. They loathe being compared to their Republican counterparts south of the border, not because they disagree with the Bush administration but because they know Canadians disagree with the Bush administration. They would just as soon implement their Republican ideas without being exposed for doing so.

Let us look at the facts. Just like George Bush, who also came into office with the so-called problem of huge budget surpluses, the Prime Minister is well on his way to achieving the neo-conservative objective of permanently hobbling government's ability to fund anything but the military.

Murray Dobbin published a brilliant analysis of this online on March 4. He points out that Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform and a dedicated Bushite, might well have been speaking for the Prime Minister when he said, "My goal is to cut government in half in 25 years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub".

Previously announced Conservative tax cuts will mean an annual loss of government revenues of \$40.2 billion by 2012-13. Put differently, the tax cuts will cost as much as it currently costs to run the entire non-military side of Canada's government.

Programs that New Democrats are championing, such as a national child care program, a national housing strategy and a national drug plan, are all meant to become impossible dreams, and government revenues as a percentage of GDP are to drop to levels that existed before the establishment of key programs, such as medicare, so that these programs too will appear increasingly unaffordable.

For those people from Ontario who may be watching today's debate, this approach is eerily reminiscent of the Harris government in Ontario. All of us will forever remember John Snobelen's comments that he was going to create a crisis in education so that the Conservatives could then implement their own agenda. It is déjà vu all over again.

Once again, it is hard-working families and seniors who will be paying the price. They will be paying it directly through increased taxation and indirectly by losing government support for the programs on which their families rely.

Let us look at the taxation picture first. I would encourage everyone to have a look at page 201 of the English version of the 2008 federal budget and to take a look at table 5.4. It is also available online.

At the end of March, we finished what is called the 2007-08 fiscal year. Table 5.4 presents for all of us sources of government revenue or money coming in.

For personal income tax, tax paid by individuals, we see that the figure for 2007-08 is \$112 billion. Two years from now, for the 2009-10 fiscal year, it will be up to \$125 billion, which is a 12% increase. On the next line, we see corporate income tax, tax paid by corporations and companies here in Canada. For the same period, we see \$42 billion today, but that goes down to \$36 billion for 2009-10, which is a 14% reduction.

The table shows a 12% increase for ordinary Canadians and a 14% reduction for profitable corporations. Nothing shows more clearly that the gift the Conservatives are handing to their corporate friends will be paid for by hard-working families in my hometown of Hamilton and, indeed, right across this country.

● (1245)

How did we get to that point? It is not complicated to follow the trail. Last fall, with their usual fanfare, the Conservatives announced that they had the solution to the hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost in the forestry and manufacturing sectors. They were going to give out \$14 billion in tax cuts.

There was one little problem for the Conservatives, who make themselves out to be the big experts on the economy. Most of these corporations did not make a profit last year, for the simple reason that after the government put all its eggs in the oil sands basket, the loonie soared to heights never before seen, making it increasingly difficult to export forestry and manufactured products. The more the Canadian dollar is worth, the harder it is, of course, to export.

Where did the so-called tax reductions go in regard to helping the manufacturing and forestry sectors? They have all gone to the most profitable sectors of our economy: the big oil and gas companies, which are the biggest polluters, and the banks, which are already making enormous profits.

Meanwhile, the manufacturing sector, which has lost 350,000 jobs over the last five years, continues to hemorrhage an additional 300 jobs a day.

As the member for Hamilton Mountain, for Steeltown, this utter disregard for the key engine of our economy is the most devastating impact of the government's misguided budgetary policy. The little bit of money for the auto sector for research and development, which the government did allocate in its budget, in no way amounts to an adequate strategy to help our manufacturers and exporters deal with the spiralling dollar in Canada.

Even Jay Myers, president of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, is on record as saying that the Conservative government "doesn't seem to understand the seriousness of the problems facing industry in Canada today". Where is the plan to deal with the high dollar? Where is the national "buy Canadian" procurement policy that most other developed countries use to boost their local products?

Government Orders

Where is the plan to balance our trade so we do not export all of our good jobs? Where is the green job strategy? Where are we positioning Canada and our economy for the 21st century? Simply, we are not.

To the Conservative government, people are there simply to serve the economy, when it should be the other way around. The economy is a man-made construct. Our economy must serve Canadians. In that way, the economy is a moral issue. It must be judged by how many people it leaves behind.

As the manufacturing sector is confronted with a tsunami of job losses, we must look at this in terms of its impact on workers. Older workers desperately need income support, yet the budget implementation bill offers nothing.

Employment insurance, which is funded solely by worker and employer contributions, is being denied to those who have faithfully paid their premiums. Why do Ontarians get an average \$5,000 less in EI than those in other parts of the country? Why is it virtually impossible to access retraining benefits when disaster strikes?

Instead of reworking the EI system so that it is there for workers when they need it most, Bill C-50 sets up a crown corporation. Instead of greater benefits, workers got greater bureaucracy.

What happened to the \$57 billion surplus that has accrued in the EI accounts? Why is the new bill setting aside only \$2 billion for the new corporation? Where is the rest? It is legalized theft from working families.

Budgets are about priorities. They are about walking the talk. We know that the priorities of the Conservative government are about downsizing, getting out of services and getting out of the things Canadians care about most. Its priorities are about helping its friends: the big banks and the big polluters.

However, there are millions of Canadians who share a different vision for our country. They are asking the same questions that we in the NDP have been asking since the government took office.

Where is the national child care program? Where is the national drug plan? Where are the additional health care workers for the over five million Canadians who are still without a family doctor? Where is the wait times guarantee? Where is the national housing strategy?

Where is the plan for accrediting foreign credentials? Where is the money to reduce the immigration backlog in a fair and accountable way instead of allowing the minister to cherry-pick who gets to visit or work in Canada?

Where is the infrastructure investment to help our aging cities and to provide property tax relief for tenants and homeowners alike? Where is the increase to the OAS and GIS so that seniors can retire with dignity and respect? Where is the help for the building trades so they can accept temporary jobs away from their homes without suffering undue financial hardship?

Where is the assistance to make post-secondary education and training affordable for young people? Where is the concrete action on climate change?

Where is the vision that sees the federal government as an agent for positive change? It certainly is not in the 2008 budget and it is not in the corollary Bill C-50. For the Conservatives, that is by design.

However, the Conservatives have the support of only a minority of Canadians. The majority of Canadians know that we can and must do better. I am proud to stand in the House and represent their aspirations by voting against the bill. I know that my NDP colleagues and the members of the BQ will as well.

For the life of me, I do not understand why the Liberals will not. They talk the talk, but they refuse to walk the walk. There is so much at stake. This budget severely restricts the ability of any future government to undo the damage done.

● (1250)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Mountain made a good point when she described how the government has put itself in the position where it cannot be an agent of change. I agree with her because of the way it has addressed the surplus. It has put all the money on the debt and not into some of the programs that Canadians have asked us to support.

The member wanted to know where the national housing program and child care program were. The 2005 budget contained money for post-secondary education, for the infrastructure and for the cities, which she talked about.

The NDP is bashing the Liberals for not voting against this bill. It is because the budget contains a few elements that are worthwhile supporting, which is why we want this amendment to go to committee where we can fine-tune it.

How will the member and her party answer to their constituents for betraying them in 2005 when they abrogated their responsibilities? They had the money for housing, for child care, for cities and for post-secondary education. It has all disappeared, not because of the Conservative government, but because of the NDP.

● (1255)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I wish the NDP did have the kind of power that the member talks about, because, frankly, if we had had the opportunity to pick the next government it certainly would not have been the Conservatives. It speaks to that really profound sense of entitlement that members on that side of the House still have.

The people of Canada decided to turf the Liberals out of office after the sponsorship scandal, after the Gomery inquiry, because they did not think they deserved to continue to be the government. It was not the NDP that turfed them out of office. It was the voters of Canada. The same voters of Canada, now in the majority, are opposed to the agenda of the government. They are looking to leadership from people in this House to vote against initiatives like Bill C-50.

The Liberals still believe they have the same sense of entitlement. They do not think they need to stand and be counted on votes. They do not think they need to stand up for their constituents but that their constituents should still re-elect them to government. It is absurd. The people of Canada know better.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions.

First, every time I hear the Liberals talking about putting down markers, I get this image in my mind of an agitated stray dog. What is the good of all these markers if policies that are unacceptable, like those in Bill C-50, go forward?

Second, budget 2008 makes much of these tax cuts. However, as the member for Hamilton Mountain has said, tax cuts are not all that the government talks about. I would like her to comment on this so-called tax largesse in relation to some specifics.

At the committee for status of women, we discovered that 68% of women were below the lowest income bracket and, therefore, a significant number of low income women do not benefit from personal income tax deductions. Furthermore, almost four of ten women will get nothing from income tax deductions because they just do not earn enough in the first place, and, of course, non-refundable tax cuts are equally useless to those four of ten Canadian women.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the value of putting down markers, there is no value to that at all, when in reality we have the opportunity now to defeat those initiatives that the Liberals and the Bloc say we oppose but only two parties are willing to actually stand and oppose them when it counts, which is during votes.

I really do not understand the strategy of the Liberals where they are willing to put the futures of newcomers and their families on the line and put their own electoral needs ahead of the needs of Canadians.

With respect to the corporate tax giveaways, it is true that the giveaways actually outstrip new program funding by a ratio of six to one.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating what should be two bills, a budget implementation bill and an immigration reform bill. First I will deal with the immigration reform bill and then I will continue with comments about the rest of this budget implementation bill.

The fundamental changes to Canada's immigration system that we are debating today are significant and important because they have the potential to affect the lives of literally hundreds of thousands of people.

Government Orders

The government has attached to its budget implementation bill, amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. These amendments would give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration unilateral authority to determine priorities for processing immigration applications and requests.

Make no mistake, this will be a very significant change to our immigration system.

Instead of visa officers following rules, procedures and policies, we will essentially invest in the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the power to decide who enters Canada and who does not with no oversight or accountability.

The bill would penalize those who have played by the rules, those who have submitted their application, paid their fees and sat on waiting lists, in some cases, for many years. However, they now may see later applicants move ahead of them. This can only be described as queue jumping and will actually increase the time they spend languishing on waiting lists.

In the last election, the Conservatives made all sorts of promises to increase accountability and transparency for a better and fairer Canada. If anyone ever needed an example of the government doing the precise opposite of these commitments, Bill C-50 is that example. In fact, the bill actually removes the assurance that every application will receive due process before being returned.

These amendments attempt to create the perception that the Conservative government is trying to reduce the immigration application backlog which now sits at about 900,000. Although reducing the backlog and preventing future backlogs is a laudable goal, they would be better served by hiring additional visa officers.

The solutions offered in Bill C-50 would present numerous challenges for prospective newcomers to Canada.

I have received numerous letters from concerned citizens and organizations in my riding of Davenport expressing concerns about Bill C-50 for the city of Toronto and for the entire country. Many of them have brought to my attention the fact that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration would also be given the power to limit the humanitarian and compassionate categories under this legislation.

This is truly disconcerting for the temporary visa workers who come to Canada to fill labour shortage gaps and who, undoubtedly, would use this channel for pursuing family reunification. This is true for my riding of Davenport and for the city of Toronto, which is more than ever dependent on the immigration community to help with our labour shortages.

Morteza Jafarpour, executive director of the Settlement and Integration Services Organization, stated:

An immigrant here without his family sends his money home. With his family here, they have to buy groceries, goods and houses.

I could not agree more with this statement as it also demonstrates the common misconception that appears to be the belief of the Conservatives: that the family and humanitarian categories do not contribute to the economic growth of our country.

Government Orders

The Conservatives are once again playing politics by making these immigration amendments a matter of confidence by including them in Bill C-50, budgetary legislation. I firmly believe that these critical immigration reforms deserve to be fully debated as a separate matter from Bill C-50 so that it can be studied in Parliament through the appropriate channels.

I encourage the government to reconsider its approach to immigration reform. Action needs to be taken to renew our immigration system. However, if we are to be successful, we need to be inclusive. We need proper consultation and review. More than anything else, we need a system that is fair and based on the rule of law and upon policy rather than the whim of the minister of citizenship and immigration of the day.

However, immigration is not the only important thing at stake in this bill.

The greater Toronto area is the home of one in six Canadians. When we consider this reality, it is certainly of concern that the proposed changes do nothing to specifically recognize the unique importance of the city of Toronto and the province of Ontario.

• (1300)

As Toronto and Ontario struggle through a manufacturing sector crisis and the global economy faces a recession, we need the federal government to play its part in helping us meet these challenges.

The finance minister has responded to these challenges by consistently criticizing the Ontario government's financial policies. As with any challenge, the greatest chance of success comes not from confrontation and unnecessary verbal barbs, but from cooperation and mutual respect.

Not only does the bill fail to address Toronto's present economic concerns, it also hurts education, the key to our future economic success. Sadly, ignoring education has become a pattern of the government.

In 2006, the government walked away from the federal-provincial child care agreement. These agreements were a major step forward for families in Canada. They ensured that child care would be more affordable for all Canadians and certainly more available.

For the past year, students, parents and members of Parliament have been calling for the renewal of the millennium scholarship fund, an innovative and effective initiative of the previous Liberal government. The program set aside significant long term funding to help students pay for post-secondary education. Rather than renew this independent and long term program, the government has simply rolled it into a ministry program and committed funding for only a few years.

Perhaps most shockingly, the government is using the bill to strip the RESP program of recent Liberal amendments that would help families save for their children's education, much as they save for their retirement.

The contrast is clear when we review the facts. The previous Liberal government created child care agreements with the provinces to help Canadian families. The Liberals set up the millennium scholarship fund. The Liberals worked with members of Parliament

from all parties to pass an important education tax credit that would have helped parents save for their children.

Liberals believe in cooperation, consultation and fair programs. The same cannot be said of the approach of the current government.

I must say that the content of Bill C-50 and the manner in which it has been presented to the House is becoming a trend for the government. It is a method of operation that does not lend itself to constructive review and debate. It is a manner of conduct that is, quite frankly, disrespectful to this institution and to our democratic traditions.

The bill's back door approach to immigration, disregard for Toronto and Ontario and failure to address education is a serious concern. Canadians deserve better than this.

• (1305)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know it was difficult for the member for Davenport to speak over the heckling by government members on the other side but he gave a very well thought-out speech.

I just want to know if the member for Davenport would agree with me that it is the tactic of—

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am just wondering whether the rules of the House permit an indirect accusation of people not being truthful. The member referred to the heckling on this side of the House when in fact there was none.

The Deputy Speaker: We will let the two comments stand and return to the hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, if you want me to name the hecklers, I can certainly do so because it was very loud from the other side at the beginning of the speech.

The member for Davenport gave a well thought-out speech on the tactic that the government is using here to insert draconian immigration measures into a budget bill to avoid debate.

However, with the heckling and some of the other tactics by the government, is it not true, I would ask the member for Davenport, that the government attacks rather than explains itself? We are seeing that on the Wheat Board, the immigration bill, on the trusts the Conservatives have set up and on the farm issues.

I wonder if the member would want to comment on the fact that it is the tactic of the government to go as far as attack personalities to avoid getting in-depth into the issues so that the people of Canada cannot really understand what the government is trying to do.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I quite agree with the comments of the member for Malpeque and his assessment of what took place. It was extremely difficult to say what I had to say, what I thought was very important to my constituents and my city of Toronto when there was constant heckling from the government benches. In many ways it is an attempt to silence members of the House, to prevent them from saying what they feel is important to their constituents, the citizens of this country.

Government Orders

I said over and over again in my speech that the immigration policy being put forward by the government in Bill C-50 is being brought in through the back door. We need to have immigration reform. I am one of those who has always felt that there are things in the immigration system that need to be reformed. We do need a study of immigration policies. We need to hear from the public. I find it highly regrettable that the government has actually attached this to a budget vote and made it a vote of confidence.

• (1310)

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Davenport that the labour shortage in Toronto is important. That is exactly what Bill C-50 addresses. I also agree that there is a significant impact on the lives of immigrants. This bill will make that impact much better.

The Conservative government brought in the last remaining residents who would join their families. The Liberals did away with it. The Liberals also brought in the \$975 landing fee and then they opposed the reduction of the same. Right now it takes skilled workers six years and if we do not change the regulation it will take ten years to come in.

They may not agree with the policies and they want to criticize them for the sake of criticism, but I thank them for showing their confidence in the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party by supporting all our budgets and everything else. However, how does the member justify keeping people in their countries so that they are not able to come to Canada? He may not care for them, but does he not at least care for the Canadian economy? Does he not agree that a 20% to 40% faster reunification of families is a good thing for the country? His own deputy leader agreed that the Liberals did not get it done on immigration. I would like to hear his comment on that as well.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, there is a point here that is missing, that if we are talking about immigration reform, there is in fact a need for it, the need for a proper study and proper process to do it. Should it come through a budget bill? I do not think so. I think even my hon. colleague would agree that this is terrible and bad judgment on the government's part. It is bad politics in fact to tie immigration reform to a budget bill and make it a vote of confidence. The government so wants to be defeated, it is actually becoming quite laughable, because it attaches everything to a vote of confidence. I do not think this is the way that Parliament should work. It certainly is a waste of our time. It is a waste of the resources that we could be putting forward in a more effective way.

If we are going to have immigration reform, we need to do it in a cooperative way. We need to make sure that it is also done in a correct way. I do not agree with the way in which it has been handled by the government and I think most Canadians do not agree with it.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill. I will use my time to speak generally of my opposition to both the Conservatives' and the Liberals' policies since they appear to form a majority government as it concerns this bill. I am also going to take some time to identify some of the glaring gaps that I have seen in the bill.

As I listened to the debate last week, I was struck by the new Liberal MP for Toronto Centre's somewhat arrogant comments that

New Democrats are against companies making profit. Maybe that is what he believed when he was premier of Ontario and that is what gave them the enormous success they had, or perhaps as a new member he is just trying to explain why he switched parties. Whatever the case may be, the comments made by the member certainly do not represent the beliefs of the NDP.

In my community of Victoria I have had the opportunity to work with a large number of young business entrepreneurs and established businesses. I have wholeheartedly supported and encouraged them in many ways to continue their successful initiatives.

We on this side of the House support responsible governance, offering a triple bottom line approach to government policy. That is largely absent from the policies of the Liberals and the Conservatives as is evidenced in this bill.

Tax incentives to large oil and gas companies like accelerated capital allowance have been an intrinsic part of the Liberals' and Conservatives' policies. What we do not support is the focus on corporate welfare that has characterized the economic policies of both parties.

When the Liberals say that contrary to the Conservatives they balance social and economic policies, how is it then that an estimated 3.4 million Canadians, about one in 10 people, now live in poverty? How is it that about 800,000 of them are children? Why is it that more Canadians each year are reduced to holding precarious jobs, sometimes two or three jobs at the same time just to make ends meet?

Other pertinent and pressing questions for Liberal and Conservative members of this House include why is there still no nationwide system of affordable child care in Canada? Why have university fees skyrocketed out of control since the early 1990s? Why has our environment continued to suffer degradation with the sharp increase in pollutants and toxins and a rise in greenhouse gas emissions?

The answer is that all these societal problems are the product of years of single bottom line thinking. It is not that the New Democrats are against corporate profits, but rather it is that we believe in a triple bottom line approach integrating social, economic and environmental factors.

I would also like to consider some of the specifics of this budget implementation bill. In giving \$60 billion worth of tax cuts, mostly to large corporate interests, the Conservative government has robbed the cupboard bare. With an economic downturn lurking over our shoulder, the federal government has seriously compromised its ability to help Canadians weather the impending storm.

Government Orders

We had high hopes, for example, of seeing significant changes in the area of post-secondary education before the release of budget 2008. We are pleased to see that the government did establish the first Canada-wide student grant program. However, many fundamental structural problems with the current system of post-secondary education have not even been considered or addressed.

There is nothing to suggest that the government has acknowledged the crushing levels of debt faced by young graduates. As a result of the deregulation of tuition fees throughout the 1990s, many young students and graduates are disappointed that the government has not even reduced student loan interest by a token 1%, not even to give them the nod that this is a problem that is putting them in debt and seriously impacting their life choices as they set out in life and in their careers.

• (1315)

We are pleased, though, that this bill acknowledges the challenges faced by part time students and seeks in some small measure to remedy them.

We have also noted that the statements of student loan accounts will now be available online. However, this measure should never have been in question since it is the right of every borrower to have a clear statement of how much is owed. Interestingly, this has been denied to students. They have had difficulty finding out how much they owe.

Again on post-secondary education issues, although the bill deals with severe permanent disability, it still makes no mention of what has been acknowledged as a policy gap, something called “episodic disability”, such as mental illness or cancer, illnesses that are clearly debilitating but do not necessarily fall under the definition of “permanent disability”. We know that their lack of ability to access relief makes their difficulties even more severe.

There is also no mention whatsoever of a student loan ombudsman. This would have been an easy measure for the government to take, a position which the NDP and many student groups have been calling for.

In all, this bill provides a small measure of progress while neglecting some of the most important issues facing students today.

Another issue is housing. In my region housing prices have gone through the roof and have left many people under-housed or on the verge of homelessness. The gap in this bill with respect to housing is absolutely unexplainable. Cities are experiencing serious funding shortfalls in dealing with the lack of housing. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that it will take an injection of \$3.35 billion annually to end homelessness, build new affordable housing units and rehabilitate and renovate existing units.

The federal government must be present at the table to discuss a long term national housing strategy. Otherwise, cities that do take measures to address their housing problems could find themselves overwhelmed by people from another region. This highlights the need for the national government to be at that table.

I would also like to briefly talk about the environment.

The federal government has adopted a business as usual approach to the most serious problem we have ever faced, that is, climate change. Carbon sequestration, which is mentioned in the budget implementation bill, is certainly part of the solution but it is simply not enough.

In this budget bill, the government could have established targets, for example, to retrofit thousands of homes and buildings to allow Canadians to make the necessary changes to adapt to current environmental realities.

It is not only a question of inadequate policies, but the government is taking us in the wrong direction. We have been embarrassed internationally by the government's inability to take up the challenge on basic human water rights. Canada emerged as the pivotal nation behind recent manoeuvres to block the United Nations Human Rights Council from recognizing water as a basic human right according to international observers.

That is where this government is taking us, and that is unacceptable. I hope that it will go back to the drawing board, listen to Canadians and come up with real solutions, which Canadians have been waiting for on these issues.

• (1320)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are some good things for the north in the budget, but there are two problems.

One is that the Prime Minister promised two icebreakers to the north and has totally broken that promise. It looks like it may get one many years down the road. The second problem is in the budget implementation bill, Bill C-50, it explains that police and transit will be allocated on a per capita basis, with about \$160,000 for each territory. How many policemen with their attendant costs could we hire? We could hire maybe one or two at most in a territory as big as any country in Europe.

Could the new EI fund invest in certain things? I have heard concerns about that. Will the member follow in what that fund invests? Also, now the Bank of Canada can have more liberal investments. Is she concerned about what those investments might be?

Does she think the government ever expects to get another vote from Ontario after owing it hundreds of millions of dollars, allocating it less seats than is fair in its allocation proposal, implying Ontarians are the little people of Confederation and suggesting that Ontario is the worst place in which invest? It is incredible. The Premier of Ontario is not the only premier to be upset. Other premiers are also very angry.

Finally, everyone admits, even the Conservatives, that there are major changes in immigration. Does the member think it is enough in the budget bill for the government to say it is changing the Immigration and Refugee Act to improve and speed up the application process? Everybody agrees that these major changes should have been explained to Canadians.

Government Orders

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if I can answer all my colleague's questions in the time I have left, but I will at least deal with the employment insurance and immigration questions, which are very significant ones.

We all know that \$57 billion have disappeared into general revenue, while the criteria for eligibility have been tightened progressively, to the point where workers cannot claim employment insurance. The new agency the government would create would do nothing to increase accountability. In fact, it would undermine the principles of parliamentary accountability for employment insurance.

The NDP does agree, and has long agreed as a party, that EI should be separate from general accounts. In fact, I believe a number of bills and recommendations have been made to that effect in the House by some of my colleagues who have worked on this issue. It is not yet clear how the government would structure this new agency or how representative it would be.

On the immigration issue, this is a very serious concern to the NDP. First, hiding this major change in the budget bill was really a show of lack of respect in the House. It also would give the minister or cabinet discretionary powers for decision making behind closed doors on setting priorities, a responsibility that should rightly belong in the House. It is very worrisome if this is allowed to proceed. In fact, my colleagues and I will not allow this change to proceed.

• (1325)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to the budget bill as it relates to values behind decisions that are made and how they relate to the city of Surrey, which is now 400,000 people.

I talked with officials of the city of Surrey before the budget was brought down. I asked them what they saw as being legitimate needs in Surrey, things for which they had asked the federal government, things that would make a significant difference in the quality of life of the near 432,000 people of Surrey. Incidentally, we have more babies every day at Surrey Memorial Hospital than I think any other hospital in Canada. There were a number of things both for B.C. and Surrey that were particularly important, but we did not see them in the budget.

As always, we wonder whether people who prepare the budgets can see south of the Fraser River. In this case, let me use a couple of examples.

The city of Surrey is a growth city both residentially and business-wise. It was very important for it to have transportation so people could either live and work in the community of Surrey, or perhaps live somewhere else and work in Surrey, or live in Surrey and work somewhere else.

While there was a significant amount of money for the Skytrain on the north side of the Fraser River, Surrey needed about \$5 billion to invest in a provincial transit plan that would bring transit equality just to Surrey in terms of the number of buses needed. For a young mom or dad to get their child from Cloverdale to the hospital and to a specialist is truly an all day outing in our community. That money was not there. There was no real indication other than a few new buses. That people recognized that the city is big and growing

quickly. It is an economic driver. People need to recognize the kind of transportation needed for a city of Surrey's size. It also has a new university.

Surrey is quite a wonderful and interesting city. It is very urban and residential. There is lot of industry, but we are also very blessed to have a large amount of agricultural land reserve. We desperately needed and asked for infrastructure dollars from the federal government for flood work. Money needs to be spent on dikes to protect the riverbanks so farmers' fields will not be flooded. That money is not there either.

It is as if a message has been given to Surrey that the government has recognized other people, but Surrey is still this little growing community and it does not think that it deserves that kind of money.

In terms of policing and what that means to the city of Surrey, the 2,500 new police officers who we keep waiting to see, the budget states they are to be front line officers. The city of Surrey, the city of Delta and others have spoken very strongly of their needs. We could all use more police officers everywhere, but in the Lower Mainland we have a number of integrated teams, drug teams, gang teams, homicide teams and child exploitation teams. We need the dollars to support those teams so they can do their work.

It is as if the federal government is saying that it knows better, that these officers should be used as front line officers and the integrated teams can find money wherever they can. However, much of the Lower Mainland has said that those integrated teams work well and it needs more support for them. We have not seen that.

• (1330)

It is a very small program, but the federal government has put money into it before but has decided not to do it this year. It is called SHaRP, or the salmon habitat restoration program. It has employed 180 post-secondary students who have been able to save money to go to post-secondary education or to reduce their enormous debt load. They have done riparian work. They have repaired not only the riverbanks, but the bottoms of the river for the salmon. The program has done superb job. It has been written about across the country. As a result of the federal funding not being there, although it was requested before the budget, it will be unable to function this year in the way that we had hoped. Again, it is another example of being unable to see the local needs or having someone in Ottawa make a decision about what the local needs might be.

People across the country talk about homelessness. The issue really is not homelessness. The issue is where do people live long term. We can build more homeless shelters, and I have no doubt that we will and that they will be full. However, where do people go when they leave a homeless shelter? There is no such thing as affordable market housing in the city of Surrey, where an average apartment is \$800 to \$900 a month.

Government Orders

Many people living in our homeless shelters are working full time. They cannot afford to pay rent in the city of Surrey. They live in a homeless shelter. They get up in the morning, go to work, work all day, do something for a couple of hours until the shelter opens, then they sleep at the shelter, sometimes sitting up, and go back to work in the morning.

It is not that these people are not trying; they are. Until the federal government looks at a national housing strategy, not homeless strategy, we will simply build more homeless shelters, but people will not in any way be able to put down long term roots either for themselves or, heaven forbid, afford to support a family.

The gasoline tax is now being returned to the city, and I give people credit for that. The Conservative government has done that. It has been lobbied very hard by many cities and by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. It does make a difference.

Other people have spoken on the issue of child care. However, the \$100 a month does not make a difference for child care. One cannot find any kind of child care, one cannot probably even find child care for a day a week or a day and a half a week for \$100 a month. Children who are eight and nine years old come home after school by themselves. Children from zero to five, for whom that \$100 applies, are in child care where parents have no idea what goes on because it is not licensed and they are not sure it is safe. It is the worst feeling people can imagine.

People can say, "Stay home with your children". I am sorry, at \$8.35 an hour to pay rent and buy groceries in an urban area that it is not possible without support for children. This has been completely ignored. Not only is it ignored, but the position the Conservative government has taken about child care has been very deliberate.

• (1335)

We were hoping very much to be able to have some money for the World Police and Fire Games in British Columbia this year. Some of the sites are in Surrey. There was a significant amount of money put into the World Police and Fire Games when they were in Quebec. Now that they are in British Columbia, there is no contribution from the Conservative government for the World Police and Fire Games, which bring almost as many people as the Olympics do.

We also look for support for softwood. People think about manufacturing jobs as being cars, and it is very critical in Ontario, but softwood as well is a manufacturing industry. We saw no money whatsoever for the tragedy of the pine beetle that is destroying the trees in British Columbia forests.

For the city of Surrey and the goals that we had for this budget, the hopes we had for this budget, the lobbying that had gone on from our council, we do not see very many initiatives that will make a difference in the everyday lives of people who live in our city.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the member for Surrey North and she mentioned some of the programs that were cancelled, the SHaRP being one, and the need for a national housing strategy. I do not imagine in her wildest dreams she would ever expect to get that out of the government.

She also mentioned child care, as did the member for Victoria before her. In fact, the member for Victoria, after going on a little

rant against the Liberals, asked the question of why there is no system of early learning and child care in this country. To both members, the answer to why there is no early learning and child care in this country is quite simple.

It was implemented by the last Liberal government. It was signed with the provinces, but the leader of the NDP, in his wisdom, got into bed with the leader of the Conservative Party and decided to bring the government down. That is why there is no early learning and child care. That is why there is no real chance of getting economic and social policy that means something to ordinary people again.

These are the bedfellows of the leader of the NDP over here. He is the leader who made it possible for that crew to form the government. That is the reality.

Why does the NDP not at least be honest and admit the facts, that it is responsible for the lost program in terms of early learning and child care, and indeed for the lost opportunity to have social and economic policies that matter to ordinary people?

• (1340)

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member that when the government was defeated, the Liberals said that they were about to call an election 42 days after that. In 42 days, they were going to do child care? In 42 days?

Hon. Maria Minna: It was already done and signed.

Ms. Penny Priddy: No, it was not. The member is shouting that it was already done.

I carried portfolios for child care through four portfolios in the B.C. cabinet and in point of fact, the Liberals had 13 years in government to put in child care with deep roots and sustainable funding that could not be pulled out by a government that suddenly was defeated 42 days early, so that is absolute nonsense. I have heard all of this before.

The NDP defeated the government and it would have been a miracle, in the time that was left, that all of these things that they talk about wanting to do and believing in would have been done in four, five or six weeks. That is foolish and I do not think people believe that.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. member and of the member who spoke before her, the hon. member for Victoria. I was particularly interested to hear the long list of big programs that they would like to see funded by the federal government.

What I would like to know is when we can expect to see a costing of all of those promises to the dollar, and maybe a list of the tax increases that would be required to pay for those promises.

Government Orders

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mr. Speaker, the programs I spoke of from the city of Surrey were all costed. The costs were submitted to the federal government when the information was submitted. They were not programs outside the realm of the federal government as much of that was infrastructure money. Those programs were all costed when the submissions were made.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today on the budget bill as well as the immigration changes included in the bill.

Let me be clear. We in the NDP were attempting to negotiate with the Liberals to keep them in government with our deal on health care but they refused. We actually extended the opportunity to change the path they were moving toward and they refused to negotiate. They were behaving like the current administration.

When it came time to vote in the House of Commons, there were not enough NDP votes to prop up the Liberals because independent members voted against them. The Liberals cannot even do simple basic math. Surprise, surprise.

Liberals members want to blame everyone else for their misfortunes. At the end of the day, Canadians defeated their administration because they were sick and tired of the constant empty promises and most importantly, because they were sick and tired of the Liberals ignoring the greatest needs of Canadians.

We have been left with the current environment of Liberals continuing to feel sorry for themselves. They expect some empathy from Canadian citizens but at the same time they prop up the current administration for their own benefit without any type of hesitation whatsoever. They have been explicitly doing that under their current leader and will probably still do that under their new slate of leaders now sitting in the House. Liberal self-interest always comes first. Nothing has changed over there.

I once again remind the Liberals that they did not actually work in a forthright way to negotiate a change in health care. They brought themselves down.

I do want to speak to the government's current fiscal plan, which is a clear gutting of Canada's capacity. The slew of corporate tax cuts are once again being supported by the Liberals. This was originally started by the member for LaSalle—Émard, who is always missing from the House of Commons.

• (1345)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member knows that he is not supposed to refer to the presence or particularly the absence of members of the House of Commons. I would ask him not to do that anymore.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I retract that and appreciate that correction.

I do want to talk about what the budget is going to do to the manufacturing sector. We have seen a record number of job losses over the last number of years. It is not a current crisis that has emerged over the last year. This has been several years in the making where we basically witnessed a strategy of saying that reducing tax cuts would actually lead to economic development, and growth and prosperity in the manufacturing sector.

That is not the case because we witnessed the decline of that industry because of a whole series of issues related to trade and tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as unfair competition. It is also reflected in the changing technologies where we have not been supportive and where other countries have done that to ensure they take advantage of it.

What has happened is that we have eroded ourselves. For example, in the automotive sector, we were actually number four in the world in terms of producing and assembling automotive vehicles. Now we are actually down to tenth. The slide will continue as the government continues to negotiate a Korea trade deal which will be at the expense of the automotive industry.

I want to pay particular attention to a couple of aspects of the budget affecting the automotive industry which are very important. The first is the feebate program which we were happy to see cancelled. This eco-feebate program, for those who are not familiar with it, literally saw millions of dollars of Canadians' money wasted, some of it actually going to those who produced automotive vehicles in Japan, Korea and other countries abroad. This program cost \$116 million over two years. We were glad to see this program gutted at the end of the day and cancelled, but I was very disappointed with the Minister of Finance who did not rollover those funds into a specific automotive strategy.

What the Conservatives have done instead is kept the component which has the tax on vehicles which will go to many Canadian manufacturers and that is roughly estimated at \$50 million a year. They cut \$116 million out of automotive, kept in an extra tax, and now have introduced and maintained a current tax on automotive, and from tax rolled out another \$250 million program over five years. It is a \$50 million program over five years. That is just coming from the tax, so they have really gutted the automotive component and support.

This is at a time when even parts manufacturers were looking at some type of an investment strategy. We have seen a lost opportunity with the automotive sector and we are going to completely witness its demise if we do not come out with a practical strategy. The strategy has to come with an investment arm and I would argue it has to be more complicated than what the province of Ontario is suggesting. It has to have greater accountability when it comes to job creation, components to technology as well as accountability.

I would also argue that the federal government is wrong by not having that actual strategy compared, evaluated and supported by a trade strategy. That is very important because the Minister of International Trade is pursuing a deal with South Korea. This is ironically the star candidate from the Liberals who crossed the floor in the House of Commons just after losing out in a general election but winning his seat back.

This deal has been condemned unilaterally, just basically across the board by many groups and organizations including the auto industry because there are several factors not taking place in terms of the consideration of how we actually ship vehicles to Korea. We have only a few hundred vehicles that get there, but the Koreans get hundreds of thousands that can be put into the Canadian market. That is not fair. We have to have some sense of balance. With that we are expecting to see some type of change.

Government Orders

Regarding the budget there was no understanding or appreciation with regard to the tool and die, mould making and parts sector. We have seen that the capital cost reduction allowance is going to be diminished by the government over the next three years. We fought hard on this issue at the industry committee. We actually committed to work together and created a report with over 20 different recommendations, many of which were shelved. However, one of the ones we were pleased about was the capital cost reduction allowance.

The government only came in with terms of a two-year program, but it was not sufficient because many decisions had already been made about investment at that point in time. What we want is the third, the fourth and the fifth year. So we went for two years which is only a small window but it was helpful to some degree. We were appreciative of that.

There were actual projects that got underway that are very helpful. But the fact of the matter is that the Conservatives are now phasing out this strategy, so what we will see is a devolution of this as an opportunity to invest back into Canada.

I do not care what the personalities are, but I am sick and tired of listening to the battle going on between the province of Ontario and the federal government. It seems to be a war of personalities more than actually working to create an opportunity for economic development.

• (1350)

That apparently goes back 10 years, but it does not matter, because the fact of the matter is that we need an automotive strategy. For many years, we in the NDP have been proposing that through a green transportation strategy. We would like to see movement on that. The budget does not do it. Instead, we see a complete erosion of the fiscal capacity of Canada, to the point that when we have to respond next time, it is going to be more challenging.

Hence, one of the key elements that we see as taking advantage of people and as egregious is the fact that the government is changing the employment insurance system to basically rob workers and employers of all the money in contributions they have put in over the years. From the previous administration, and going back several years, we know that the fund is up around \$57 billion in terms of employment insurance. Now that system will be basically robbed and the government will be putting in a \$2 billion program.

I am from a city that has been struggling with the recovery of manufacturing and trying to go forward, and I can tell members that retraining and opportunity are very important. With this employment insurance decision, when areas have greater losses of jobs and there will be a squeeze on the funds, I am willing to bet the number one thing that will happen is that we will see a reduction of workers' hours and a reduction of eligibility.

It will be just as it is now. Many people who pay into the system can never take advantage of it because they are working at part time jobs or they do not have enough consecutive weeks. We see it every day in my constituency. People do not meet the qualifications any more because the bar has been set far higher than the hours they can work or achieve in the current market. That is wrong, because people

need an opportunity to be retrained and they need to have faith and hope that supports will be there for them and their families.

As for what is happening right now, we only have to look at a few industries to see examples. A lot of people just assume that we should go high tech, that we should do the high end of things and make sure that we will be the best in the world. I can tell members that this is happening right now in our tool and die and mould-making sector. Windsor and Essex County are the best in the world, there is no doubt about it, but they are significantly challenged because of the lack of automotive decision making and the procurement decisions that have happened, as well as being blocked from other markets, intellectual property theft, and a whole series of things.

All we have to do is tour some of these plants and we literally will see that work that used to be done in this area, which was the best in the world, is now sent overseas to China and to other places, and sometimes it has to be sent back to be fixed at our own plants here.

However, here is what that has done. It has meant layoffs for workers in our community, workers who have good skills and abilities unmatched across the world. Some people think we can just lower the wages by a couple of dollars, but that will not make a difference at all. We could lower it to \$10 an hour on a job. If we do not have access to the market, it will not make a difference.

That is just like the corporate tax cuts we see right now. As tool and die and mould-making companies are struggling to get buy, a reduction in taxes does not help them. They need targeted, specific, developed plans. One plan, for example, needs to deal with some of their funding. When they make arrangements with the auto sector, they do not get paid for a year or a year and a half for their actual projects, so they have a problem getting access to capital from banks and large loan centres, or they have to pay extra interest, which becomes an inefficiency.

We need the federal government and the province to work together on a strategy that eliminates this type of non-cooperation with regard to the fiscal arrangements and also to make sure that there are going to be supports there, so that when workers are the best in the world and are actually trained, they will have access to the markets that are being penetrated over here.

I have to say that I cannot support the budget. There is a whole series of reasons behind that. It is not just the economic sector and the manufacturing sector, but I want to be very clear about what will happen if we do not seize the opportunity. Despite the fact that we have a lot of unemployment and despite the fact that a lot of change is happening, if there is a real interest in being involved with this, there can be significant change.

Canadians have done their part. The people in my constituency of Windsor West have shown consistently that they are the best in the world in terms of producing and manufacturing automobiles and all the component parts. They win awards on a routine basis. I am very proud of their accomplishments.

However, they cannot do it alone. They need fair trading practices and a government which recognizes that other countries are doing these things at their expense. Even the countries next door, such as the United States, for example, have several favourable clauses under our NAFTA agreement that protect their industries at the expense of Canadians.

We cannot pretend that this is going to go away. We have to deal with it. This budget does not do that.

• (1355)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct when he talks about the United States protecting some of its industries when it comes to free trade talks. The hon. member will know that in every free trade agreement the United States has entered since 1924 it has always exempted shipbuilding and marine services from those free trade talks.

In fact, when the United States negotiated with Canada in the 1980s, one of the first things it exempted was shipbuilding and marine services, yet we did not do that in our country and now we see the result, which is the decline of the industry in our country. Even though there has been a report sitting on the desk of the Minister of Industry since 2001 and we have had four ministers since then, we still have not seen any movement on this file.

I wonder if the hon. member would like to elaborate. He comes from an auto area and I come from a shipbuilding area, but the problems are literally the same in regard to the lack of action and planning by the government.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to be in Halifax and tour the shipyards on a couple of occasions. I talked with the workers there and I can tell members that we have the best in the world here. I have heard a few Conservatives say today that we must have freedom of movement of labour and that those individuals there should basically pick up and ship out.

However, what I can tell members is that if we do not change the way we trade and the way we actually have accountability, we will continue to lose out on good, skilled people and also on the infrastructure that is important for our national security. For heaven's sake, how can a country like Canada, from coast to coast to coast with so much water, not have the capacity to build and maintain some of its own ships? That we are going to have to farm this out is unacceptable.

I know that the hon. member has fought for this, but it needs to be understood, not only in terms of an issue related to employment, training and the capacity of the country to actually be involved in something, but also because it is a national security issue. We must have our shipyards for Canadians to protect Canadian interests.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things we have long known across this country when communities are in difficult economic times, and I would certainly describe the city of Windsor and the member's riding in that way from the number of manufacturing jobs lost, is that we most frequently see an increase in partner abuse and an increase in child abuse.

Statements by Members

Could the member tell me if that in fact is happening in his city and if indeed there are services being provided, or if services have been cut back and will not meet the needs of those people?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it is always a challenge for social services during a downturn. There is no doubt about it.

Ironically, with this budget the Conservative government is actually reducing what we can get on a return for a charitable donation. Because the Conservatives have tied it to the income tax bracket, what has happened is that the for amount of money we give to charities we are going to get less back this year than we did last year. The government has not decoupled that. Basically what it is going to do to Canadians is that as we give to charity, we are going to get less back, so it is a double whammy.

I can say that when it comes to our city and area we also have been hurt by the thickening of the Canada-U.S. border. We have witnessed a loss in trade for some of the tourism as well as some of the other activities for which Americans came over to Canada. They would visit and partake not only in the lifestyles but also in commerce and social functions. That has actually put other charities at risk. That is a shame.

I have a private member's bill that actually looks at reforming the charitable tax act of Canada. I wish the government would adopt that as opposed to a general corporate tax cut, because that would put more money back in people's pockets and more money into charities and not for profit organizations such as the United Way and the VON, which do good work for Canadians as opposed to having that money sent overseas.

The Deputy Speaker: That will bring to an end the five minute question and comment period and bring us fortuitously to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our ability to attract the best and brightest from around the world is a great advantage for Canada, for our economy, and for our way of life, so I am glad that our government is taking great strides to get more skilled workers here sooner and reunite immigrant families faster.

When the Liberals were in office, Canada's immigration queue went from 50,000 to 800,000 people. Skilled workers and family members who would bring great advantage to Canada were facing a six year wait time and just giving up on Canada.

Again it is a Liberal problem we are going to fix, just like we cut the \$975 Liberal landing fee in half and righted the historic wrong of the Chinese head tax.

Our government is acting to help newcomers succeed. We are going to reduce that backlog so more skilled workers and families can build a great future here in Canada.

Statements by Members

●(1400)

10,000 TREES FOR THE ROUGE

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sunday, April 27, marks the 19th anniversary of 10,000 Trees for the Rouge, a community initiative to reforest the Rouge Valley.

Covering 47 square kilometres in the eastern part of the greater Toronto area on lands that border the surrounding municipalities, including part of my riding, the Rouge Valley is an important green space in the most urbanized area of Canada. So far, the 10,000 Trees campaign has reforested over 140 acres of land.

Last year, 2,000 people volunteered to preserve the beauty of the Rouge through the planting of 5,000 trees. In previous years, my wife, children and I planted trees alongside many of my constituents.

This being one of the largest single-day tree planting initiatives in Canada, the volunteers for 10,000 Trees deserve our appreciation, recognition and many thanks.

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*[Translation]***SOCIAL HOUSING**

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after UNESCO, it falls to the Union des municipalités du Québec to denounce the social housing situation. In a news release, UMQ stresses the importance of increasing the amount of affordable housing for families, seniors and people with specific housing needs.

Building community housing not only improves housing conditions, but also, and above all, improves living conditions for low-income families.

The Union des municipalités du Québec points out how urgent it is that we construct this type of housing in urban areas. In urban areas, the less fortunate have more difficulties in finding adequate housing. By supporting social housing, we support the population in small municipalities.

It is imperative that the Conservative government use part of the CMHC surplus to build affordable social housing.

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*[English]***CHUCK BAILEY**

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the most important thing a person can do is make a difference in the life of a child.

Chuck Bailey died on March 20 of this year after a lifetime of making a difference, dedicating more than 50 years to little league baseball as a pioneer of the Whalley Little League.

Chuck built a league that today is famous across the country. Over the years, he coached two Whalley teams to the Little League World Series and helped win 160 championships.

Chuck built more than a league. He built a family. Many of the youth he coached are themselves coaches today. In 2006 Chuck said:

I love the game. It's nice to see the smiles on the kids' faces. And when you see their tears you feel like crying too because they try so hard.

At Chuck's service, people wore their ball caps and jackets and afterward went to the ballpark, sat in the bleachers and ate hamburgers and smokies. How fitting.

I know Chuck will be with us when we throw out the first pitch of the 2008 little league season on Saturday, and we will all tip our hats to him.

* * *

JUNO AWARDS

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night in Calgary, comedian Russell Peters hosted the 37th annual Juno Awards. This annual event celebrates the best in Canadian music, and do we ever have a lot to celebrate.

Whether an emerging artist or an international superstar, from this year's Hall of Fame inductees, Triumph, to last night's big winners, the artists honoured have one thing in common: they are talent we are proud to call Canadian.

The gathering of all these talented people on the same stage is eloquent testimony to the excellence of their work. The trophies awarded to these artists are undeniable proof of the public's appreciation of them.

I ask members to please join me in congratulating all Juno award winners, nominees and performers. May our Canadian music stars continue to shine brightly both at home and on the international scene.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations made a decision to reinstate David Ahenakew to its senate, in spite of his despicable and hateful remarks about Jews. The Minister of Indian Affairs appropriately expressed disappointment with the federation's decision to reinstate Mr. Ahenakew and stated that the government would be reviewing its funding commitments with the federation. The minister said:

The past comments by this person have been very hurtful and inappropriate and go against absolutely everything that this country stands for.

Past comments by many members of the government have been hateful, inappropriate and go against everything this House stands for, as we saw with one stunning story about the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre regarding hateful comments he made about the gay community in 1991.

On Friday the government House leader said that he believes the matter is closed.

Why is there a double standard? As an article in the Regina *Leader-Post* put it:

At the end of the day, we must be consistent. We can't cherry pick our principles.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

HEALTH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand in the House today to recognize World Health Day. This year's focus is on the adverse effects of climate change on human health.

This government understands that as a northern country Canada is particularly vulnerable to a changing climate. That is why we have invested \$85.9 million in our new adaptation on climate change strategy. Under the strategy we will implement several new initiatives that will complement our Turning the Corner action plan that will aggressively combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

For 13 years the previous Liberal government failed every day. Let there be no doubt that on this World Health Day and every day this Conservative government is serious about improving the health and the environment of Canadians. I am proud to say that we are getting the job done.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC COMMUNITY CREDIT NETWORK

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Réseau québécois du crédit communautaire is a network of 24 organizations from across Quebec. A good number of its clients are women and people under the age of 35. More than 50% of the clients of the organizations in this network have no jobs and even no income.

Community credit is an innovative way to meet the needs of the unemployed, of people receiving social assistance, and of low-income workers who want to take their place in society. Community credit does not simply fill the gap left by financial institutions. It is primarily a development resource that enables marginalized people to access funding for individual and group business projects, or for self-employment.

The Bloc Québécois would like to acknowledge community credit, which is part of solidarity financing in Quebec and is an indispensable complement to traditional types of financing.

* * *

[English]

JAKE WARREN

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour Mr. Jake Warren who passed away last Tuesday, and to recognize his long service to Canada.

Known as “Mr. Trade and Commerce”, Mr. Warren was one of Canada's most important public servants of the past four decades.

Mr. Warren served for our nation in World War II and then as a senior official in the public service. In 1964 Mr. Warren was appointed deputy minister of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce. He went on to serve as high commissioner to Britain, ambassador to the United States and as ambassador to the Tokyo round of the world trade negotiations.

Mr. Warren was instrumental in shaping Canada's most important trading partnership, our trade relations with the United States.

He received the Public Service Outstanding Achievement Award in 1975 and was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1982.

In recognition of his important contributions to Canada, I ask that all members of the House join me in paying tribute to this devoted servant of our beloved nation.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of World Health Day. This year's theme focuses on the protection of global health from the adverse effects of climate change.

[Translation]

The effects of climate change on human health are becoming increasingly clear. More and more people are dying from extreme weather events.

[English]

The variation, incidence and spread of diseases are more likely to be affected by changing weather patterns. These impacts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including the young, elderly, medically infirm, poor, and isolated people.

[Translation]

I therefore call on the government to become a proactive participant in efforts to address climate change in order to safeguard the health of our citizens.

* * *

●(1410)

QUEBEC CITY ARMOURY

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec City, a UNESCO designated world heritage site, has just suffered a terrible tragedy. Its historic armoury, an architectural jewel and guardian of the military tradition of the Voltigeurs, the oldest French-speaking unit in the Canadian army, was lost to fire during the night of April 4, 2008.

The armoury was built in 1887 and declared a national historic site in 1986. The loss of the armoury is a very serious matter for this government and we believe that heritage remains a key factor in the management of our nation's affairs.

I would like to commend the remarkable work of the brave firefighters who battled the flames and helped the members of the museum's conservation team ensure the safeguarding of over 90% of the artifacts.

This government recognizes the immeasurable value of this historic armoury and remains committed to action, whose ultimate aim will always be the protection and preservation of our national heritage.

Statements by Members

[English]

LOUIS HARRIS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 22, 2008 at the age of 87 Louis Harris passed away peacefully. Mr. Harris was a proud Canadian who served in World War II with the Essex Scottish Regiment.

During his service in Normandy, Louis was injured when he was struck by shrapnel at multiple parts of his body, but was saved from greater harm as one piece was blocked by the book *Jewish Thoughts*, which his grandmother had given to him on his departure from home. It was tucked into his breast pocket for safe keeping.

When Louis returned he continued his service to Canada by volunteering all his life. As a member of the Royal Canadian Legion he was a founding member and past president of Branch 578, honorary life member of both the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars and was a recipient of many awards including the prestigious Palm Leaf.

Louis was a loyal member of CAW local 444 working to provide for his family and community.

Louis was married to Mary, née DesRosiers, for 61 years, and the cherished father of Linda, Bonnie, Pam, Wayne, the late David, Gale, Danny, Barbara and Patrick. He is also survived by his 12 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

My condolences to Mary and all the Harris family. I will miss Louis' smile, laugh and determined resolve to build a better world. He did his part through and true.

* * *

COMMUNITY MICROSKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Since 1984 the Community MicroSkills Development Centre has provided settlement, training, employment and self-employment services to newcomers with a focus on visible minorities, low income women and youth.

This non-profit charitable organization helps newcomers negotiate the labyrinth of regulations so that they can get their skills recognized. They also encourage people to participate in the community to advance the goals of social and economic equality.

May 22 will mark the 11th anniversary of the MicroSkills Annual Awards Gala which will celebrate women entrepreneurs, corporate partnership and leadership among women and youth.

I encourage all members of the House to join me in recognizing the vital role the MicroSkills organization plays in encouraging newcomers to become active participants and productive contributors to Canadian society.

* * *

[Translation]

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives have shown that all their talk about open federalism hides a harsh reality. The Minister of

Finance and the Conservative members from Quebec are getting ready to strip Quebec of its financial powers by imposing a single, centralized securities commission, against the unanimous will of the National Assembly. What hypocrisy.

By voting against assistance for the manufacturing and forestry sectors, against assistance for unemployed workers affected by the crisis, against increased funding for our universities and against Quebec's economy and jurisdictions, the Conservative members from Quebec are proving once again that they are condemned to remain forever in opposition, forever in opposition to Quebec's interests.

Watching the Conservatives cave in whenever it comes time to defend Quebec's interests only confirms that I made the right choice when I joined the Bloc Québécois.

* * *

OUTAOUAIS TOURISM AWARDS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to attend the 23rd Outaouais tourism awards gala last Saturday.

I would like to congratulate the winners: Ferme aux Saveurs des Monts, Aux Quatre Jéudis, Théâtre des Quatre Sœurs, Fortune Aerial Experience, the Gatineau Loppet, Edelweiss, the Gatineau Hot Air Balloon Festival, Camping Base Macrocarpa, Auberge du Draveur, Fairmont Le Château Montebello, Maison La Crémaillère, Cabines de la Chute, Ms. Danielle Dupont, the sommelier at the Casino du Lac-Leamy, Ms. France Boisvenue of the Château Logue, Ms. Francine Carle of the Auberge du Draveur and Ms. Andrée Dompierre, who received the 2008 tourism personality of the year award.

Kudos and sincere congratulations to all those who will represent the Outaouais at the Quebec tourism awards on May 9. Long live the Outaouais tourism association, its president, Mr. Jean Thiffault, and the entire team.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 14 you gave clear direction to the House for what you called serial anarchy within our parliamentary committees. In particular, you noted a tyranny of the majority overriding the correct rulings of committee chairs.

Our procedure committee already had its chairman removed because he said no to a political witch hunt. The new chair was elected against his will by a tyranny of the majority.

Now at justice committee, a coalition of Liberals and separatists is threatening to remove another chairman because of his correct ruling on a motion. Again, it is tyranny of the majority.

Their own Liberal chairman made an identical ruling on this matter in another committee but they are sending in the wrecking ball to justice committee. The opposition has already shut down four justice committee meetings because they refuse to accept your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

These bully tactics must end. I ask all members to respect your ruling, get down to the business they were sent here to do, not destroy our parliamentary committees and not—

The Speaker: Order. Oral questions. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as much as the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre had no choice but to apologize for his disgraceful comments, the Prime Minister today has no choice but to demonstrate to Canadians that his government rejects those disgraceful comments.

I will give the Prime Minister a chance to do the right thing today. Will the Prime Minister replace the member as parliamentary secretary, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, who, close to some two decades ago, made some completely unacceptable comments. He has given an unqualified apology and has clear, heartfelt remorse for those actions.

I believe, when such an apology and remorse is sought from an individual member, the generous and high-minded thing to do is to accept that apology.

* * *

HERITAGE BUILDINGS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, and to remove him as parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

Moving on, the Quebec City armoury, home to Les Voltigeurs, the first French-Canadian regiment, and a building of national architectural significance, the greatest heritage distinction in Canada, was destroyed by fire. Everyone, led by the mayor of Quebec City, is calling on the Prime Minister to commit to rebuilding the armoury without waiting for the results of an investigation—since there is sure to be one. Everyone is calling for this, except the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Will the Prime Minister commit to rebuilding the armoury in Quebec City as quickly as possible, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the armoury, built in 1887, is one of the most important historic monuments in Quebec City. My office has already contacted the office of the mayor of Quebec City. We have indicated that we are determined to explore every possibility to rebuild this building,

Oral Questions

which is such a wonderful illustration of the proud military history of Quebec City.

* * *

SEAL HUNTERS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not being asked to explore possibilities, he is being asked to commit to rebuilding the armoury.

Third subject: following the tragedy that cost the lives of four fishers from the Magdalen Islands, the bereaved families of the victims want the truth. They want to understand. The government is offering to have the Coast Guard investigate the Coast Guard.

Will the Prime Minister promise to hold a truly independent investigation or not?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already said yes to the other question. The Leader of the Opposition should accept that answer.

In the meantime, the government has already indicated that there will be a number of investigations into this incident. It is an immense tragedy. These investigations will be independent and the results will be made public.

* * *

● (1420)

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was asked in Bucharest whether he told our allies that our military mission in Kandahar would end in 2011, he replied that they did not ask so he did not tell.

However, the motion passed by Parliament clearly states that the government must notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar in 2011.

Why did the Prime Minister fail to tell our NATO allies in no uncertain terms that the Canadian mission in Kandahar will end in July 2011?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because long before Bucharest our allies were made aware of the position of the Government of Canada and of Parliament on the matter in Afghanistan. They understand exactly the position of the Government of Canada. They do not need to ask.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the same topic, the motion approved by this House also states that this mission will change after 2009 and focus on training and reconstruction.

Has the Prime Minister unequivocally advised our NATO allies that the Canadian mission in Kandahar must change and will change?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before the NATO summit in Bucharest, the government had already indicated to our allies that the parliamentary resolution constituted the government's policy and we will pursue that policy.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his report, John Manley said that the deployment of an additional U.S. 3,200 troops in southern Afghanistan was good news, but that the contribution was inadequate. Ideally, another 1,000 troops are needed, he said. The Prime Minister had made that a firm condition for extending the Canadian mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009.

I would like the Prime Minister to confirm that, as a result of his discussions in Bucharest, there will indeed be 1,000 more troops than there are currently—let me emphasize “currently”—in southern Afghanistan.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the Manley report was tabled our conditions have been clear for extending the mission in Afghanistan. This obviously includes the 1,000 troops. The Americans have decided to provide an additional battalion for the long term.

It is clear. The conditions are clear and it is also clear that the conditions will be met.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 3,200 American soldiers currently serving in southern Afghanistan will be leaving the country in October. As a result, in February 2009, they will be gone and there will be 2,200 fewer soldiers, not 1,000 more.

Can the Prime Minister explain how there could be 1,000 more soldiers if the 3,200 soldiers leave Afghanistan in October?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have clearly stated that, in the long term, we are looking for an additional battalion in partnership with another major country in Afghanistan. The Americans have decided to meet that condition, and it is clear that that condition will be met in Kandahar.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said he is trying to meet that condition. Obviously, this means that it has not yet been met.

All we know is that 3,200 soldiers will be leaving Afghanistan in October. Does he have a guarantee that these 3,200 soldiers will be replaced? If not, then to my way of thinking, there will not be 1,000 more soldiers, but 2,200 fewer soldiers. What sort of guarantee does he have?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot put it any more clearly to the leader of the Bloc. The conditions are clear, and the conditions will be met by the Americans. There will be an additional battalion in Kandahar, and perhaps more, but it is clear that the conditions will be met.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good for the Prime Minister to say it is clear, but all we know officially—and what is clear is usually official—is that these 3,200 soldiers will be leaving the country in October. Has a clear decision been made about replacing them? I would like to have the numbers and dates, and I would like the Prime Minister to tell me—if he knows—that the 3,200 soldiers will not be leaving Afghanistan. All we know is that they will be leaving the country.

Can he deny this information, and Mr. Manley's statements, that these soldiers will be leaving Afghanistan in October? If not, he

should state officially, clearly and publicly who will be replacing them.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that I am being as clear as I can. The fact is that the Americans are going to be there with us in Kandahar and the French are going to send additional forces to Afghanistan.

And the fact is that the Bloc is not going to support this mission. However, this government supports the mission, and our allies are going to help us.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre has offered a sincere and heartfelt apology and we accept the apology for the remarks.

However, it remains true that many across the country, particularly in the gay and lesbian community, have felt hurt by the remarks and, of course, the discussion that is going on.

We really need leadership from the Prime Minister now to send a very strong signal regarding this issue and that there will be consequences when minority communities experience this kind of hurtful behaviour.

Why will the Prime Minister not, as a step, remove the member as a spokesperson for the government in his position as parliamentary secretary?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already indicated, as others in the government have indicated and as the member himself has indicated, the remarks in question were totally unacceptable. The member has taken responsibility for those things that he said a very long time ago. His apology and his remorse were absolutely clear and heartfelt.

Once again, under such circumstances, it is my view that when such an apology is sought, such an apology should be accepted.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, gay and lesbian Canadians know that Conservatives have never supported our full equality. We fear the attitude in question shows their true colours.

The Prime Minister could show leadership. He could add gender identity and expression to the Human Rights Act, overturn an organ donation policy rooted in the fears of the 1990s, adopt and promote the Montreal and Yogyakarta declarations on GLBT rights and restore the court challenges program.

More than words, what action will the Prime Minister take to show that such views are not the position of the Conservative government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a whole range of public policy issues that it may or may not be appropriate to get into at some point. One issue he raised, for instance, was the organ issue. This is a decision not taken by the political wing of the government but taken by those who have regulatory responsibility.

Oral Questions

This government, at all times, promotes and supports tolerance among Canadians of all kinds and we will continue to do so.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced a reform package, she stated that it would help eliminate the backlog. The reality is that the new rules will only apply to applications received on or after February 27, which means they do not directly apply to the backlog.

How could the minister introduce such incredibly flawed legislation that fails to deliver on its original intent and is guaranteed to fail?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are tackling the backlog and we will get it done because we are putting more resources into it: \$22 million over the new two years and then \$37 million a year after that. We are also going to do things better and smarter so that we can process each application faster, get rid of the backlog and achieve our goal of getting more immigrants here and getting them here sooner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the discriminatory reform of the immigration system gives the minister the exclusive power to choose who can enter Canada. The new rules do not directly apply to the backlog.

Could the minister explain how she will use her full powers to determine who will appear on the first list, who will appear on the second list, and who will have the door slammed in their face?

• (1430)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are just fearmongering.

[*English*]

Let me be clear. Instructions issued will set priorities for categories of applicants to be processed, in which only the categories should be done, not individuals. All the instructions will, of course, comply with the charter because that is the law. The minister will not be given any rights under these amendments to pick and choose individuals, to cherry-pick. The minister will deal with categories and will not be allowed to override immigration officers.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend in Montreal, I confirmed with a number of immigration lawyers who feel that Canada is about to make a serious mistake in rushing so quickly through the immigration bill. They need time to consider all the ramifications.

We send our soldiers to Afghanistan to fight, in part, to keep Afghan families together. Would the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration be willing to take the time necessary in this House to consider the serious implications of these changes and ensure that we practise at home what we paid such a dear price for overseas?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week we spent an entire day discussing these amendments. The debates will come forward this week. It will be going to committee. The finance committee will be hearing from

stakeholders on every aspect of this bill. We will be consulting with the provinces, territories and stakeholders before any instructions are issued.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, six months ago in this House members, including the immigration minister, rose and applauded the arrival of my two children from Darfur, and I appreciated it from everyone here. If this law were to go through, thousands of families like mine might never experience the joy of such a moment.

My children are in Ottawa today and for the sake of many like them, will the minister pull these proposals out of the larger bill and let it be debated fully in this House? There is too much at stake here in Canada. It is who we are. Let these families come, minister. Let them come.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, where was that member when we were trying to protect the children of this nation between the ages of 14 and 16 by raising the age of protection? We are working for families. We have already improved the processing times for family reunification by up to 40%. We want to get families reunited faster and more skilled workers here sooner, after the Liberals did nothing for 13 years except balloon the backlog.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORT

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, as was I, and he saw that residents are calling for a public inquiry on the circumstances surrounding the sinking of *L'Acadien II* while it was being towed by the Coast Guard.

It should not be too complicated for the minister to launch an inquiry, since the Transportation Safety Board already has the power to hold public inquiries.

Will the minister commit to holding a public inquiry on the circumstances surrounding the sinking of *L'Acadien II*?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member well knows that there are three inquiries that have already started, one by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, one by the Coast Guard with an independent lead and we announced the name of the leader. Every avenue, every factor that resulted in the accident will be explored and then a comprehensive, thorough study will be carried out by the Department of Transport.

The Quebec government, the local area, everybody accepts that. Let the committees get on with their work.

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this question is more for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Although the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities committed to shedding light on what happened at sea, he did not specify whether the inquiry by the Transportation Safety Board would be public.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities take action and immediately confirm whether a public inquiry on the *L'Acadien II* tragedy will be launched as soon as possible?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member well knows and I will say again, that thorough investigations are under way. It would do the member well, if he wants to represent his people properly, to let the committees get on with their work so that the truth of whatever happened comes out. We will assure him and assure the people that whatever happened in relation to this accident will not only be brought forward but it will be made public.

* * *

*[Translation]***HERITAGE BUILDINGS**

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the aftermath of the terrible tragedy that destroyed the Quebec City armoury, Quebec's premier, Jean Charest, the mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, Parti Québécois member Agnès Maltais, the minister responsible for the Quebec City region, Philippe Couillard, and my Bloc Québécois colleague, the hon. member for Québec, are all appealing to the federal government to take immediate steps to rebuild the armoury.

Knowing that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages wants to wait for the investigation to be completed and that the Prime Minister just told us he will explore any means, I will put my question to the Minister of National Defence. Can he immediately commit to rebuilding the Quebec City armoury?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister indicated that it was a historic monument. However, it is also important to piece together the string of events that led to this tragic

fire. The Prime Minister also indicated that we are prepared to explore every means to proceed with the reconstruction of this heritage building.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, its reconstruction will take time. In the meantime, Quebec City will be celebrating its 400th anniversary.

Can the government tell us what it plans to do to protect the armoury site in the context of the 400th anniversary celebrations?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is only natural that in the context of any action following such an explosion, the municipalities have regulations in place. I understand that Quebec City also has regulations in place. The Canadian government will of course comply with Quebec City's regulations and, specifically, regulations concerning the protection of the public in the immediate area of the explosion.

* * *

*[English]***NATIONAL SECURITY**

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, U.S. law applies to satellites operated by Canadian subsidiaries of U.S. companies and the satellite images belong “exclusively to the U.S. government” for reasons of “national security or foreign policy concerns”.

Does the foreign affairs minister realize that if this sale goes through, the RADARSAT-2 satellite developed by Canadians with Canadian tax dollars can be used by the Americans against Canada's claim to the Northwest Passage?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member wants to do some fearmongering here. The fact of the matter is that this proposed sale is being investigated, is being analyzed by the Minister of Industry. He has made it extremely clear that his final decision on this sale will be made in the best interest of our country. I wish the member would just accept that.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians would accept that if the foreign affairs minister would actually take his responsibilities seriously.

In fact, last week we introduced the foreign affairs minister to Canada's Remote Sensing Space Systems Act, an act for which he himself is responsible. Under this act, the minister must “have regard to national security” in exercising his authority over RADARSAT-2.

Now that we have made the foreign affairs minister aware of his own law, will the minister use his authority to block the transfer of RADARSAT-2 to the Americans?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows full well, the question is premature. The sale of MDA is being reviewed by the Minister of Industry under the Investment Canada Act.

Oral Questions

In my role as foreign affairs minister, I will act with one guiding priority. It is very simple. I will act keeping in mind the protection of Canadian sovereignty.

* * *

• (1440)

[Translation]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when there is a threat of a major company being sold to foreign interests, the workers at that company start to worry. In the case of the sale of MDA, the Conservatives seem to have no concern whatsoever about the workers and their families.

Can the minister assure the workers at MDA that they will not lose their jobs if the company is bought by American interests?

[English]

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has a statutory duty to review all aspects of this proposed sale. The issues that the member raises are part of this analysis. It must be done in a confidential manner. The minister has made it very clear that he will be making a decision later on this month and the member will just have to wait for that.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government's inaction in the possible sale of MDA is quite striking. It is clear that the Conservatives do not know how to protect our space industry of which we are so proud.

Will the minister finally stand up and defend Canada's aerospace industry or will he give in to the Americans, as he did with the ITAR rules?

[English]

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am curious as to how the hon. member is so clear about things when no decision has been made.

Perhaps the hon. member would just wait for the process to work, for the decision to be made, and for the decision to be announced. Then I am sure she will have lots of attacks to make because that is the best thing she can do. She can criticize, complain and carp, but maybe she should wait until there is something to complain about.

* * *

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the last election the Prime Minister recognized the important work undertaken by ACOA and committed to maintaining the budget.

[Translation]

Since 2006, ACOA has invested almost \$500 million in more than 700 economic development projects in Atlantic Canadian communities.

[English]

Recent media stories speculate about ACOA's budget cut in the coming years. Given the importance of this agency to Atlantic Canada, can the minister assure the House the ACOA budget will be maintained as promised?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, this government is very committed to seeing that the Atlantic Canada agency continues to work for Atlantic Canadians, and that the region itself becomes a prosperous have region. That is why we are committed to projects such as the Atlantic gateway which works well with all provinces in Atlantic Canada.

That is why our government announced nearly \$500 million of funding through ACOA for more than 700 economic and community related development projects throughout Atlantic Canada since January 2006.

This is why we are investing in innovation throughout Atlantic Canada, through firms, through universities, and through world class research projects. ACOA is recognized by Statistics Canada as a key contributor to growing R and D in Atlantic Canada.

It is only the member for Kings—Hants—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

* * *

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada today has world class imaging satellite technology with RADARSAT-2. Those stepping up to be heard in opposition to its sale are growing each day. Today the chair of the Ontario Research and Innovation Council told the *Ottawa Business Journal*:

When we lose technology companies [like MDA], it undermines the whole business framework from which new companies can grow.

Can the minister tell this House how innovation in Canada's high tech sector will be helped by allowing the sale of MDA to an American weapons manufacturer?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I really urge members of this House to wait until the process is complete before deciding how to respond. It is foolish and it makes no sense. It does not help Canadians to speculate about what might be if this or if that, when the process is still working. No decision has been made.

I urge members of the House to wait until a decision has been made before they draw any conclusions. I think Canadians deserve at least that.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me ask something concrete. Canada got RADARSAT-2 technology for non-military purposes.

ATK, the U.S.-based company that wants to buy MDA, is a weapons manufacturer, interested in such things as ballistic missile defence.

Oral Questions

With NATO endorsing President Bush's plan for ballistic missile defence, can the Prime Minister tell us whether he or his officials have discussed with the Bush administration the future of RADARSAT-2 and, if so, what was the content of that discussion?

• (1445)

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I assure the hon. member that the Minister of Industry is making a very full and complete investigation into this matter. He has all the documents in his hands.

I am sure that he is well aware of the anxious concerns of the member opposite. I can assure her, as the minister himself has stated many times, that his decision will be made with the best interest of our country at the fore.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when someone is recorded making controversial statements, he should explain himself and apologize. Will the Prime Minister finally explain to Canadians what he meant when he spoke of the “financial considerations” presented to Chuck Cadman?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has already explained this many times. The only offer made to Chuck Cadman was to rejoin our caucus, run as a candidate and be re-elected. There was no offer of a million-dollar life insurance policy. This accusation by the Liberals is false.

[English]

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has admitted there was an offer made to Chuck Cadman. It is there as plain as day on tape. But so far in this House the Prime Minister's plan A has been to dodge the question.

So why does he not go to plan B instead, come clean with Canadians, and explain what his recorded words really mean. And if he acted inappropriately, why will he not apologize to the Canadian public, the Canadian citizens?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, this question has been answered a number of times.

After a month of Liberals throwing stones and trying to build a false scandal here, they still have all of their work ahead of them because the allegation that they have made against the Prime Minister that he somehow offered Chuck Cadman a million dollars in life insurance is utterly nonsensical. It has proven to be so day by day.

The Liberals should get on and talk about issues that are a concern to Canadians, rather than continuing to invent these scandals day after day.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Prime Minister many times to explain his words on the

Zytaruk tape, but he has chosen not to. Until he does, I will try my best to understand what he would say if he did answer.

He might say: “Chuck was dying and he knew it, and if he died as an MP, his family would receive a much larger parliamentary benefit than if he were a former MP. So this was an incentive for him to vote with the Liberal government, but if he had another insurance policy that would pay out the same amount, he could then vote however he wanted and not be distracted by what he shouldn't be distracted by”.

For the Prime Minister: Is this how it all began?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a new approach that I have not seen in eight years in Parliament. The Liberals invent a scandal, then they invent their questions and then they invent their answers to their own questions.

Again, we have been straightforward on this, as has the Prime Minister. There was no offer of a million dollar life insurance policy. Any efforts to present that as the truth is in fact fraud.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, if he was willing to answer, might go on this way.

“So, I talked with Chuck several times, but he was not interested. He already had his life insurance policy and besides, this would be illegal. But our guys still wanted to run it by him. I told them it wouldn't work. He'd made up his mind. But they still wanted to try”.

For the Prime Minister: Is this how it happened?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once upon a time there was actually an official opposition in the House of Commons that used to raise substantive policy questions in the House of Commons. Once upon a time there was an official opposition that gave a damn about what Canadians wanted the House of Commons to address. Once upon a time there was an official opposition that really, truly brought issues of substance to the House of Commons. Once upon a time there was a Liberal Party that actually believed in things rather than smear people's reputations with false accusations.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security has learned that 10 seconds elapsed from the time police arrived at the Vancouver airport room where Robert Dziekanski was being held to when he was tasered. That was 57 seconds after they entered the building. The RCMP was quick to use this electro-shock weapon. Does this not clearly show that the taser has become an easy solution used without even considering other, less dangerous options?

Oral Questions

What does the minister responsible for the RCMP think?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, I have asked for a report on the use of the taser. Now, every time a taser is used a report must be filed. Mr. Kennedy has also prepared a report and we are awaiting his final report for further recommendations.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this happened six months ago. The Vancouver International Airport Authority has had the time to learn some lessons. But not the RCMP. It could not even enlighten the members of the committee who travelled to Vancouver to investigate this matter. It is using the investigations as an excuse for inaction and silence. However, it is obvious that there is a serious divergence between the measures that it acknowledges should be taken before using the taser and what happens in reality.

Will the minister acknowledge that a moratorium is necessary? How many deaths will it take to convince him?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government was first to ask for a complete report on the events at Vancouver airport. The Canada Border Services Agency has already conducted an investigation and provided a report with many recommendations. Furthermore, the Vancouver International Airport Authority has also conducted an investigation which resulted in more recommendations, and I believe we will be receiving eight other reports as well.

* * *

AIRBUS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has said that it is absurd to ask whether there was any contact between ministers or government representatives and Mr. Mulroney that may have been organized or facilitated by Mr. Mulroney. However, Mr. Mulroney did meet in private with the former Minister of Industry last April.

Will that meeting be part of the public inquiry's mandate, yes or no?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the opposition is trying to make up stories or scandals out of thin air.

When I was Minister of Industry, I never met with Mr. Mulroney about anything. I did however have social contact with him during his book launching in Montreal.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of deep budget cuts by Liberal governments, our Canadian Forces were left with aging and out of date equipment.

Our Conservative government committed to strengthen and better equip our military. Part of the process of rebuilding our forces includes obtaining medium and heavy lift helicopters.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell the House if the government has made any progress in this regard?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the government announced that we would be issuing a request for proposal to acquire 16 medium to heavy lift helicopters. This is part, as the member has suggested, of the government's strong commitment to the men and women of the Canadian Forces, to provide them with the proper equipment.

These versatile aircraft will give Canada's military the ability to operate in remote and isolated areas and increase its capacity to respond to disasters both at home and abroad.

After more than a decade of rust out, the Canadian Forces now have a government that cares for their concerns. This is good news for them. It is good news for Canadians. It is certainly good news for everyone in the world who depends heavily on the courageous and important work of the men and women of the Canadian Forces.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week in Bucharest the Prime Minister said that when it came to the high levels of opposition to the war in Afghanistan, Canadian public opinion was being misread. He said that it was not the mission to which Canadians were opposed, but rather it was not being successful of which Canadians were afraid.

Millions oppose this mission because it is the wrong path for Canada to take in Afghanistan. The recent meetings in Bucharest reveal that this is effectively a U.S. counter-insurgency war.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House exactly where he draws his conclusion on Canadian public opinion from?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have seen in this UN backed NATO-led mission, with over 60 countries participating in the development and reconstruction, the more Canadians hear, like the 30 hours of debate that took place here in the House of Commons, like the vote that was taken here to extend the mission, something that is unprecedented and has happened twice under this government, is important.

I know the member perhaps was not here for much of that debate, but the more Canadians hear about the important work that is being done, about the schools being opened, the thousands of kilometres of roads that are being built, water and electricity being made available to Afghans, those types of humanitarian efforts to increase medical coverage for the entire country, is important.

Oral Questions

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, cheap shots aside, for the millions of Canadians who oppose the counter-insurgency mission, the issue is not whether to help Afghan people but how to do that. They have read the Manley report. They have read the reports from Oxfam and others that say the counter-insurgency method is not working. They know civilian death is up, corruption is up, poppy production is up. They want their country to pursue a path of peace and reconstruction, not counter-insurgency.

Instead of misreading public opinion, why will the government not acknowledge that Canadians have real and valid concerns with this war?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the representation of fact and the negativity, we know that it is up in the NDP as well.

However, what Canadians are impressed with is continuing reports of the progress that is occurring on the ground as a result of the important work of the Canadian Forces and our NATO and UN allies. We now have a UN representative in Afghanistan who will help coordinate some of this important work, so more schools, more medical care, more efforts to improve the quality of life of Afghans will continue.

That is what this government is interested in. That is what the allies are interested in. I wish the NDP would make a connection between security and the important development and humanitarian work that is happening there.

* * *

AIRBUS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is wilfully providing cover to Mr. Mulroneo to hide his lobbying efforts on behalf of his business interests. It is doing the same by limiting the scope of the public inquiry.

We know a letter was sent to the former industry minister asking for a private meeting with Mr. Mulroneo and Luc Lavoie to discuss the pending wireless legislation because Mr. Lavoie in his own words said, “The wireless piece was absolutely crucial to Quebecor’s business strategy”.

Will the government table this letter or is it putting Mulroneo’s business interests ahead of the public’s right to know?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in French previously, no meeting happened and the law has been followed. Those members are trying to find a scandal. They are trying to find a story where there is no story.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last year, our government has massively expanded the Nahanni National Park Reserve and moved to protect the east arm of the Great Slave Lake and the ramparts rivers and wetlands, lands that are almost twice the size of Nova Scotia.

Environmental protection is one our government’s priorities in our northern agenda. Could the Minister of the Environment tell the House what action our government took today to further protect the Nahanni watershed areas in the Northwest Territories?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to announce today that the Government of Canada was withdrawing some 7,600 square kilometres of significant natural lands in the upper South Nahanni watershed area, something that is unprecedented in the country. We are protecting an area of land one and a half times the size of Prince Edward Island from further development.

The creation of a new national park on Nahanni’s boundaries is yet another example of our commitment to ensuring key parts of our north are protected for future generations. This conservation initiative is possible because of the government, the support of aboriginal people in this area and the territorial government.

I would like to particularly thank members of the Sahtu Dene First Nation, who joined us this morning at the Museum of Nature.

Step by step, we are getting the job done.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l’Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian government continues to wash its hands of Omar Khadr’s fate even though reports about his health are alarming. In light of the situation, several groups—including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Canadian Bar Association—have appealed to the government, which has always claimed that he is well treated. We know this is not true. We know that he is a child soldier and that he should be brought back to Canada to be tried.

When will the minister decide to bring Omar Khadr back to Canada, to Quebec, to be tried as—

● (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): As my colleague just mentioned, it is true that Mr. Khadr has been visited by my department’s representatives on several occasions. It is true that we have received assurances from the American government that Mr. Khadr was not treated cruelly. It is also true that Mr. Khadr faces serious accusations.

As for asking for the release of Mr. Khadr, it is too early and too premature to do so because not all legal avenues of appeal have been exhausted.

[English]

FITNESS TAX CREDIT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government claims that it wants to help average Canadian families afford the registration and equipment fees for their children's fitness through their tax credits. The Conservative government also claims that it wants to promote a healthier, more active lifestyle to fight childhood obesity. However, is the finance minister not aware that municipal programs only last an average of six weeks and the cut-off for the tax credit is eight weeks?

How does the minister expect Canadians to benefit from this tax credit when it is designed so they do not even qualify?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the comments that I have heard from parents who are filing their tax returns is that they are very pleased to have the opportunity to make a claim for the children's fitness tax credit.

This is an important step forward in Canada for parents who incur expenses for their children to engage in active sporting activities, which I am sure the member would agree is of benefit for the children.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Two dollars a week.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: I know the member for Wascana would say it is not enough money, when his party did nothing for 13 years. At least we have moved forward and brought in a way for parents to help fight obesity in children, which is of great importance on a health basis.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

The Speaker: Order, please. There have been discussions among representatives of all parties in the House that we now rise and observe a moment of silence in honour of the fallen Canadian soldier in Afghanistan.

[A moment of silence observed]

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Luke Ouellette, the Minister of Transportation for Alberta.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I also would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Ron MacKinley, Minister of Transportation and Public Works for Prince Edward Island.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Routine Proceedings

VACANCY

GUELPH

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain, the hon. member for the electoral district of Guelph, by resignation effective today, April 7, 2008.

[Translation]

Pursuant to subsection 29 (50) (b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I addressed, earlier today, a warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill the vacancy.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made some remarks in the House which conveyed the wrong impression and the minister had to withdraw those remarks and correct herself.

Today a similar incident has happened where the minister implied in one of her answers that the official opposition had opposed the proposal to increase the age of protection in Canada. In fact, the official opposition supported that measure.

I think the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration would want to similarly rise today as she did on Friday to correct the record and to make sure no wrong impression is left.

● (1505)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my recollection that, in this particular instance, the Liberal Party walked out of the House and did not vote for the motion.

The Speaker: In any event, it does strike me as being a matter of debate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

SCHREIBER-MULRONEY FINANCIAL DEALINGS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report of the independent adviser into the allegations respecting financial dealings between Mr. Karlheinz Schreiber and the right hon. Brian Mulroney.

This report was received by the government on Friday. I am tabling it today and the government will be acting on it shortly.

*Routine Proceedings***FIREARMS ACT**

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to subsection 93(2) of the Firearms Act, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to table, in both official languages, the 2006 report of the Commissioner of Firearms on the administration of the Firearms Act for the period of January 1 to December 31, 2006.

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TREATY ON TRANSFER OF OFFENDERS

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 32(2) I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, a treaty entitled "Treaty Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Argentine Republic on the Transfer of Offenders".

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts restoring the honour of the RCMP.

The Government of Canada has already implemented many of the recommendations and the efforts are under way to address the remaining recommendations in that particular report.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period, in response to one of my questions, the Minister of National Defence suggested that I was not here during the debate on Afghanistan. In fact, I took part in the debate.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, that is against the rules. I would ask the minister for an apology for his comments during question period.

The Speaker: The hon. member has raised a point of order. I agree that referring to the presence or absence of members is out of order in the House and I am sure that hon. members are aware of that.

I am certainly prepared to look at the words the minister used in this connection to see if in fact he overstepped the rules and, if necessary, I am sure the minister will of course retract, if it is necessary that he do so.

I see the minister is rising now. Perhaps he has something to say on this subject.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I said was there that 30 hours of debate took place in the House and maybe the member was not present for that. I know for a fact that he did take part in the debate. If there was any negative inference drawn from that I apologize to the member.

The Speaker: I think I may settle the matter, but perhaps hon. members could bear in mind my comment that absence of members is not a subject for discussion in the House. There seems to be some of it these days on other topics too but I will not get into that now.

* * *

● (1510)

DAY OF REFLECTION ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today, the 14th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, to inform you that as a result of consultation among all parties, if you seek it I believe you would find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

Whereas during a three month period beginning April 7, 1994, 800,000 Rwandans were killed in an organized campaign of genocide that targeted ethnic Tutsis and political moderates, including Hutus;

Whereas this genocide was made possible by the indifference and inaction of the international community;

That the House of Commons solemnly commemorate the Rwandan genocide on the occasion of its 14th anniversary; reaffirms its commitment to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; and designates April 7 as a Day of Reflection on the Prevention of Genocide.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: During question period, all members of the House spoke about the tragic fire at the Quebec City armoury on the weekend. To have an even clearer idea of the government's response, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to adopt the following motion: "That, in the opinion of the House, the Government of Canada should be clear and immediately commit to funding the reconstruction of the Quebec City armoury."

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa on a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, when they say that they will explore every means and commit to looking into the options, I note that the government is not prepared to fund the Quebec City armoury.

The Speaker: It is not a question of who said what. It is now a question of unanimous consent, and that has been denied.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women, presented on Tuesday, February 5, 2008, be concurred in.

The motion reads:

That the government endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 September 2007 and that Parliament and Government of Canada fully implement the standards contained therein.

After two decades of development, on September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 143 to 4.

It is disgraceful that Canada was one of the four nations that voted against this declaration and the Government of Canada was actively lobbying other countries to vote against this historic declaration.

Canada's position in refusing to support the declaration is contrary to the wishes of aboriginal organizations, human rights organizations and even government officials. A ministerial briefing note obtained by Amnesty International stated that:

Indian and Northern Affairs and Foreign Affairs Canada initially advised...that they were recommending that Canada support the adoption of the draft Declaration.

Canada's decision to oppose the declaration flies in the face of a long history of championing UN standards to elevate and promote human rights globally.

The declaration recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to the lands, territories and natural resources that are critical to their way of life, a way of life that honours the earth and her resources.

The declaration also provides guidance measures needed to ensure the dignity, survival and well-being of some of the world's most impoverished and marginalized peoples.

The president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, Beverley Jacobs, states:

While the adoption of the declaration brings me great joy, Canada's unprincipled decision to vote against the declaration demonstrates a lack of commitment, not only to indigenous peoples but to human rights more generally. This is not over. We will be calling on Canada to join us to implement this declaration immediately.

It is a reality that indigenous women confront double or even triple discrimination because they are indigenous, they are poor and they are marginalized.

Routine Proceedings

In Canada, 38% of aboriginal women live in low income situations. The median income of aboriginal women was \$12,300, about \$5,000 less than the figure for non-aboriginal women.

According to Statistics Canada, aboriginal women represent less than 2% of the general population. However, they experience violence at a rate 3.5 times higher than non-aboriginal women. Close to 35% of aboriginal women have been the target of violence.

Aboriginal women live in remote communities and often have no access to women's shelters at all. These women are making the impossible choice between losing their home and living in fear with an abusive partner.

Young aboriginal women are five times more likely to die from violence than other women in Canada.

Aboriginal women continue to face barriers in attaining post-secondary education. Of aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 living off reserve who had started but had not completed a post-secondary education program, 34% reported family responsibilities as the reason they had not finished their post-secondary education, 21% reported financial reasons, 12% lost interest and motivation, and 8% found a job or had to work.

Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia has been renamed the Highway of Tears because of the more than 30 aboriginal women who have gone missing or have been found murdered along this stretch of highway.

Last spring, at Losha Native Family Healing Centre, a first nations agency in London, marked June 21 with a march and traditional ceremony of remembrance for the loss of our sisters across Canada. It was moving and gentle but it pointed out the despair of those left behind to mourn, those who will never know what happened to the women they loved.

Why are the Highway of Tears' victims mostly young aboriginal women? The answer is poverty.

● (1515)

In 2006 a symposium was held on the Highway of Tears. It produced numerous recommendations to prevent the unnecessary deaths and disappearances of young aboriginal women. I hope that the federal government will do everything possible to implement these recommendations. I hope it will finally listen, because aboriginal women and their children are more likely to experience violence and abuse in their lives than other Canadian women. Eight out of ten aboriginal women are abused.

Racism, the legacy of residential schools, and the lack of housing and educational opportunities work together to make aboriginal women more vulnerable. As a community we have an obligation to make sure violence against aboriginal women, against all women, ends.

Routine Proceedings

The UN declaration is among the first international human rights instruments to explicitly provide for the adoption of measures to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy protection and guarantees against all forms of violence. According to Foreign Policy in Focus, indigenous peoples have fought for centuries against genocide, displacement, colonization and forced assimilation. This violence has left indigenous communities among the poorest and most marginalized in the world, alienated from state policies and disenfranchised by national governments.

In the Americas, indigenous peoples have a life expectancy 10 to 20 years less than the general population. The same general pattern holds internationally. Because of gender discrimination, the pattern is most entrenched for indigenous women.

Today the human rights and very survival of indigenous peoples are increasingly threatened as states and corporations battle for control of the earth's dwindling supply of natural resources, many of which are located on first nations territories.

One key concern of indigenous women is gender based violence. For indigenous women violence does not only stem from gender discrimination and women's subordination within their families and communities, it also arises from attitudes and policies that violate collective indigenous rights. As Dr. Myrna Cunningham, an internationally recognized indigenous leader, said:

For Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous women, exercising our rights—both as Indigenous Peoples and as women—depends on securing legal recognition of our collective ancestral territories, which are the basis of our identities, our cultures, our economies, and our traditions.

That understanding of collective rights has enabled first nations women to create anti-violent strategies that address connections between issues as diverse as women's human rights, economic justice and climate change. These connections are reflected in indigenous women's organizations around the world, for instance, in a Kenyan village run by indigenous women, and in a community development organization on Nicaragua's North Atlantic coast.

Experts believe that crowded housing conditions aggravate the problem of physical and sexual abuse. No woman should have to make the impossible choice between losing her home and living with an abusive partner.

Housing conditions are a major contributing factor to a person's physical and mental health. Aboriginal people face serious housing shortages, as well as substandard quality in their housing.

In Canada 52% of aboriginal households fall below core housing needs. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation:

[This situation] is primarily the result of low incomes that stem from inequities experienced in the labour force and elsewhere by women and Aboriginal people in general. These inequities are amplified by low levels of schooling, and the inability of many to enter the labour force because of child-rearing responsibilities.

First nations housing and infrastructure is in crisis. When a comparison is made to the non-first nation demographic, first nations communities are at an extreme disadvantage. Adequate housing is considered a fundamental human right, one that is critical to the day to day well-being of first nations people. It is a key link to education, health, economic opportunities and employment outcomes.

Aboriginal women also experience poor health, have shorter life spans and are more likely to be disabled. According to the Saskatchewan Provincial Health Council, "health differences are reduced when economic and status differences between people, based on such things as culture, race, age, gender and disability are reduced".

The poor health status of aboriginal women is linked to factors such as poverty, unemployment, lower social status, instability and violence in their families and communities, and inadequate housing and living conditions. Crowded housing conditions and lack of safe, clean water for drinking and washing aggravate the already poor health of aboriginal women.

● (1520)

The UN declaration is a fundamental international human rights instrument which outlines the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples. Articles 21 and 22 explicitly mention indigenous women and the interconnectedness of our well-being, our children and our elders to be free from violence and discrimination.

Indigenous women at the international level have fought hard for these provisions. These provisions are not abstract. They reflect the collective realities that first nations face in our communities and how deeply we feel the actions or inactions by the state. We need the Government of Canada to commit to the declaration and the principles, rights and values it upholds.

The International Indigenous Women's Forum stated that the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples will serve as a comprehensive international human rights instrument for all indigenous women, men and youth around the world. The adoption of the declaration will allow indigenous women and their families to infuse local human rights struggles with the power of international law, and their governments would be accountable to the international human rights standards.

Since 1923, first nations leaders have made attempts to represent their people at the international level. It is time for the Government of Canada to sign the UN declaration. This nation we are building has always championed human rights around the world. It is time to champion those same human rights at home.

● (1525)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to ask my colleague a question on such an important matter.

The United Nations has been looking at this matter for 20 years. It has been under development through a lot of negotiations. During that time, a lot of countries have had to wrestle with many different problems, from land treaties, to the elements of aboriginal people's treatment, in terms of programs and services, dislocation from original land, and a whole series of settlements. There has been so much progress to this point. This is not seen as the ultimate solution to everything, but it is an important significant step for Canada to be part thereof to put the pressure on all countries, including ourselves, to deal with this matter.

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I would like to ask my colleague about the two decades of work that Canada was intimately involved with that could literally go up in smoke. That seems to be a departure from the traditions of a country that is starting to wrestle with old problems and bring restitution to things that we have done as a nation that have a healing effect to move forward.

What might the rest of the world think of Canada being in the position of 20 years of working on this and then pulling out at the last minute? What will others think of us and of our country's leadership?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, the work that has gone into this agreement goes back to 1923. As my colleague pointed out, in the last 20 years Canada has played a very active part in that. In fact, Canada seemed to be one of the nations driving the agenda at the UN because of the recognition that first nations people had suffered because of a lack of opportunity. They had been marginalized and were most definitely suffering the effects of colonization.

Exactly why Canada would pull out at the last minute and lobby other nations to ignore this declaration is a mystery in some ways.

However, in response to the member's question about our reputation, I think it is a blight on our reputation. If we look at the last two years, in fact if we look at the last decade, we have moved backward constantly. We saw the cancellation of a national housing policy in 1996. There is the lack of a child care agreement. There have been all kinds of promises, all kinds of surpluses, but absolutely nothing in terms of legislating a national child care program. First nations people are among those who have suffered as a consequence of that.

In the Status of Women Canada department, there have actually been cuts and changes to the mandate and program. As a result, Canada's reputation as a partner in the world community, as a champion of human rights, has deteriorated. The nations of the world are looking with despair at what we are becoming.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member alluded to in her comments, Canada was one of four countries that voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government has now adopted the position that because it voted against the declaration, it is not party to it, or it does not fall within the parameters of the declaration.

Could my colleague opposite comment on the fact that the government believes that since it did not support the declaration, it does not fall under its guidelines?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Once again, Mr. Speaker, it is a very strange reality when one considers that Canada was one of the countries driving this agenda, that we have not lived up to our obligations to the first peoples of this country, the people who are so important to our sense of nationhood.

I find it quite interesting that the current government would say that Canada cannot be party to the declaration. We certainly were a party to the many treaties that we made with first nations. We were certainly there when we traded for all of the territories and pushed first nations onto reserves. We were certainly there when the residential schools were created, which were intended to assimilate

and ultimately destroy first nations communities. We were party to all of that and it would seem to me that it is time to be party to something positive. The UN declaration would most certainly be that.

• (1530)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is most frustrating for us and for Canadians in general is that they are concerned about the role Canada is playing on the world stage when it comes to their participation on issues like the one in front of us.

What does my colleague think is stopping the government from embracing what are really important tenets and values at the United Nations, in this case on the indigenous peoples file? Why will it not recognize what is really a world consensus? Why are we falling behind the rest of the world?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, it is a very important question to consider and one for which I feel a certain level of embarrassment. I believe that we have decided we cannot live up to the obligations of the declaration because it means making an investment in the many outstanding land claims. It means making an investment in communities.

First nations communities are among the worst in the world in terms of sanitation, services, accessibility to education and health care. Many have described the reserves in northern Canada as being third world conditions. We know that many of these communities continue to suffer.

The community of Kasechewan, for example, is constantly in danger of flooding. The water is unfit to drink and the children are often sick. The community of Attawapiskat does not have a decent school. Despite the fact that the government has \$14.5 billion to give away in tax cuts to wealthy corporations, it just cannot find \$30 million to build a decent school for the first nations children in Attawapiskat.

I would say that it has to do with dollars and very little sense. The investment in housing, education, sanitation, the things we as a community know are essential are missing. I think that the government simply does not intend to make those investments.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member what her response is to the initiatives taken by the government to finally in history give first nations women the right to own property, the right to have division of property in the case of marital breakdown. Those are initiatives that this government is undertaking. I wonder if she is supportive of that. It seems to me she would be. It is very much commensurate with things that she was talking about in her speech.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the member's question gives me an opportunity to reiterate the words of Beverley Jacobs, the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada. She made it very clear that this declaration is absolutely essential to the future of first nations people.

The member mentioned matrimonial property rights on first nations reserves. Unfortunately, he failed to mention that there was virtually no consultation and that those communities are very upset. They feel disenfranchised.

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They are communities that always have been based on that sense of community. They do not look at themselves as individuals but as a collective. The government basically has tried to impose something that flies in the face of what traditional communities embrace, and that is their collective needs. With no consultation, there is no buy-in from first nations women.

● (1535)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to respond to the motion by the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, which states:

That this House endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007, and call upon the Parliament and Government of Canada to implement fully the standards contained therein.

As I am sure the House is aware, on September 12, 2007, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement indicating that Canada could not vote in favour of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

The following day, Canada delivered an explanation of vote, setting on the record its position on the declaration. Canada stated, among other things, that the declaration did not provide practical guidance to states and that some of the provisions were overly broad and capable of a wide variety of interpretations.

Since taking office in 2006, our government has acted on many fronts to improve quality of life and promote a prosperous future for all aboriginal peoples. This agenda is practical, focuses on real results, and has led to tangible progress in a range of areas including land claims, education, housing, child and family services, safe drinking water, and the extension of human rights protection to first nations on a reserve.

We are also pushing to have section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act repealed. This would ensure the protection of fundamental human rights for all aboriginal people, including aboriginal women, who are often the most vulnerable.

It should be noted that Canada supports the spirit and intent of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, but further negotiations were necessary to achieve a text worthy of Canadian support that truly addressed the interests of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world.

Canada's position has remained consistent and principled. We have stated publicly that we have significant concerns with the wording of provisions of the declaration, such as those on lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and obligations of indigenous peoples, member states and third parties.

Canada voted against the adoption of the current text because it is fundamentally flawed and lacks clear, practical guidance for implementation. These comments apply to a number of different areas of the law, including intellectual property.

Clarity of language should be an important consideration before a government decides to commit to any document, yet articles 11 and 31 of the declaration include a number of terms where the international community has not been able to come to a consensus as to their nature, scope or legal implications. These terms include, for example, "traditional knowledge", "traditional cultural expressions" and "free, prior informed consent".

Let us take, for example, the term "free, prior informed consent". During the vote on the declaration, the Canadian ambassador stated that some of the provisions dealing with the concept of free, prior informed consent were unduly restrictive. Provisions in the declaration said that states could not act on any legislative or administrative matter that might affect indigenous peoples without obtaining their consent.

● (1540)

While Canada has a strong consultative process, reinforced by the courts, as a matter of law, the establishment of a veto power over legislative or administrative action for a particular group would be fundamentally incompatible with Canada's parliamentary system. Such a comprehensive veto power would impact on intellectual property and other federal and provincial laws.

The declaration also refers to the "violation of their laws, traditions and customs". Such language could imply the recognition of a body of aboriginal intellectual property law in Canada without having first identified and studied these laws, determining how many such laws exist across Canada, how they interface with federal and provincial laws and policies, and whether they pose any concerns for Canada's ability to honour its international legal obligations.

This concern is increased because there is no explicit reference in the declaration that states such aboriginal customary laws would be subject to Canada's national laws. I would further add that we are not aware of any country, in particular our major trading partners, that recognizes dozens if not hundreds of domestic intellectual property regimes.

Some may suggest that any implications for Canada's intellectual property regime and intellectual property rights holders posed by these two articles would be minimal, as they would apply only to aboriginal communities. Let us not forget that intellectual property law recognizes a property right. One characteristic of a property right, intangible or otherwise, is the ability to exclude others from using the property.

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We can consider, for example, that a traditional symbol in the public domain is governed by some aboriginal customary law. If the aboriginal customary law were to be recognized as having priority over Canada's intellectual property regime, it would affect the ability of all Canadians, including other aboriginal Canadians, to use the symbol in a new work, such as a painting, for example. If the symbol were incorporated in an existing trademark held by a foreign rights holder, it would raise questions as to the legal status of the trademark. Recognizing a new intellectual property regime in such a manner and without consulting Canadians is not acceptable to this government.

Supporters of the declaration have stated that Canada should not be concerned because the declaration is not a legally binding instrument, yet there could be attempts to rely on the declaration as an interpretive tool and to demand that the federal government bring its policies in line with the declaration. The precise wording, therefore, is very important. And to this point, the declaration has in fact already been cited in legal proceedings in Canada.

Moreover, such an approach would be inconsistent with Canada's position in ongoing self-government negotiations where Canada has insisted that the Government of Canada retain exclusive law-making authority in relation to intellectual property in areas of federal jurisdiction.

Apart from my comments about the government's concerns with the declaration, I would add that Canada's national intellectual property regime does not discriminate against its aboriginal citizens or any other group of people in Canada. All Canadians, aboriginal or otherwise, benefit equally from Canada's national intellectual property regime within Canada and abroad.

The government is working to better understand the concerns of Canada's aboriginal peoples regarding the interface between their cultural heritage and Canada's intellectual property regime. For example, we have provided funding to allow aboriginal Canadians to take part in relevant meetings of the World Intellectual Property Organization and the Convention on Biological Diversity. We have also accepted invitations to go to aboriginal communities to explain the benefits and limitations of Canada's national intellectual property regime and to learn their concerns about intellectual property law.

We believe that this measured, step by step approach to addressing the concerns of our aboriginal citizens regarding intellectual property represents the best way forward. Adopting a text that is fundamentally flawed and lacks clear, practical guidance for implementation is not to anyone's benefit.

• (1545)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite spoke about the consultation that goes on between her government and aboriginal people. I wonder if she could comment on the fact that from February 2006 until the declaration was signed in September of 2007, her government chose not to consult with indigenous organizations in this country.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I know this is certainly an issue that the member opposite has been very interested in over the years and has worked very hard on, and I would like to thank her for her contributions on this issue.

That brings me back to a point that I really would like to make. This is a very long time issue. It has been worked on for a great many years and it is something that we know we must get right.

I know there are many members in the House who do not share the priorities and policies that the government shares, but that does not make the government priorities and policies wrong. We need to have differences of opinion and debate. The fact that we have worked on this issue for so long and have not resolved it speaks to the fact that we need to take the time to get it right.

We have had a lot of consultation. We know there needs to be investment in a great many areas. We certainly have consulted on a great many areas and will continue to consult. That is part of this government's commitment, that we will continue to consult with the groups that will be impacted by this.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member about what happens now in terms of the first nations in Canada and the message that our refusal to sign this declaration sends out to people? What will first nations do now that the government has made this clear position that it does not support the declaration? How do first nations people then move forward in the areas that they are so concerned about?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question, and she is another member who certainly has done a lot of work on this issue, has been very interested in it, and contributed a great deal.

I would like to point out to the hon. member that, as I said in my speech, Canada's position has remained consistent and principled. We have stated publicly that we have significant concerns with the wording of the provisions of this declaration and that those living on the lands, territories, and those affected by the wording by these provisions will be consulted.

We voted against the adoption of the current text because it is fundamentally flawed. It lacks the clear guidance we need to finally put this issue to rest and come to a decision that is in the best interests of those concerned.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the member not agree that aboriginal people around the world have been treated terribly? They have been discriminated against, suffered racism, been dispossessed from their land, have lost their means of economic survival, and had their culture and language in many cases taken away.

A human rights declaration like this is not a document or a mechanism for redressing all of that. That will take, unfortunately, more generations until that is finally resolved.

Does she not agree that signing on to this kind of international declaration would send a positive message? Would it not reach out to first nations people around the world and say, "We want to get back on track. We want to reach out, work with you, and build a better life for first nations people around the world?" Does she not agree with that?

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• (1550)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, everybody needs to realize that Canada is one of the only nations that includes aboriginals in its Constitution.

We are concerned. We work aggressively with our aboriginal people. Since taking office in 2006, our government has acted on many fronts to improve the quality of life and promote a prosperous future for our aboriginal people.

We take a practical agenda. We focus on real results. We look for tangible progress. Our government has dealt in areas such as land claims, education, housing, child and family services, safe drinking water, and the extension of human rights protection to first nations on reserve. We have been pushing to have section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act repealed.

Our government deals very much with our aboriginal people with respect to human rights.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to endorse the motion we have before us, that is, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as adopted by the United Nations General Assembly September 13, 2007.

This is a declaration that has been worked on for many years. Indeed, as my colleague opposite has cited, for over two decades Canada has played an important role in the development of the UN declaration, including the drafting of the document's text.

The declaration, as it now stands, is the result of extensive negotiation between member states and between indigenous people from around the world. It is important to note that this is the first time in UN history that rights holders were actually participants in the process. The current text, as I said, now stands because of these extensive consultations that took place.

Canada was known throughout the world and at the UN as a strong supporter of the UN declaration on human rights.

When this government took over, the Prime Minister's friends, Mr. Bush and Mr. Howard, had a considerable role in helping Canada to change its position. It was after the visit to Ottawa of the Australian prime minister that Canada indicated its unwillingness to support the declaration. Since February 2006, as I cited earlier, there has been a total failure to consult between Canada and the indigenous people.

When it came time to vote at the UN, only four countries voted against the declaration: Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia.

Canadian officials have repeatedly denied that the federal government has insisted on changes to the provisions in the declaration that were supported by previous Liberal governments. Yet, in amendments dated August 2007, Canada, with Colombia, New Zealand and Russia, sought over 40 revisions. In many instances, Canada actually helped draft the specific measures.

It is important to note that in opposing this declaration, Canada, well-known prior to this government for its advocacy of human rights both nationally and internationally, for the first time, has opposed an international human rights document.

The government says it was not an easy decision, but the gymnastics to justify its position are at best ingenuous. Canada was lobbying against this human rights instrument, we know, in Geneva in June 2006. This was before the government stated to parliamentarians that it was still studying the text. It encouraged opposition against the declaration and aligned itself with countries with highly abusive records, as I said earlier, with Colombia, Russia and with some hard-lined African states.

As described in the December 2007 Amnesty International report:

Over the intervening year, Canada was at the forefront of urging the UN to undertake wholesale renegotiation of key provisions of the Declaration, a process that would have greatly delayed adoption and would likely have resulted in a greatly weakened text. In doing so, Canada aligned itself with states with poor records of supporting the UN human rights system and with histories of brutal repression of Indigenous rights advocates.

Now that the declaration has passed, the government continues to ignore the document and ignores its international obligations.

The government, as well, misled the Canadian public. If it were truly convinced that the arguments against the UN declaration were valid, it would not resort to what I believe are false statements to justify its actions.

• (1555)

The minister says that the declaration does not provide a balance of individual and collective rights, although it is cited right in the declaration. He said:

In Canada, you are balancing individual rights versus collective rights, and (this) document...has none of that...By signing on, you default to this document by saying that the only rights in play here are the rights of the First Nations. And, of course, in Canada, that's inconsistent with our Constitution.

However, a simple reading of the declaration confirms there are 17 provisions that address individual rights. The federal government is aware that the previous Liberal government took a lead role in promoting article 46, one of the most comprehensive balancing provisions to exist in any international human rights document.

The claims of inconsistency with Canada's Constitution are not substantiated. Canada fails to demonstrate how the declaration is inconsistent with Canada's constitutional framework. The declaration provides uplifting human rights standards. Canadian courts may rely on such progressive international instruments to interpret indigenous peoples' rights.

As the Supreme Court has confirmed, and again I quote:

—our Constitution is a living tree which, by way of progressive interpretation, accommodates and addresses the realities of modern life.

It goes on to state, "A large and liberal or progressive interpretation ensures the continued relevance and, indeed, legitimacy of Canada's constitutional document".

I talked earlier about Canada's failure to consult with indigenous people. I will not go back to that. However, we hear members opposite trumpet Bill C-21 and the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. We support the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and we are waiting for that bill to be brought back into the House. It is now over two months since it has left the committee.

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In coming to that, I would question the issue of collected versus individual rights. In the many discussions leading up to the final report of the committee on Bill C-21 we saw a real effort to subvert the collective rights of indigenous peoples.

We have heard much about the importance of this declaration for women. It is an important aspect of our concern for the full implementation of the Declaration of Human Rights in Canada.

We know aboriginal women are at much greater risk of domestic violence. We know that in many situations it is because of the living conditions. We know aboriginal peoples do not have access to adequate water. In fact, the water supply for aboriginal peoples on reserve is not what it should be.

We know the health opportunities for aboriginal women and their families are far less than those for non-aboriginal Canadians living in urban and rural settings. We know the educational opportunities for children are not there. We know the government is in fact robbing Peter to pay Paul, basically taking moneys designated for education projects in communities in order to transfer them to water projects so they can trumpet what it is doing there.

I am not saying that the water projects are unimportant. In fact, they are very important to the health and the safety of all Canadians. However, it is important that all human rights be honoured. When we focus on women, we must understand that human rights are basic human rights.

I want to quote Beverley Jacobs from the Native Women's Association of Canada. She talks about all of the individual challenges facing first nations people, water, education, health, et cetera. She says:

All of these seemingly individual problems stem back to our history where our lands, resources and territories were unjustly taken from us and where our right of self-determination was subverted for the benefit of others.

Unfortunately, this is not only an historic problem, but a contemporary one where the order of business has not significantly changed in some respects.

• (1600)

We still see the Canadian government fighting court case after court case to challenge the constitutionally protected aboriginal rights we hold. As indigenous women leaders, we come to our positions not only as defenders of individual women, but as defenders of our lands, our resources and our territories.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, this will have to be the strangest point of order you will have ever heard in the House. I want to give the member a break because she needs to get a drink of water to clear her throat, so that is why I have this point of order. It should be easy to deal with.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his point of order, as probably the member for Winnipeg South Centre does.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, neglected to indicate that I would be sharing my time with my colleague from Beaches—East York, so I may be concluding.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre will have lots of time to rest her voice because her time expired a minute ago.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Surrey North.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the previous speaker has given this a great deal of thought and has an understanding and a passion about the needs of first nations women or indigenous women and their children. I read in one of my local papers the other day that in parts of northern British Columbia, the rates of babies born drug-addicted by first nations moms was increasing exponentially, and I do not say that in any stereotypical way. It was what the research showed.

Could she comment on how we are going to both keep the mom healthy and prevent that happening to the infants when we have a declaration that Canada cannot possibly support? What does that say to those moms who are trying to look after those babes?

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, if I could just take issue with my colleague opposite on a small point of her question. We do have a declaration that Canada could indeed support, if it had the political will to do so. This is an all-encompassing declaration and it would address some of the many needs of aboriginal people in our country.

She speaks about children being born drug-addicted or substance-addicted. We also know there is a higher infant mortality rate among aboriginal children in the first nations communities. This is in part a result of the living conditions in which first nations women find themselves, whether it is lack of adequate health care, or poor housing or poor water.

It is a function of all the shortcomings in their lives, and it is incumbent upon the government to ensure that no Canadian lives under such circumstances.

• (1605)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get up and ask a question of my hon. colleague. I will limit my question to a very specific focus.

The declaration contemplates those countries that are signatory to it to enter into a scenario that would start the discussions from the perspective of a pre-contact state for the indigenous peoples. In light of that, what would the member suggest in relation to whether Canada should simply set aside the historic treaties we have negotiated with our first nations peoples throughout our history, which have built this great country? Should we set aside all the ongoing negotiations that we have with our first peoples? Should we set aside our Constitution, which incorporates Métis, first nations and Inuit people into the very document that binds our country together?

The declaration suggests that we must return to that pre-contact moment as a starting point. How does she reconcile that fact with the existence of Canada?

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Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the assumptions upon which both the government and the member opposite have come to that conclusion. This document has been negotiated over 20 years. Legal experts from across Canada and around the world have negotiated, compromised and looked at its implications.

As I said in my earlier remarks, Canada's Constitution is a living document and accommodation is interpreted through the courts.

I suggest for the member opposite that the supposition upon which the government wants to build the rationale for its objection is a false one.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is truly astounding that we are having this debate at all today. Obviously I would rather we did not have to.

However, as someone who has worked at the international level and who was involved when Canada was involved in previous years with negotiations at international fora, I want to say that Canada is usually at the forefront. We are very proud of that. Quite often when there are contentious issues, Canada is one of the few countries known for being the arbiter, helping to bring peace and pulling together.

This is the first time, to my knowledge, that Canada has done the opposite. Not only did it not vote, thus opposing a major human rights document, which is totally unheard of, but it also actually lobbied other countries for this document to be defeated. Again, the most interesting thing is that for this document Canada in fact was very involved in helping draft the text at the time. Again, I find this very disturbing, to say the least.

Some of the arguments that have been made by the government side are that we have it in the Constitution of Canada, so why would we have to do this, and that it does not balance the individual rights and the collective rights.

I actually scratch my head at that and say to myself that the fact Canada has indigenous peoples' rights in its Constitution should be a reason to support this document, to actually encourage other countries around the world, and to become part of something strong to make sure that this does in fact happen. I find it totally contrary to the arguments in this case. It is very sad.

When I hear that Canada has been one of the most active and aggressive opponents to the declaration in lobbying other states of the world to reopen negotiations and to weaken the current document that has been passed, I think that it is bad enough that we voted against it and embarrassed ourselves. It is bad enough that after 20 years of negotiations and helping draft it, we lobbied and voted against it, but now we are still lobbying to weaken the document.

I do not know whether this is a strong biological bias on the part of the government with respect to this document, but contrary to its international obligations as a human rights council member, Canada is severely politicizing the indigenous peoples' human rights, I believe. Otherwise, I do not see the major rationale for any of this.

The declaration is not all that difficult to understand. Very basically, it addresses human rights, because indigenous people are among the most marginalized, impoverished and frequently victimized sectors of the society in which they live. We all know

this. We have seen it in different parts of the world, not to mention in some of our own communities in this country.

Why, then, do we not want to make sure that these rights are protected? The declaration has been under development for 20 years. Everyone has said that, so we cannot say that we have not had enough time to talk about it. Sometimes in this place we do a great deal of debating and we think a day or two or a week is a long time, but 20 years is a long time.

I have to say that over these two decades it has become apparent that there is a small handful of governments that are intractably opposed to the declaration for reasons of domestic politics. I think we know this. Obviously this is what is happening within our own country right now.

As I said earlier, some of the things that the declaration does are quite clear. It provides an inspiring vision of a new relationship between states and indigenous people, one that is based on cooperation and respect for the rights of all people. This is very important to maintain.

Again, the declaration affirms that indigenous peoples have the right to maintain their distinct cultural identities and to live free from racism and discrimination. These are not things that one can oppose. How hard is it to support something of that nature?

Other articles provide specific protections against discrimination, forced assimilation and other forms of cultural destruction. We know what forced assimilation looks like. We have had generations of children in our own country put into residential schools. We know what kind of harm, horrible pain and destruction that has brought about.

• (1610)

Again, this part of the declaration simply is trying to address not only past but current practices that are still sometimes going on in many places. It is acknowledging these things. I want to quote very clearly what this does:

In particular, the Declaration responds [to] Indigenous peoples' necessity to maintain and pass onto future generations their distinct cultural identities and to the centrality of the land to the practice of this culture and to provide for the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

Again, this is not something that is very difficult for us. We are a proud country. In the past, we have been at the forefront. Canada was the lead in setting up the International Criminal Court, for instance. One of our judges who headed that court was Louise Arbour, a famous Canadian, and one, by the way, whom the Government of Canada did not even bother to thank when she left her job most recently, but that is another issue to put aside altogether. Everyone else thanked her for her job except for the Government of Canada, which says something. It sends a message. This is what she had to say with respect to this issue, noting that the declaration:

—has been 20 years in the making. Its contents are drawn from the experiences of thousands of indigenous representatives who have shared their anguish and their hopes.

As we stand at the brink of this historic decision by the General Assembly, it is the time to call upon member states of the United Nations to join as one and adopt the Declaration and thereby establish a universal framework for indigenous peoples' rights, social justice and reconciliation.

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That is a strong statement from a very important Canadian, one who has certainly made us proud on the international scene.

However, I think it is also worthwhile to look at some of the statements made by the indigenous people of our country themselves, our first nations people:

The Declaration recognizes our collective histories, traditions, cultures, languages, and spirituality. It is an important international instrument that supports the activities and efforts of Indigenous peoples to have their rights fully recognized, respected and implemented by state governments.

Those are the words of National Chief Phil Fontaine of the AFN.

This is how our first nations people themselves are seeing this issue:

The First Nations Leadership Council stands together with the indigenous peoples of the world in celebration of this historic achievement.

However, we remain shocked and angered at Canada's refusal to support this important international human rights instrument.

The government talks about wanting to work with first nations, and then, at a time when it could seriously show support and respect for them at the international level, it does the exact opposite.

In regard to women, we have talked a great deal today about violence against women in aboriginal communities. Beverley Jacobs, of the Native Women's Association of Canada, talks about all violence, from violence in the home and violence in the streets, to discrimination and socio-economic marginalization in all sectors of native women's lives, from education and housing to health, child welfare and economic sectors. These are some of the issues she and aboriginal women deal with every day.

Beverley Jacobs goes on to say that mothers lose their children to the child welfare system far too often simply because they cannot provide the basic needs for their children in a country where there is no need for this to happen to any family. She says the education system falls apart. This falls far short of providing adequate education for our children.

This goes to the heart of some of the things that are happening in our country. Our committee, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, also did a report on trafficking. One of the comments was that a large number of women who are trafficked come from aboriginal communities. Earlier, one of our members mentioned the highway of tears.

The fact of the matter is that the government does not seem to listen. Let us look at its record. The Kelowna accord was not just a piece of paper. It was \$5 billion for a program to address housing, health, violence against women, and the rights of indigenous people in this country, but the first thing the government did was summarily eliminate the Kelowna accord. Then it proceeded not only to vote against but to lobby against this international document. That completely shocks me.

• (1615)

It is a shameful day when the government of this country goes out of its way to make sure that policies put forward, both domestically and internationally, are to the detriment of our first nations and aboriginal people.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal

Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after hearing the member opposite make her presentation, I must rise and ask a few questions.

I heard her mention her previous government's last minute initiative to try to cover up 13 years of poor action on its part, especially in relation to aboriginal people. As for the Kelowna proposal she talks about so fondly, aside from the fact that it was really a desperate initiative of the previous government on its deathbed, it actually would not have brought any real change to first nations people's lives. It did not identify systemic reform.

Thankfully, our government has proceeded with some important systemic reform, such as matrimonial real property for aboriginal women and, of course, extending the Canadian Human Rights Act to first nations people.

With my question, I would like to continue in the same vein that I did with the previous member. That, of course, is how we as a country take our international obligations quite seriously.

As such, when we see a declaration that contemplates having Canada set aside its treaties, some that go back to before to our Confederation, to enter into a new legal context with our first peoples, we obviously look at that with a very serious perspective. As such, we cannot proceed with a signature. We take these obligations seriously. That is what we have done. Is the member opposite suggesting that she would entertain Canada returning to a pre-contact state in terms of our legal obligations to first nations people?

• (1620)

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is really stretching things. First, the Kelowna accord was not a last minute desperate attempt. That kind of accord takes a long time to negotiate. It was negotiated over a period of a couple of years with all of the aboriginal first nations people of this country and with all of the premiers of this country. It was eventually signed by all of the provinces of Canada, the Government of Canada and the first nations of this country as well. It an agreement that was a first for this country. It was unique for its kind. The hon. member may not like it, but it was unique.

It also put the money where the mouth was. It put \$5 billion on the table, which the Conservative government chose to take off the table. Now the government wants to talk and brag about the property rights. With all due respect, it should have consulted with the first nations women before deciding on what the final solution for that should have been.

Then the hon. member asked if we want to set aside treaties. I do not believe that the first nations of this country and leaders like Phil Fontaine are in any way worried about the fact that this treaty, this document and this international declaration actually puts aside our historical treaties. I do not see the two. I think the hon. member is trying to confuse the subject.

I would suggest to the Conservatives that instead they review their conscience and their position, put Canada back on track, give us the respect we deserve, and ratify and sign the treaty rather than lobby against it.

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Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention of the member opposite in the debate. I have a question for her in terms of the declaration itself, which states:

The Declaration establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world's indigenous people...addresses both individual and collective rights...[identifies] rights to education, health, employment, language...outlaws discrimination against indigenous people...ensures their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own priorities in economic, social and cultural development...encourages harmonious and cooperative relations between States and indigenous peoples.

This declaration has been endorsed by indigenous peoples, their organizations around the world, former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, the Canadian and Ontario Human Rights Commissions, all three opposition parties, and the Government of the Northwest Territories, just to name a few.

The government members have indicated that the government cannot sign it because it has concerns. The members did not outline these concerns particularly well other than to say they had concerns about lands and resources and that the declaration was not specific enough. It seems to me that this is rather—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I have to go to the hon. member for Beaches—East York for a final comment.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member's comments obviously. The declaration is very clear. The government is coming up with all kinds of different ways of justifying its opposition.

Canada has taken the lead for many decades. People at the international level like Louise Arbour have taken the lead not just today, but we had the leadership of people like Lester Pearson, of whom I am very proud, and so on.

Now, in the 21st century, for Canada to be one of the few countries that actually voted against this international human rights declaration, not only for the first time but then lobbied to try to weaken it even further, is extremely shameful for us.

I would urge the government to review its position and endorse this declaration.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre, Violence Against Women; the hon. member for Kitchener Centre, the Manufacturing Industry; the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Ethics.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

• (1625)

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Laurentides—Labelle, who knows a great deal about women's rights—because this motion comes from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women—and who may go into a little more detail.

First of all, I look forward to the day when this House stops playing politics at the expense of our indigenous peoples. Members

of this House have been debating about recognizing the indigenous peoples of the world for 20 years. I remember where I was on June 29, 2006, when the UN Human Rights Council voted 30 to 2 to adopt the text. I was in eastern Quebec, on my way to meet with the Mi'kmaq in New Brunswick and Gaspé.

The first question I asked my assistant was whether Canada had really voted against this resolution. The answer was yes. I could not believe it.

The Conservatives had been in power since January 2006. I do not want to talk further about the Kelowna accord. They did what they had to do: they cancelled it. Yet in 1986, all the parties in this House, including the Conservatives, began working on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Work continued under the Liberals. The point I am trying to make is that Canada has always been an undisputed leader in creating a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

When I travel around the world, it makes me extremely uncomfortable to have to say that Canada cannot recognize its indigenous peoples, especially in light of the first article of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Let us look just at this article, because I only have 10 minutes. I do not want to go any further, even though I could talk at length about this. Article 1 is worth examining.

Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law.

Whether our Conservative friends like it or not, this declaration was adopted by a vote of 143 to 4. Canada cast one of the four votes against the declaration.

I do not understand and will not accept that, in Canada, indigenous peoples are considered inferior. That is how the Conservative government treats them now, by not allowing them to benefit from the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The full declaration shows that this is exactly what indigenous peoples are calling for.

Today, at precisely 4:30 p.m., the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development will hear from Mr. Erasmus.

• (1630)

Members will recall the Erasmus-Dussault report, at least I hope someone from the other side of the House remembers and that this will ring a bell for someone. Although in 2006 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the tabling of this report, it has yet to be implemented. We treat aboriginals in Canada as inferior beings, and it is unacceptable. The committee will hear Mr. Erasmus at 4:30 p.m.

The government is trying to implement legislation to shirk its responsibilities. But its primary responsibility should be to recognize the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In a nutshell, the declaration says that the chief expression of recognition of full status as a people is the right to self-determination. This is clear in Article 1, which I read a few moments ago. Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. It is not complicated.

That is what aboriginal people want. They do not want to hear another word about the Indian Act, which is paternalistic legislation, to say the least in parliamentary language. To read the Indian Act the way I have read it in the past few months and the past year is to realize there is no worse legislation in Canada. I do not know of any other country that governs people from their birth to their death—and beyond—and in the way the Indian Act does. It controls aboriginals from time they are born and then, in a very paternalistic fashion, dictates how they will be educated, what schools they will attend and how much schooling they will receive. If by some misfortune, an aboriginal person wants to pursue post-secondary education, he or she needs authorization from the department to get funding.

This has to stop. It is extremely important that we adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Rest assured that when the time comes to vote on this motion, there will be one party standing alone in this House and that is the Conservative Party. I hope that party pays the price for it among the first nations. The claim that the Conservative Party has gotten closer to the first nations is rather dubious.

I do not want to do any advertising—I am not allowed to and I am glad about that—but I invite all those watching me today to see the latest film by Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie, called *The Invisible Nation*. The title says it all: they cannot be seen, because others will not look. This film deals with the situation of aboriginals in Canada, just north of here more specifically. For those who do not know it, Ottawa's Parliament belongs to the Algonquians. We are on Anishnabe territory; from here to James Bay we are on Algonquin territory. This film shows how Algonquians have been treated in the past few years.

The best example is Maniwaki, in the riding of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Aboriginals have been pushed back as far as possible to a reserve that is now called Kitigan Zibi, just before entering Maniwaki.

I will close by saying that the Bloc Québécois will support this motion. It is time we recognized the aboriginals for who they are. They are a people and proud of it. We should adopt this motion as quickly as possible and join the great group of nations by becoming the 144th country to recognize the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

• (1635)

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate hearing the presentation from the member opposite who sits on the aboriginal affairs committee with me. We often have disagreements on our perspectives and I must admit that today is no different.

I think the member referred to Canada as treating aboriginal peoples as inferior peoples. I would humbly argue that, for instance, in relation to extending the Canadian Human Rights Act to first nations people, our intention was to extend the full benefits of the Canadian Human Rights Act. However, that member and his cohorts

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in the other opposition parties attempted to water that down as much as possible.

My point would be that in no way do we suggest that aboriginal people should be considered inferior peoples. They should have all the benefits and rights that all Canadians have.

I want to also ask this member a question in relation to the declaration itself.

Canada has one of the largest aboriginal populations in the world, a population that is recognized in our Constitution. If we as a nation believe that it would not be possible to implement these measures, in light of the things that I have already been talking about today, such as our constitutional obligations with the massive number of treaties that we have negotiated throughout the years with first nations peoples which have brought clarification to the lands within our great country, for which business and immigrants have developed, how could we implement this declaration?

We are not like the Liberal Party where we will sign on to international declarations, such as the Kyoto accord, and simply do nothing. We take these obligations very seriously and, as such, that is why we did not sign.

However, I would ask him a question that I have been asking other members today. How is it that we could reconcile these facts—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the first question.

Contrary to the Conservative Party, we listened to the first nations, which is why we have amended this bill that the government does not want to reintroduce to the House for a vote, a bill that is about repealing section 67 of the Indian Act.

When they show us that they want to reintroduce it to the House, then we will talk about it seriously. I, for one, will talk seriously. Article 2 states: “Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.”

I have the French translation, for my colleagues across the way.

In response to the second question, we should be sitting, discussing, signing treaties; that is how we will implement the declaration on indigenous rights. It is the only way to move ahead, but this is not how they want to do it, because they are too afraid that their friends, the oil companies out west, will suffer if we implement the declaration on indigenous rights. That is the real reason.

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Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am looking at a letter from the Assembly of First Nations chief, Phil Fontaine, who has written a critique of the government's excuses about why it cannot implement the declaration. He talks about the government's actions on education, drinking water, et cetera. He says that the government keeps insisting that it has moved on land claims, education, housing, child and family services and safe drinking water, and that this is somehow enough.

Chief Fontaine indicates that these actions are expected of any national government. He says that these are simply the things that a national government does and that it should not be used as an excuse to undermine the constitutional responsibility for indigenous peoples and their human rights.

I wonder if the member would comment on that.

•(1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I will reply to my colleague and I will start by thanking her for bringing this debate to the House. Contrary to what our Conservative friends believe, these three hours are not a waste of time. In fact, these three hours are an investment in the development of aboriginal peoples.

In response to my colleague's question, I invite her, as well as our Conservative friends, to read and reread article 7 of the declaration. "Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person." That includes the right to housing that is not full of mould and to potable water. Today, in 2008, aboriginal communities located 165 km from here live in conditions of another era.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to defer to your good judgment and ask that you please give me a signal, because I often digress and lose track of time.

I thank my hon. colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for his frank and honest speech. I am pleased to take part in today's debate on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Bloc Québécois is always right in there when it comes to denouncing injustices, especially when they affect the most marginalized members of our society. In this case, we are talking about aboriginal peoples, who are among the least fortunate and most mistreated of all. Their rights are constantly being violated by national governments, even when those rights are enshrined in the law.

This is particularly true in the case of aboriginal communities in Canada, and this is because of the incompetence of various federal governments and because of the Conservative government's ideological blindness. This is why it is so urgent to recognize and protect aboriginal peoples' rights.

This incompetence was confirmed in June 2006 when over 30 member countries of the UN Human Rights Council voted in favour of this declaration, while Canada and Russia were the only two countries to oppose it.

A few weeks later, Canada joined with the United States, Australia and New Zealand to pressure African countries and other governments that had initially declared their support for the declaration.

These actions are unworthy of a country like Canada, which has always been very concerned about defending human rights.

As a Quebecker and representative of the Quebec nation, I am ashamed of this Conservative government's attitude on the world stage. It is doing a disservice to the reputation of Quebec and Canada through its disdainful actions regarding the respect of human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.

By contrast, the Government of Quebec has taken concrete action in favour of the rights of first nations peoples living within its borders, particularly through the Peace of the Braves and James Bay agreements.

It is high time Canada did the same and stopped considering aboriginal peoples as second class citizens who must live in conditions that are often comparable to those of third world countries.

Since this Conservative government was elected, the leadership and flexibility Canada had shown since the start of negotiations became things of the past.

In the last year, Canada has become one of the fiercest and most aggressive opponents of the declaration, and has pressured a number of countries to reopen negotiations and water down the current declaration.

The Conservative government uses more financial and human resources than any other country, and mainly targets countries that have a less than stellar human rights record.

The Standing Committee on Status of Women decided to look at this declaration because of the horrible situation facing aboriginal women in Canada, and the lack of consideration the Conservative government has shown for them since it was elected in January 2006.

Let us talk about aboriginal women, since in our roles as Bloc Québécois status of women critics, the member for Laval and I have heard all kinds of things at various meetings of the Standing Committee on Status of Women.

The testimonies, figures and statistics are appalling when it comes to describing the situation facing women on and off aboriginal reserves.

According to the organization Quebec Native Women:

Violence against women remains a very widespread problem within Indigenous communities in Quebec, as well as in the rest of Canada. Female victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are subject to a number of physical, psychological, economic and social prejudices. Guilt, shame and fear also come into play and have major repercussions on them. The consequences of this violence on the victims' moral and financial autonomy, on their social participation and on their physical and psychological health as well as their families' health and welfare, are very serious.

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• (1645)

In addition, aboriginal women are more likely than any other group of women in Canada to be victims of domestic violence. A number of studies confirm that this population has a higher rate of domestic violence. Although very few statistics are available on the rate of violence against aboriginal women in communities in Quebec in particular, a 2006 Statistics Canada report entitled "Measuring Violence Against Women" shows that rates of spousal violence and homicide are higher among aboriginal women than among non-aboriginal women or aboriginal men. The severity and impacts of spousal violence are also greater for aboriginal women. According to this report, not only do aboriginal women report higher rates of spousal violence, but they are also significantly more likely than non-aboriginal women to report the most severe and potentially life-threatening forms of violence, including being beaten or choked, having had a gun or knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted (54% of aboriginal women compared with 37% of non-aboriginal women). Consequently, aboriginal women were more likely than their non-aboriginal counterparts to have suffered physical injury, received medical attention, taken time off daily activities as a consequence of the assaults and experienced 10 or more separate episodes of violence from the same perpetrator, and were more likely to fear their lives were in danger.

The same agency, in the document entitled "Indigenous Women and Violence", added the following:

Thus Indigenous identity has been broken down for purposes of colonial and later federal policy into the categories of Métis, Inuit and Indian, with the latter further broken down into status and non-status Indians. ... These categories have little to do with culture, upbringing or identity and everything to do with administration, bureaucracy and an apparently continuing federal policy of assimilation that persists to this day. These inequalities breed violence, such as postcolonial structural inequalities, family violence, bloodism, racialized and sexualized violence, and gender violence. They also lead to poverty, lack of access to adequate housing, including the lack of access to matrimonial property rights, lack of access to justice, low education and employment rates, low health status and little or no political participation.

On June 22, 2007, the then Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women announced new funding to help increase funding currently allocated to aboriginal women's shelters. However, that announcement was not publicized at all, which prevented a number of communities from filing applications to meet their critical needs in that area. Once again, the Conservative government managed to turn a good intention into an administrative catastrophe.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to reiterate to all aboriginal peoples our support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I also hope Canada's aboriginal women and Canada's aboriginal communities will one day receive the same respect from their government that Quebec's aboriginal communities receive.

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member finished her presentation on this matter with her party's position, which is that her party supports this declaration on indigenous rights.

In light of the fact that Quebec City is having a 400-year anniversary this year, is she suggesting that her province return to 400 years ago as a legal context in that province? Is she suggesting that Quebec should renegotiate with its first nations people?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Conservative colleague for his remark and comments. I will speak to

him about the Peace of the Braves. I do not know if he has ever heard about this agreement. In Quebec I do not think that we have to go back 400 years to show what happened after it was signed. I quote the premier of Quebec at the time:

The signing of this agreement between our two peoples [the Quebec nation and the Cree community] paves the way for cooperation based on mutual respect, dialogue and trust. In many respects, our two nations are innovating and leading the way. Other countries are already watching us. This is an unique opportunity to show them our desire and determination to turn this partnership into an outstanding success.

I invite my colleague to do the same by signing this agreement that has been long awaited by our aboriginal communities.

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this House at any opportunity, especially in relation to aboriginal issues. These are the most important issues to me over the last two years that I have been in this House. As a parliamentarian of Métis descent, it is always a great honour to speak in relation to these issues.

Canada's decision to not support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has resulted in some controversy and, of course, we have seen some of that today. In my opinion none of it is warranted.

By voting against the adoption of this declaration at the UN, Canada put on record its disappointment with both the substance and process. At the time of the vote, Canada indicated our understanding that this declaration was not a legally binding instrument. It has no legal effect in Canada and its provisions do not represent customary international law.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate this core message. The declaration is not a legally binding instrument. However, hearing the opposition parties speak about it, they would have us assume that in fact it should be implemented in Canada.

The opposition parties are calling upon our government to implement the standards in the declaration. Yet, United Nations declarations are statements only of political commitments and objectives. While they reflect the aspirations of states which support their adoption, they are not intended to be legally binding instruments.

Second, in the context of this particular declaration, let me remind everyone that Canada has voted against its adoption. This means that the concerns of Canada were such that it could not support the text as drafted. Therefore, calls to implement the standards of this declaration are misguided since Canada did not support the declaration internationally. It does not support it at home in light of many of the issues that I have been raising here in the House this afternoon.

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For over 20 years Canada helped lead international efforts toward a declaration that would promote and protect the rights and freedoms of every indigenous person, as well as recognize the collective rights of indigenous people around the world.

In the final analysis, however, the declaration was seen to be a flawed instrument that lacked clear practical guidance for states and is subject to competing interpretations. As such, Canada could not support its adoption.

As a country committed to the protection of aboriginal rights, Canada takes the precise wording of this declaration very seriously. Canada is not willing to support this instrument simply because it is expedient to do so. Voting against adoption of the UN declaration was of course a gutsy, if not difficult move, one that put actions above rhetoric and principle above posturing.

I have already referenced how the previous Liberal government was quick to sign on to the Kyoto accord, but of course had no intention of following up any of its founding principles.

Our government takes international declarations seriously and as such we have chosen not to sign on or vote for this draft declaration.

Canada has taken numerous concrete actions to ensure that the rights of indigenous people are safeguarded both within Canada and around the world. On the domestic front we have introduced two key pieces of legislation that will extend legal protection to first nations people who currently do not have access to either the Canadian human rights tribunals or provincial and territorial courts that would protect their matrimonial real property rights.

The interesting thing about both of these initiatives is that they are being opposed by the very parties that are currently creating such a fuss about Canada's refusal to support the UN declaration. Without putting too fine a point on it, it strikes me as ironic, if not somewhat hypocritical, for certain aboriginal organizations and opposition parties to condemn the government for its principled stance on the UN declaration, while at the same time creating such enormous obstacles to the passage of both Bill C-21 and the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act.

In the last few years Canada has taken enormous strides in rectifying past wrongs and moving forward on initiatives that will ensure protection of the rights of indigenous people here in Canada. Indeed, aboriginal and treaty rights are protected in our Constitution and are safeguarded under numerous self-government and land claims agreements, federal legislation, and through judicial decisions going as high as the Supreme Court of Canada.

• (1655)

Recently, we introduced Bill C-30, legislation that was developed jointly with the Assembly of First Nations. This bill would establish an independent specific claims tribunal, thereby bringing greater fairness to the specific claims initiatives and would be handled in a way that would speed up the resolution process. This government is working with willing partners on a host of other key initiatives, including housing, water, child and family services, education and self-government.

Why did Canada vote against the UN declaration? As I have already said, it was a flawed document that, upon its final

ratification, was not incorporating the key elements that we suggested, as a country, be brought into it.

Over the course of the past 20 years, Canada worked hard for a declaration that would promote partnerships and harmonious relations between indigenous people and member states that would strike an appropriate balance between the rights of indigenous people and the rights of others. The final text of the declaration did not meet these objectives.

For example, in relation to indigenous rights to lands, territories and resources, the provisions in the declaration are unclear and open to interpretation. The declaration states that:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.

The member opposite from the Bloc just referenced how her province has a number of signed agreements since the founding of Quebec, but of course what is contemplated here sets that aside, though she did not mention that in her answer.

This statement could be used to support aboriginal claims to ownership rights over much of Canada, even where such rights have been dealt with lawfully and in good faith in the past.

Another problematic issue is that of self-government for aboriginal people. While the document expresses an ideal shared by many Canadians, it lacks the clarity and definition that would make the actual implementation of self-government feasible. For example, there is no effective guidance about how indigenous governments should interact with provinces, territories and municipalities and, of course, the Government of Canada. Nowhere does the document provide explicit direction on matters of jurisdiction and financing.

Yet again, this is an issue on which Canada is leading the way. Our country has amassed considerable experience in the area of aboriginal self-government and has developed an array of effective tools. Our aboriginal people travel around the world talking about the very successful aboriginal governments that they are engaging in Canada.

Canada's Constitution provides for the recognition and affirmation of existing aboriginal and treaty rights. Our courts interpret the content of this recognition and protection. In many ways, an endorsement of the UN declaration would represent a step backward for Canada. It could well negate much of the progress already made on self-government, reignite divisive debates, and ultimately erode popular support for aboriginal and treaty rights.

In spite of Canada's decision to vote against the UN declaration, we continue to embrace numerous human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Canada continues to take action on the basis of such instruments and within our domestic legal framework.

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One of the key, modern day challenges facing indigenous people around the world is equitable access to digital communications technologies. To ensure that aboriginal people in this country, particularly those living in remote communities, can access digital technologies, the Government of Canada established the SchoolNet program more than a decade ago. The program continues to provide Internet connections and supportive services to remote first nations schools. Another program, the Aboriginal Canada Portal, significantly improves access to a broad range of content relevant to aboriginal people.

Canada has also played a lead role in connectivity for indigenous people around the world. In 2002, when the United Nations endorsed a proposal for a world summit on the information society, Canada took action to ensure that indigenous people would participate.

Thanks to this country's diplomatic efforts and financial support, indigenous groups from around the world took part in the Geneva and Tunisia conferences. As a result, the final statement from the summit includes this article, which states:

In the evolution of the Information Society, particular attention must be given to the special situation of indigenous peoples, as well as to the preservation of their heritage and their cultural legacy.

The world summit process also led to the establishment of an international indigenous web portal. Owned and operated by indigenous people, the portal aims to foster links among indigenous communities around the world and that portal is an invaluable tool that will help indigenous people advance and protect their rights and interests.

• (1700)

Another fine illustration of Canada's commitment to international indigenous groups is a program funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. The indigenous people partnership program is a pilot program that links aboriginal groups in Canada with indigenous partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

These cross-cultural projects generate valuable opportunities to forge new partnerships, exchange best practices and share knowledge, experience and expertise as a means of contributing to the improved well-being of indigenous people throughout this region. These projects enhance the capacity of local organizations and these indigenous communities to become self-sufficient.

Canada has also played a leading role in ensuring that aboriginal people are represented in international decision-making bodies. The Arctic Council, for example, was established through the Ottawa declaration in the early 1990s. The council was a high level intergovernmental forum that engaged inhabitants of our Arctic Region, including indigenous people, on these important issues, such as sustainable development and environmental protection.

Canada is also a leading supporter of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, a non-governmental organization that represents some 150,000 Inuit living in four countries. The council promotes Inuit unity, rights and interests.

Canada has worked tirelessly with the United Nations to advance the rights and interests of all people of the world, including indigenous people. This country has played an active role in creating the UN permanent forum on indigenous issues, arguably the most

important mechanism to recognize and promote interests and rights of indigenous people.

Canada has also contributed to the creation of the expert mechanism on the rights of indigenous people and supports the renewal of the mandate of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

These actions clearly demonstrate Canada's determination to advance the rights and interests in indigenous people throughout the world, but especially in Canada.

Unlike these agreements, the UN draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people, as I have said, lacks clear, practical guidance for states. Canada, along with other key nations, did not participate in the negotiations that produced the final text.

I am convinced that once my hon. colleagues carefully consider the motion now before us, they will recognize its imprecise language, reject its faulty logic, and join me in voting against it.

The opposition parties have said that Canada's concerns are overstated, yet proponents of the adoption of this draft declaration are calling on aboriginal groups to use the declaration in their negotiations in Canadian courts and to demand that the federal government bring policies in line with the declaration itself.

In a country like Canada, with strong democratic institutions, it is easy to take the issue of human rights for granted. Here the rights of indigenous people are recognized and affirmed in our Constitution and in our legal system. Regardless of the declaration, Canada will continue to take effective action at home and abroad to promote and protect the rights of indigenous people across our country, and of course, we will also work on extending existing human rights obligations and commitments.

Such effective action, I must be clear, will not be undertaken on the basis, though, of this declaration.

• (1705)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the parliamentary secretary's speech. I noticed that he mentioned that the Conservatives are claiming to be champions of human rights.

He mentioned specifically Bill C-21, the bill that would have repealed section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. Of course, we know that after extensive hearings at the aboriginal affairs committee, the opposition parties submitted a number of amendments that were in line with the testimony.

One of the articles in the UN declaration talks about appropriate consultation. Arguably, what happened at the committee was not consultation, but at least we had an opportunity to hear from people about their concerns for the bill.

The opposition parties worked hard to put those amendments forward. That bill is now languishing somewhere. If the Conservatives are such supporters of human rights, when will they bring that bill back to the House for report stage, so we can debate it and get it into third reading?

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Mr. Rod Bruinoog: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that the member uses the word “languishing”.

When this bill was first brought forward to extend the historic inadequacy of our current context in Canada which prevented first nations people from being able to utilize the Canadian Human Rights Act, this was first brought about by our government in December 2006.

It had been there for over a year in committee, yet she mentions that it is languishing, in light of the fact that there were a number of changes that were brought in by the opposition parties, changes that we felt, unfortunately, did water down much of what the Canadian Human Rights Act represents to Canadians and to all of our citizens.

However, we are currently working to bring this bill back before the House. It is being considered by our government and we look forward to working with the opposition parties to finally move forward and extend the Canadian Human Rights Act to first nations people.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to put something on the record. The parliamentary secretary referred to the fact that the opposition was opposed to the government's two bills that it brought in, the repeal of section 67 and the matrimonial real property act.

Let me state for the House, and I think I have said it 17 times already, this party is not opposed to the repeal of section 67 and, in fact, supported it in committee. As to the matrimonial real property, I do not know why he is making up fables. I have no knowledge that this opposition party is opposed to the introduction of matrimonial real property on reserve.

The member opposite talked about the consultation between aboriginal peoples and the government. From February 2006 until the signing of the declaration on the rights of indigenous people in September 2007, there was absolutely no negotiation with indigenous peoples on the declaration.

Why did the government actively lobby other countries to oppose this declaration in spite of the fact that no consultation had gone on with our indigenous peoples? Why would he think first nations and indigenous peoples in our country would want to support a declaration that would give up all the treaties, policies and rights that he says have been in place for 100 years?

• (1710)

Mr. Rod Bruinoog: Mr. Speaker, the first part of the question by the member for Winnipeg South Centre suggested that Canada wanted to proceed with the declaration in the text that was negotiated. As we have said, we were not supportive of that declaration. We attempted to continue that negotiation previous to the ratification and that did not occur. The language of the declaration was not something we could support and was not modified to bring about our support.

The member and her party like to suggest they were always supportive of the declaration and that was not the case. The government's civil servants stated that the Government of Canada was not supportive of the declaration for many years, dating back to the previous Liberal government.

However, Liberal Party members like to try to represent that they are supportive of our indigenous peoples, but we can look to actions. Actions speak louder than words. They wanted to bring about some historic important changes through the previous Indian affairs minister, Robert Nault. That was set aside. They suggested some proposals in their dying days with the Kelowna accord. A government perhaps should have done at the beginning of its mandate if it believed that, but it left it right to the end.

We are proceeding with real changes, real important innovations for first nations people, such as the extension of the Canadian Human Rights Act, which I hope will happen. This was delayed for many years by previous governments.

I will address the member's comments in relation to the declaration's text, which contemplates bringing countries back to a pre-context state. This is in the declaration itself. Some groups would like see many of the treaties opened up. Groups in Quebec would like to see the province return to a pre-Cartier moment.

This is simply the case of the text. The text speaks for itself. As a government that is responsible for this negotiated history, we must stand up for what we believe is the most appropriate action for Canada.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the people whom I have really enjoyed listening to in the House is the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs. He always speaks logically and very knowledgeably.

He brought up Robert Nault and he alluded to the Kelowna accord. What is his assessment of the government's courage in doing the right thing with reference to Robert Nault's suggested bill, which I thought was a pretty good bill, but it was not followed through, and with what I would call the mirage of the Kelowna accord?

Mr. Rod Bruinoog: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has referenced a few different initiatives by the previous Liberal government. There is no question that one of them was quite substantive. A lot of effort was put in to the First Nations Governance Act. Unfortunately, that was the first thing the member for LaSalle—Émard set aside when he was finally successful in his coup of that government.

In relation to what is called the Kelowna accord, this has been a debate among myself and the member opposite for some time. I will not deny that proposals were brought about by the previous government at a meeting in Kelowna. However, I cannot accept the fact that there was a signed agreement at Kelowna. It is simply not part of Canada's history. This is a deception, which is the only way that I can put it.

To add more credibility to that meeting by suggesting that there was a signed accord is something that I cannot accept. At every opportunity when it is raised, I will point out the truth of the matter, and that is what I am doing today.

• (1715)

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak to the motion today. I thank the member for putting it forward. It is a very important debate on this issue.

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I will start with a quote from the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. It is with regard to the legal questions around Canada's arguments against the UN declaration.

National Chief Phial Fontaine said:

We believe that Canadians are fair-minded people who care deeply about human rights and that they do not want their government to pick and choose when they will apply and respect human rights. Canada has made a commitment to uphold the highest human rights standards in international and domestic law.

We remind Canadians that it is not too late for the federal government to reverse its opposition to the UN Declaration, as Australia has promised to do. We expect the legal panel will agree with other legal advisors and international experts by reaffirming that the UN Declaration is consistent with the rights guaranteed under section 35 of Canada's constitution and all other domestic laws and international human rights laws.

I say that because we hear from the government repeatedly that it would not support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People because it did not fall in line with domestic law.

Before I proceed any further, Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the member for Don Valley East.

I will speak to this issue and the UN declaration in terms of women's issues, as put forward by the status of women critic for the NDP. I represent a riding which has numerous aboriginal communities, including first nations and Métis communities. Over the last two years and some months, I have had the great privilege to meet with women throughout my riding. I have had the opportunity to have forums on issues pertaining specifically to first nations women, in particular, as we move forward with the government's legislation, a government that claims to be concerned with human rights for aboriginal women and children. It has been unequivocal in the minds and hearts of aboriginal women in my riding that their priorities are their families and children.

We have had in this current Parliament, under the Conservative government, a rare opportunity to have a true dialogue, a true consultation. In fact, when we talk about legislation and when there is the possibility that we might infringe on aboriginal and treaty rights, there is a legal premise, as laid out in our Constitution, section 35, that the federal government has a duty to consult.

That all sounds very legalese and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People often sounds legalese, but we are talking about the day to day issues. When it comes down to the day to day issues of life as it affects women, aboriginal women have been very explicit. They have said that their concerns are directly related to human rights.

For instance, a motion entitled "Jordan's Principle" was unanimously passed in the House. This would ensure that first nations children residing on reserve would receive health services for their complex medical needs. Hundreds of children in my riding are not receiving health services, a basic human right that the government has made no effort to ensure is provided, even though a motion was passed unanimously.

• (1720)

When we are talking about human rights, we are not talking about some concept that is not applicable in people's day to day lives. That is the very reason we have these laws and conventions. The work at

the UN on the rights of indigenous peoples has been critical in terms of our domestic law and how we move forward.

Women were very concerned about the whole process of Bill C-21 where the government moved forward without true consultation by claiming that there were 30 years of consultation and that committee hearings fulfilled the duty to consult. We are talking about human rights and yet at the community level we see no new dollars for housing for the people residing on reserves. We have no new dollars for programs to address the issue of violence against women. No effort was made to ensure that the development of the legislation was done in partnership with the Native Women's Association of Canada or the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council.

The government claims that it has the issues and concerns of aboriginal women and children at the forefront and yet it participated in a process toward the development of the matrimonial real property legislation, one of the pieces of legislation in which it chose to participate, in a consultation process, with aboriginal people but when it came down to the actual development of the legislation it did so without the partnership of aboriginal women through the Native Women's Association of Canada or the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council.

I would like to read from a press release that the Native Women's Association of Canada issued. It was the day after the matrimonial real property legislation was tabled. The title of the press release is "Consultative Partnership' a Sham". The Native Women's Association of Canada said:

The Honourable Josée Verner, Minister of Canadian Heritage who—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I regret to interrupt the hon. member. We do not name members of the House. You cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): I did not mean to do that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The...[Minister of Canadian Heritage] who also has responsibility for the Status of Women, suggests that this is the deliverance of equality to women living on reserve as the solutions are now similar to those held by other women in Canada. As President Jacobs explains, this is another level of frustration that NWAC experiences. "Property on reserve is not held in the same way as it is held in the rest of the country. This is a reflection of the unique status of Aboriginal peoples in this country, which in 1982 was enshrined in Canada's Constitution. Providing the same right as other Canadian women hold does not take account of our unique situation and actually creates inequality rather than protecting against it."

I read that statement by the Native Women's Association of Canada because it speaks clearly and pointedly to the fact that the government has not, as it claims, moved forward in a process that assures the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are held domestically. In fact, it does have horrible consequences in the day to day lives of people at the community level. What we have seen is a government that has often claimed to move forward in a process but that has been a sham.

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• (1725)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the interjection by the member for Churchill, which is the riding where I was born.

My question for the member relates to much of the theme I have been talking about today, which is the contemplation of the declaration to revert legal status of lands and rights of lands to a pre-contact moment.

Does the member believe that the lands and the mineral rights in her riding should be handed back to the first nations inhabitants of her riding to the point they were previous to contact with Europeans?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised that the member needs to use the term “inhabitants” rather than “peoples”. I think that in itself speaks to his position around the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The parliamentary secretary is well aware that we are currently looking at Bill C-30, the specific claims tribunal act, in which we are moving forward in a process with first nations. It has been very clear that there are many issues in regard to the land, and we have heard from first nations repeatedly. We heard at committee today that first nations are very concerned that Bill C-30 would not deal with the issue of land and that many of the specific claims are around the illegal disposition of lands.

Through the enormous effort of all parties and all Canadians, we have moved forward. As national chief, Phil Fontaine, said, Canadians are fair-minded people and we want to move forward in a conciliatory process. What we are talking about here is relationship building. To use scaremongering tactics in which we talk about a legal premise, which is not even possible within the Constitution of Canada, is a little reckless.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is specifically with regard to article 18 in the declaration, which states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights....

I was surprised to hear the parliamentary secretary earlier refer to what happened with Bill C-21 around the repeal of section 67. I would call what is happening now languishing with Bill C-21 but I was surprised to hear him refer to it as languishing when what we were doing was hearing from representatives from across the country because the government failed in its duty to consult. What happened at committee was not around consultation. It was around dialogue and discussion.

Could the member comment on the importance of consulting and the failure of the current government to fulfill its obligations around matrimonial and real property and Bill C-21?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I agree that the government has not been very clear about that duty to consult. It seems to think that it is a concept in which one may or may not choose to participate. The federal government has a duty to consult and cannot off-load that duty onto a third party.

What is really important to note is that in the process of Bill C-21 a far greater number than 90% of the witnesses had many suggested amendments for the bill.

The bill in its original form, as the government put forward, was not a context with which most of our witnesses were comfortable. In fact, the ongoing discussions, which were not at all languishing, nor was it irresponsibility on the part of the opposition members, were important discussions around the legal issues, such as a duty to consult, and ensuring that we move forward to not only meet our legal obligations but to develop a relationship with first nations that would truly be a hallmark of how we define ourselves as champions of human rights.

• (1730)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion that the government fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Canada was an active participant in the drafting of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People over the course of many years. It was a long, overdue declaration that flowed from 20 years of deliberation. A working group of independent experts worked on it. It was debated and refined at the UN and was passed by the UN General Assembly by a vote of 144 in favour and 4 against.

It, therefore, came as a shock to the international community that Canada was one of the countries that voted against this important effort to advance the cause of human rights.

Canada used to be a leader at the United Nations. We were signatories to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We, therefore, call upon the Conservative government to respect the rights of indigenous people.

I would like to remind the House that one of the first acts of the Conservatives was to cancel the \$5.1 billion Kelowna accord, which was an agreement reached under the former Liberal government.

This was an extraordinary agreement that included the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Native Women's Association of Canada and, ultimately, the first minister of each province and territory in Canada. It was a plan that was developed over 18 months by experts in 14 governments across Canada and in our aboriginal communities.

We in the Liberal Party consider it unacceptable that the incidence of infant mortality is almost 20% higher for first nations and that suicide can be anywhere from three to eleven times the national average.

Furthermore, teen pregnancies are nine times the national average.

The Kelowna accord would have doubled the number of aboriginal health professionals in 10 years from the current 150 physicians and 1,200 nurses today. Housing would have also been a national priority for first nations. Under the accord, a national effort would have closed the housing gap on reserves by 40% within five years and 80% within ten years.

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The Premier of British Columbia, who was the chair of the Kelowna process, stated the following in the provincial legislature:

I characterize that agreement...as Canada's moment of truth. It was [our] time to do something that had eluded our...nation for 138 years. It was our chance to end the disparities in health, education, housing and economic opportunities.

Canadians are, therefore, dumbfounded as to why the Conservatives have chosen to abandon this historic opportunity to improve the quality of life of our aboriginal people.

Why has the finance minister blown off the surplus without any long term plan on behalf of the federal government to assist first nations? In a country as wealthy as ours, how is it that the Conservatives have no regard whatsoever for first nations? Why do they just pay lip service?

What is it about the UN declaration that they find so difficult to accept? The declaration talks about survival, about dignity and about health and education for aboriginal people. What is it that the Conservatives find so difficult to accept?

When we hear in the House that the Conservatives have done so much for the aboriginal people, it is all rhetoric, all talk, no action and no money.

I am not sure if any members on the government side have gone to the trouble of seeing what it is like to live with a constant boil water order that lasts for years.

I am not sure why the Conservative government is so insensitive to the basic needs of first nations or why it is opposed to an international Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. What is so flawed about it that the minister claims he cannot support? What is it that the Conservatives really want for aboriginal communities?

• (1735)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the member for Don Valley East, I have a number of questions. Her perception on our actions is that they are simply rhetoric.

I would suggest that bringing about the historic resolution of the Indian residential school settlement as the first act of Parliament by this government is not rhetoric but real important action. I would also like to suggest that proceeding with implementing important historic legislation in relation to setting up a specific claims tribunal has been called for for years and will improve upon the incredible backlog that we received as a government. There were nearly 800 specific claims which burgeoned from a very small number in the early 1990s.

My question for the member is in relation to the actual agreements that her party when in government signed. The previous Liberal government signed the Kyoto protocol and then did nothing to implement it. In fact, it left our government behind in a terrible way with 35% emissions above important initiatives in terms of greenhouse gas reductions.

Would she have our government sign a new declaration on the international scene which we know as a government we simply

cannot implement? Is she suggesting we follow the former Liberal government initiatives where they simply placated the international community but did absolutely nothing to follow through on their commitments?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, it would take me 10 minutes to answer his question, but I want to ask him a very simple question.

The Conservatives claim that they have the aboriginal community at heart. The declaration says to establish a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world's indigenous people, to address individual and collective rights, rights to education, health, employment and language. What is it within that declaration that the Minister of Indian Affairs finds unacceptable? What is it that the Conservatives find so unacceptable?

The Conservatives simply want to play with words. They have done nothing, absolutely nothing.

If the Kyoto protocol is something the Conservatives could not follow through on, it is because they lacked the leadership. Theirs was the Prime Minister who did not even believe in the science of climate change. They are later converts to climate change.

When the Conservatives do not have any knowledge, any background, any inclination to support climate change and any inclination to support aboriginal people, they will fall flat on their faces and keep on talking rhetoric.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my colleague would agree with me that September 13, 2007 was a historic day for indigenous peoples around the world. On that day the UN and its member states voted 144 to 4 in favour of the declaration. Sadly, one of those four members was Canada, even though Canada has been participating in the declaration from day one and has always endorsed UN declarations and always has been at the forefront of these declarations.

This declaration which is now part of a larger body of international law makes a much needed contribution to global understanding and promotion of human rights that are indispensable to survival and well-being of some of the world's most marginalized and—

• (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): If the hon. member for Davenport wants an answer, then he will have to leave time for an answer. There are 40 seconds left.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, would my hon. colleague not agree with me that it is a shame the government has abandoned human rights internationally, has abandoned the U.S. and has abandoned indigenous people in this country?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There are 20 seconds left to respond.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with the member. Human rights were something brought in by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms under the late right hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Liberals are the proud custodians of that.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this very important motion moved by the member for London—Fanshawe.

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The Amnesty International report, "The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Righting Historic Wrongs, Embracing a Future of Justice and Hope" talked about the urgent need for the declaration. I am going to read from it because it sets the context for why it is important for the House to support the UN declaration on indigenous rights. It states:

Indigenous peoples are among the most marginalized, impoverished and frequently victimized sectors of the societies in which they live. This is true in every region of the world...

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated:

For far too long the hopes and aspirations of indigenous peoples have been ignored; their lands have been taken; their cultures denigrated or directly attacked; their languages and customs suppressed; their wisdom and traditional knowledge overlooked; and their sustainable ways of developing natural resources dismissed. Some have even faced the threat of extinction.... The answer to these grave threats must be to confront them without delay.

That is a very powerful statement and why we need to take a look at supporting the UN declaration.

In this context, we have a long sad and sorry history in this country of appropriating lands, removing children from the care of their parents, residential schools, deliberate attempts to extinguish language, and certainly deliberate attempts to extinguish culture. We only have to look at the potlatch laws in British Columbia in the earlier century.

In that context, I want to talk about a couple of issues. One is around children. Of course, many members of the House have children and grandchildren. We know how near and dear those children are to our hearts and how important it is to make sure that our children grow up in environments that are safe, loving and protective.

The B.C. Aboriginal Child Care Society made a presentation in February 2008 on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and, as we can tell from its name, the B.C. Aboriginal Child Care Society's main focus is with children.

In its opening statement it provides a vision and talks about the fact that our children are sacred gifts from the creator and bringing up children is a sacred responsibility, that the well-being of children is indivisible and not separate from the general health and well-being of women, families and indigenous people, communities and nations. Then it goes on to talk about a number of factors that impact on aboriginal children in this country.

It specifically cites a couple of articles from the declaration that directly impact on the ability to protect and care for children in this country. I will not go through all of them but there are a couple that I want to mention. One is article 14 which states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching...

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

Article 15 states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

Those articles talk about a framework for how children are raised and cared for. Sadly, in this country a disproportionate number of children are in care. I am going to talk about that a bit more in a few minutes but I first want to touch on a very special child named Jordan.

In the House last December members unanimously supported Jordan's principle. Jordan's principle is about a little boy who, sadly, in his four short years of life, did not enjoy the benefits of a home.

Jordan was a little boy born with complex medical needs and as a result, his family made the very difficult decision of surrendering him to the care of the province because the family could not get the care he needed in his community. After two years of being in hospital, Jordan's circumstances stabilized to the extent that he was able to go into a foster home where he would be provided with specialized care.

This is the sad comment. When we talk about the rights of children and the declaration of indigenous rights, what we had is a child who then spent a further two years in hospital. Why did he spend two more years in hospital? Because the federal and provincial governments argued over who should pay for his care.

● (1745)

We have this tale of a little child who was removed from his family because he could not get care. The family gave him up, surrendered him because he could not get care. Then governments argued over dollars and cents to the extent that the child died in hospital. They went so far as to argue about who should pay for shower heads.

Unfortunately, this child's story is not an isolated one. In this day and age in this country, many children from coast to coast to coast are in exactly the same circumstances.

The Norway House Cree Nation has 37 special needs children who are currently living with their parents and getting additional care as needed. These are children with complex medical needs. Unfortunately, it is another case of jurisdictional dispute. Many of those 37 children's parents are having to look at surrendering them to provincial foster care because we cannot get the federal government to come to the table and agree on a child centre approach, to agree that children should be put first. If that is not a fundamental human right, what is?

The irony of this is that it would cost the government more to have these children in provincial foster care than it would to keep them in their homes in Norway House Cree Nation.

That is fundamentally wrong. Yet we cannot get the governments to move on this. The federal government could demonstrate leadership, could demonstrate its commitment to human rights by coming to the table and saying that it will pay for those children to stay in their homes where they will get the cultural support, where they will get the language support, where they will benefit from the elders.

Norway House Cree Nation is limping from funding crisis to funding crisis. There is a two month extension right now, but in two months' time, many of those kids could end up in provincial care. That is a shameful crisis in this country.

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Jordan's principle has widespread support. There is a coalition of many groups and organizations across this country who support Jordan's principle, which says that we would come from a child centre approach and put kids first.

In its journal, the Canadian Medical Association had an editorial about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It said:

...we endorse putting the medical needs of First Nations' children first. We also make this recommendation: that if the provincial, territorial and federal governments ignore Jordan's Principle and entangle themselves in financial or jurisdictional battles first, then governments deserve to be sued, in the most winnable test case that First Nations' advocates can manage.

Once again we are talking about forcing first nations into litigation because government will not do the right thing. If we truly care about working and middle class families in this country, if we truly care about their children, we would not force first nations into litigation to make sure their kids are well looked after.

Part of this coalition is called Many Hands, One Dream. "Health care professionals know all too well the need for Jordan's principle," said Dr. Kent Saylor, a pediatrician in Kahnawake, Quebec and chair of the Canadian Paediatric Society's First Nations and Inuit Health Committee, "We see families struggling to get the services that their children are entitled to, while governments argue over who will pay the bill".

While we are talking about children, I also want to talk about the fact that unfortunately the Assembly of First Nations and the organization that Ms. Cindy Blackstock works with had to file a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. They filed a complaint regarding the disproportionate number of children in care and the fact that many of these children receive less funding as first nations children on reserve than they do if they are in provincial care. In some of the provinces there is a 22% discrepancy. A child in provincial care gets 22% more toward his or her care. In addition, measures are sadly lacking around putting those children first in terms of least disruptive measures, support to their families.

As Ms. Blackstock has pointed out on any number of occasions, for many of these children it is not an issue of abuse, but an issue of poverty. If we want to make the lives of families better and the lives of these children better, we have to look at proactive measures to address the poverty in many first nations communities.

● (1750)

A number of issues around children need to be addressed. The United Nations declaration on indigenous rights goes a long way to providing some benchmarks in order to do that.

As well, I want to talk about education.

Article 13 in the declaration talks about the fact that indigenous peoples have the rights to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures and to designate and retain their own names for community places and persons.

Paragraph 2 of article 13 says:

States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

Article 14, and I referred to this earlier but it is important in this context, states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

When it comes to education, on any number of levels, we see a violation of human rights in our country.

My colleague from Timmins—James Bay has been leading a fight on a school in Attawapiskat. Attawapiskat is a community where the school was contaminated by a diesel spill, I believe, in 1979. It took many years to have those children taken out of that contaminated school. They were put in portables. The portables have a lot of problems with them. I am sure most of us in the House would say that after our children had been in portables for eight years, some of them the entire life of their school time, it would be time to ensure they had a school.

The declaration talks about a right to education. In Canada, when we talk about the right to education, we talk about an education that provides the full range of opportunities. We want to see our kids in safe schools. We want to see that those schools are well-equipped. We want to see that the students have access to teachers who are well-qualified.

We have schools like Attawapiskat and many other cases across the country where first nations children on reserve are subjected to substandard school buildings. We have stories about the doors not closing properly, or about mould in the schools, or about some kids being farmed out across the community in order to receive their education.

On the K to 12 system, we had testimony at the aboriginal affairs committee. We studied post-secondary education. We heard consistently that education was one of the doorways to raise families and communities out of poverty.

If we are not providing children an opportunity in that K to 12 system to get access to an adequate education so they can graduate from high school and go on to a post-secondary institution, then we are not fulfilling our duty. We know about the honour of the Crown and the fiduciary responsibilities, but we see a government that continues to fail in this.

We recently asked for some statistics on the number of schools that currently needed to be built. The figures we received indicated that 39 schools across Canada needed to be built, which would take approximately \$300,000 to build them. With the amount of surpluses we had over the last 10 or 12 years, that was ample money there to build the schools to ensure that first nations children not only had the schools, but also had the operating budgets to ensure they had an adequate education.

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In addition, language is a big issue. In my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan the Cowichan tribes have done a tremendous amount of work around preservation of the Halkomelem language. They are working hard to build a dictionary, to get oral testimony from the elders, to provide language labs in the schools, to ensure that mentoring and support is in place, yet they are constantly having to struggle to find the funding in order to ensure they can deliver that very important language service.

I believe back in 2006, Justice Berger in Nunavut delivered a report around the state of land claims in Nunavut. He talked about the importance of language. He estimated that approximately \$20 million was required to do some of the bridging around education. Not only have we not seen any funds come about as a result of the report in 2006, we have not even had an official response from the current government to Justice Berger's report.

• (1755)

The commitments that were made in the land claims agreement were that a significant proportion of the employees of the Nunavut government would come from the people of Nunavut. The government is lagging behind in those commitments and part of it is because of the fact that people do not have access to the education they need.

When we talk about education, it does start and stop at the K to 12 system. It is also very much part of post-secondary education. The two articles I quoted, article 13 and article 14, talked about the rates of education.

The First Nations Technical Institute has attempted over a number of years to ensure it has adequate long term funding. The aboriginal affairs committee did a report called, "No Higher Priority". As part of the recommendations that came out of that report, the committee talked about the fact that indigenous institutions were not eligible to receive operating grants, special grants, capital and infrastructure grants or research support for mainstream institutions. Most operate on short term funding grants. The lack of formal recognition of indigenous institutions also means that they do not have the authority to grant provincially recognized certificates, diplomas and degrees.

Over a number of years FNTI has faced significant cuts. In January 2008 it did an analysis on the figures. At that time it was facing a 66% cut from Indian and Northern Affairs to its core budget from the previous fiscal year. This would represent an 84% decrease since 2004.

The sad thing about FNTI is it is an aboriginal controlled institution. It opened in 1985. Hundreds and hundreds of students over the years have received their diplomas and degrees and have gone on and had success in employment. It has had some very successful employment placement as a result of that. I believe roughly 80% of the graduates have gone on to employment or further education, and that is a success.

FNTI has worked hard in partnership with other institutions. Even though it is not an accredited institution, it offers a number of programs, including an aviation program, which is a unique first nations program that gets students from across Canada. It has a first nations public administration and governance program with Ryerson, which is the most successful aboriginal university initiative

in Ontario. It has broken new ground by partnering with Queen's University in a masters in public policy. The Mohawk adult language immersion program with Trent University is having ground breaking success in creating new speakers in an endangered language. It has pioneered the practices of community based intense mode delivery. It has delivered initiatives in urban centres, fly-in communities and everything else in between.

It is making great progress in terms of lifelong learning. It has done something called prior learning assessment, which is really important in terms of recognizing a student's life experience and translating that into the academic setting.

Because this institution is not an accredited institution, but works with other accredited institutions, it has not been eligible for some of the funding transfers that come from the federal government to the provincial governments. Because of the fact that it is working partnership with some other accredited institutions, it is often not in a position to keep the percentage of the tuition fees to which other institutions are entitled.

The government's response has been, go out and raise funds from its alumni. It is a small institution. It has not had thousands and thousands of alumni coming through its doors.

In the context of the UN declaration on indigenous rights, which clearly calls for support for education, language, culture, surely it would make sense that when we have a successful aboriginal institution, that we would put money into it.

The Conservative government has talked consistently about the importance of skills training in aboriginal communities. We have an institution that it could fund, support and ensure that more students could have access. Instead what it does is it cuts the funding. This institution needs is multi-year long term funding so it can come with some assurance to its faculty, students and communities and say that it will be around for the long term.

• (1800)

From working in an academic institution, I know this kind of long term stability is very important. We want to get elders involved in these institutions as well. Elders are going to want to know that this institution is going to be around for the long term.

Therefore, I urge all members of the House to support this very important declaration.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan on the work she has done in relation to Jordan's principle, a motion that was passed unanimously by all parties in the House last year.

My question today will be similar to some of the questions I have asked other members who have spoken to the concurrence motion. It is in relation to Canada's long history of negotiated settlements with our first peoples and the Constitution of Canada in which we have entrenched aboriginal rights.

Routine Proceedings

Could the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan suggest to me how she reconciles the concept of returning lands and rights to indigenous peoples with our existing negotiated settlements and Constitution that make up Canada today?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, a document called “Patterns of Deception: Canada’s Failure to Uphold the Honour of the Crown” from the Assembly of First Nations in November 2006 addressed this issue extensively. Unfortunately, I do not have time to quote from all of it, but one of the things it points out is that the declaration cannot provide rights in the manner claimed by Canada.

It goes on to talk about the fact that there were many legal reasonings and precedents. I do not have time to go through all of them. However, it also talks about the fact there are many court decisions that talk about the onus and rights of proof.

Again, it is fearmongering. The document will not override existing treaties and it sets a framework for first nations and aboriginal peoples to come together and have a discussion with the government around treaties, negotiations, rights and title.

It is an important aspirational document that sets the tone and the flavour for where we should move forward.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague from the New Democratic Party on her research and on her articulation of the case to be made for supporting the international declaration.

I have heard her argument. The House has heard it. I have listened, as the House has, to the parliamentary secretary. It hinges on two arguments. One argument is the legal implications and an attempt to extrapolate that and apply it to existing treaties and so on. The parliamentary secretary says that the government has concerns because there may be precedence. My colleague from the NDP has based her argument more on natural rights, natural justice, a sense of morality and ethics when it comes to these inherent rights that the first nations peoples had and the circumstances of history. Because they did not have natural law and natural justice, they lost those rights.

Does my colleague come down on the side of, from time to time, articulating what are basic human rights, what is basic natural justice and articulating that without prejudice, to what perhaps the deeper implications may be with respect to the international justice system, or even justice systems in our country or in any other country?

Would she like to give us an opinion on which side she comes down on with respect to first nations and the international declaration?

• (1805)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is a very important issue. When we talk about natural justice, I am not a lawyer and I have great respect for my colleagues who are lawyers. Therefore, I can argue more from a heartfelt place, from that place of natural justice.

One of the elders in the community where I live has told me if we find a place to speak from our hearts and always consider those future generations, that we will come from a place that equates to natural justice.

Therefore, I come down on the side of natural justice and social justice. Many New Democrats have come from this place around really wanting to confront those fundamental issues around access, equality, fairness, clean drinking water, schools and rights for our children.

I certainly agree that I come from the place of natural justice.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that it was a very embarrassing day for Canada when we as a country voted against that declaration at the United Nations. Australia is another country that voted against the declaration. We have now since heard that there has been a change of leadership there and Australia has changed its position on how it voted at the United Nations. I would like to ask the member if she thinks that is hopefully where we can be in the near future for Canada.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, Australia was one of the countries that was with Canada. Canada was taking a lead role around the UN declaration and was actively trying to encourage other countries not to support it. Australia was one of those countries that was supporting Canada in its efforts. We have seen a complete about-face recently.

In my view, Australia needs to be commended for its apology to the aboriginal peoples in Australia. One can only dream of the day that we will have that kind of heartfelt apology happening here in the House of Commons for the residential schools legacy.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member. First, she covered education extensively and I have just one technical question on that. My understanding is that there were some proposals in the department to actually fix some of these schools and to replace them. I wonder if she too has heard that those proposals have been cancelled. Maybe the member for Burnaby—Douglas could comment on that at some time.

Second, just to support the point related to Bill C-21, which she has made this afternoon on several occasions, it is a bill with a few words in it. It was so bad that, as the parliamentary secretary said, it has taken the government over a year when it should have taken a few weeks. There was no consultation. There was no non-derogation clause. There was not enough time to implement it. There was no training. There was no interpretation clause to deal with the collective society that aboriginal people have.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, there are two points around the member's question. One point under the issue of schools is that we constantly hear about the money being shifted out of schools that are already on the books in order to deal with other emergencies. I mentioned the fact that we have 39 schools with roughly \$300,000. We have heard the government bragging about the surplus that is emerging in this fiscal year. That surplus could have built those schools many, many times over. Again, it is about political will and setting priorities. I would argue that education should always be a priority.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to Bill C-21, the member is absolutely correct. The New Democrats and the opposition parties proposed amendments. If only the bill had had the appropriate consultation, as outlined in article 18 in the UN declaration. It is the Crown's responsibility to consult. If that appropriate consultation had happened in advance, the opposition parties would not have had to spend so many months gathering input from coast to coast to coast in order to make sure that the bill would not be a deeply flawed bill.

We have seen other pieces of legislation such as the voter identification bill, for example, that were rushed through this House, and then we have had to go back and try to fix the problems. Instead, the opposition parties, in my view quite responsibly, were hearing from witnesses to make sure amendments could be proposed that would fix the flawed bill.

●(1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am about to resume debate. The next member on the list is the hon. member for Surrey North, but she has only two minutes. We will have to end debate at 6:13 p.m.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not get into the specifics, then, but let me just offer some observations of language that I have heard used this afternoon, because when people talk about the natural right of respect for people, of human dignity, very much of it is reflected in the language. The kind of language I heard today from the Conservative minority government is language underlaid with what is not a respectful attitude toward first nations people.

As one of the members from Churchill mentioned, somebody talked not about people but about inhabitants.

After 20 years of working on a document, there was no consultation when that position changed. This is something that says the government does not respect indigenous peoples the same way that it respects other people.

I believe the Minister of Indian Affairs said that the document did not provide enough "guidance" for aboriginal people. I do not know if I have to provide guidance for aboriginal people. That is a fairly condescending way of saying it.

The last phrase that really stuck with me was a phrase used by a member on the Conservative side who talked about "our aboriginal people". I do not know about everybody else, but I do not have any aboriginal people. It is a very condescending phrase to suggest that they are our aboriginal people in the same way we would express "our" about possessions we have.

In the two minutes I have had, I wanted to reflect the kind of language that I heard and which said to me that it is in part what is underlying this lack of respect for the document.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

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

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The vote will take place at 5:30 p.m. tomorrow.

* * *

●(1815)

PETITIONS

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour and the privilege of presenting yet another handful of petitions, this time a little smaller. It is under a thousand names at 738, but they come in every day from people right across the country who recognize the target of Bill C-484, that is, to protect the right of a woman who chooses to have a child to have that right, that choice, and to have the baby protected in law. There is support from Surrey, Terrace and Richmond in British Columbia and from a number of other places in the country.

CHARITABLE TAX CREDIT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two sets of petitions to present. The first is with regard to a private member's bill that I am moving forward, Bill C-476, to amend the charity portion of the Income Tax Act. The legislation would provide for charitable donations the same type of tax deduction that political parties get right now. The petitioners are from across Canada and support this important change.

ANIMAL CRUELTY LEGISLATION

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second set of petitions deal with animal cruelty. The petitioners call on Parliament to update a 115 year old law that protects animals from cruelty. Over 700 petitioners are calling for real changes, not Bill S-203, which is coming forward this week in Parliament.

SRI LANKA

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition submitted to this House by 1,068 Canadian residents throughout the length and breadth of this country on the subject of eradicating the scourge of international terrorism, with special reference to Sri Lanka. The petitioners express their appreciation of the ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE, by the Government of Canada in 2006, following similar action taken by the U.S.A., India, the U.K. and the EU, which designated this group as a terrorist organization.

In summary, the petitioners respectfully seek that Canada fully cooperate with the legal and democratically elected government of Sri Lanka and that it live up to its legal obligations in combating international terrorism and take all measures to prevent the raising of funds within this jurisdiction for terrorist warfare in Sri Lanka. I am pleased to table this petition for the consideration and necessary action of the House.

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition to the House from constituents who are concerned about the security and prosperity partnership of North America. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to stop further implementation of the security and prosperity partnership of North America with the United States and Mexico until there is a democratic mandate from the people of Canada, parliamentary oversight, and consideration of its profound consequences on Canada's existence as a sovereign nation.

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure today to present a petition signed almost exclusively by my constituents. They drew up the petition before Bill C-484 was introduced, but that is essentially what they are supporting. In particular, the petitioners are calling on Parliament to enact legislation to recognize unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence. As this House has voted upon it, it is a timely petition.

ORGAN DONATION

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of presenting a very significant petition coming from over 1,000 Canadians regarding the present government's decision to exclude gay men from donating their organs. Contrary to what the Prime Minister said today, these petitioners point out that in fact it is the decision of the government and the present health minister to put before Canadians an exclusionary policy that would deny gay men the ability to donate their organs.

The petitioners point out that the policy is discriminatory and disgusting. They point out that it is not based on scientific evidence. They point out that this policy comes at a time when we have a desperate need in this country for organ donation. The petitioners point out that it is wrong to turn away a healthy organ simply because of its carrier's sexual orientation. That will cost hundreds of Canadians their lives.

They point out that this policy is based on stagnant, outdated and incorrect assumptions about the sexual activity of gay men. The

Government Orders

petitioners call on the government, specifically the Minister of Health, to immediately repeal the regulation banning from organ donation men who have had sex with men.

* * *

● (1820)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill C-50, the Budget Implementation Act, 2008, but specifically on the amendment proposed by my colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, which picks in particular our concern in this corner of the House for provisions that are included in the budget implementation act regarding changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Specifically, the motion that we are debating at this point in the debate reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, since the principles of the Bill relating to immigration fail to recognize that all immigration applicants should be treated fairly and transparently, and also fail to recognize that family reunification builds economically vibrant, inclusive and healthy communities and therefore should be an essential priority in all immigration matters.

I think that spells out very clearly what our concerns are with this provision regarding immigration in the budget implementation act.

We are concerned because a measure that changes our immigration law so significantly, we believe, should not be buried in a large budget implementation bill. We believe that this change to the immigration law is so profound and so important that it should be debated on its own merits in a separate debate.

Adjournment Proceedings

It should have separate committee consideration as well and that it should be considered by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, not the finance committee which does not have the expertise that the citizenship and immigration committee does in relation to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and immigration concerns from coast to coast to coast in Canada.

We believe that this piece of Bill C-50 is improperly placed and really should be debated on its own with particular reference to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

What does this proposal from the government actually do? We see that it gives major new powers to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to control the types of applications the minister accepts, to impose quotas, to dispose of current immigration applications, and to facilitate queue jumping.

We would say that it puts certain limits on the humanitarian and compassionate category which currently is the only channel for many who encounter challenges in the process of pursuing family reunification.

We believe that it gives the minister new powers to deny visas to those who meet all immigration criteria. We also believe that it further supports the current policy shift whereby immigrants are increasingly being understood and treated as economic units to be brought here through temporary visa arrangements, instead of the permanent residency program.

Those are all very significant concerns with this provision that is buried in the budget implementation act. That is why we believe that it should have a very thorough debate. All of these questions that we raise, we believe, should have a fulsome debate here in the House and in committee. By having it as part of a budget implementation bill and sending it to the finance committee will not allow for that.

It is not only New Democrats who are concerned about these provisions that would change the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that are found in the budget implementation bill. Richard Kurland, who is one of the most prominent immigration experts in Canada and editor-in-chief of Lexbase, which is one of the key sources of information about immigration policy and procedure in Canada, has been very critical of this proposal from the government that is included in this legislation.

He notes that it took a long time and it was a long fight to establish clear criteria for the processing of immigration applications to establish the principle that anyone who applied should have their application considered, that anyone who met the criteria of the immigration program should have a chance at success of their application.

He has some specific criticisms of what this legislation would do. He notes that in the existing IRPA, section 11.(1) states:

A foreign national must, before entering Canada, apply to an officer for a visa or for any other document required by the regulations. The visa or document shall be issued if, following an examination, the officer is satisfied that the foreign national is not inadmissible and meets the requirements of this Act.

• (1825)

The important word there is that the visa “shall” be issued. Mr. Kurland notes that in the proposed legislation this same section 11.

(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is amended to say:

A foreign national must, before entering Canada, apply to an officer for a visa or for any other document required by the regulations. The visa or document may be issued if, following an examination, the officer is satisfied that the foreign national is not inadmissible and meets the requirements of this Act.

There is a significant difference between the words “shall” and “may”. It opens up a huge opportunity for discretion and the operation of the minister's own biases. It is a real attack on the kinds of transparency and guarantees that exist in the current legislation, guarantees for the appropriate processing of applications that were fought for long and hard over many years.

Mr. Kurland further points out that the use of the word “shall” in IRPA's section 11.(1) gave all visitors, foreign students, foreign workers and applicants for permanent residence the right to a visa when they met the preconditions for visa issuance.

He notes that the use of the word “may” in the government's proposed change to IRPA's section 11.(1) takes away those rights. All visitors, students and foreign workers and applicants for permanent residence no longer will have the right to a visa, even when they qualify for the visa by meeting the required preconditions for visa issuance or renewal of their status.

Mr. Kurland additionally points out that under this proposal, applications for visas do not have to be accepted, applications for visas that are accepted do not have to be processed, applications for visas that are processed do not have to be given visas even when the person meets all the requisite conditions to the visa issuance, and applications for visas with the supporting materials and documents may be disposed of at any time.

Surely, those are all important compromises to the kinds of transparency and guarantees that have existed recently and that were fought so long and hard for in the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the addition of that kind of discretion to the minister or the department is a huge step backward in ensuring the appropriate processing of immigration applications.

The whole question of what this does to family reunification is a key one in all of this. It is something that we need to highlight when we are looking at the effects of current Conservative government policy when it comes to citizenship and immigration.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to resuming my speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas will still have two minutes when we return to the study of Bill C-50 and, of course, five minutes for questions and comments, which I know he is looking forward to.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1830)

[English]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the spring of 2005 I was reviewing Canada's hate crimes legislation and I noted that there were a number of categories, identifiable groups, which were covered: race, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. However, I noticed that there was an omission. Gender was not covered. That spurred me to call the Department of Justice to find out if perhaps there was other legislation that covered off gender.

I received a call back from an official who told me that it seemed to be an oversight. I thought to myself after that conversation, my goodness, what kind of Canada do we live in when this sort of oversight can occur? Is it a reflection of the gender inequality in our House of Commons? Or is it a reflection of society's tacit acceptance of certain hateful types of expression?

That spurred me to draft a piece of legislation, a private member's bill, perhaps unique in the sense that all it entailed was the addition of one single word "sex", the legal term for gender, in existing legislation.

Since the original introduction of hate crimes legislation, there has been a diminishing number of hate crimes in Canada. We have become more accepting and respectful. In fact, we often now celebrate our differences. Unfortunately, women continue to be the target of hate crimes at increasing rates.

Several months ago, every MP in this House stood for a minute of silence in memory of 14 young women massacred at the École Polytechnique. Yet three times, a number of these same MPs have blocked the passage of Bill C-254 in our House of Commons, allowing the continuation of the spreading of gender-based hatred. It is a hatred with which vulnerable new generations are being infected.

For instance, a musician who has sold thousands of CDs in Canada raps these horrific lyrics:

Then punch a bitch in the nose
Until her whole face explodes
There's three things I hate: Girls, women,—

And he continues.

Minister, why are these lyrics legally protected? Yet, if we were to substitute equally pejorative terms for Jew, Black or gay, charges would be laid. Today, the hands of our police forces are tied when attempting to deal with this type of hatred.

Soon after introducing my bill, I received a letter of support from the office of William Blair, Chief of Police in Toronto. His letter stated:

The Toronto Police Service supports and applauds your efforts to combat the serious issue of promoting hatred and violence against women.

It is not just our police forces which support Bill C-254. The media violence coalition, representing some 160,000 teachers, principals and trustees in Ontario, is actively lobbying on its behalf.

Finally, I hope that the Minister of Justice will concur with the opinion of his colleague, the Minister of Finance, who, as Ontario's attorney general, stated in a letter dated December 20, 2000:

I will continue to ask the federal government to expand the definition of identifiable groups to include gender.

He further stated:

It is time for the federal government to provide such tools to prosecute those promoting hatred against women by amending the Criminal Code.

I hope that all my parliamentary colleagues will put their political differences and ideologies aside for the sake of Canadian women, to protect our mothers, to protect our wives, to protect our sisters, and to protect our daughters.

I call upon the minister to act and to add one word, just one word, "sex", the legal description for gender, into existing hate crimes legislation.

Tough on crime should also apply—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member.

The floor now belongs to the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do find it a little bit ironic that when we as a government bring forward legislation that would actually, in a substantive and measurable way, protect Canadians, men, women and children alike, we are met with obstruction and criticism by the opposition.

When we have bills for which Canadians have been calling for years that would, in a meaningful way, protect them, we are met with that kind of response, and yet today we have a member raising the issue of protecting women, protecting Canadians. It is a little ironic.

The member also does touch on the issue of deciding which lyrics he likes or does not like or what he finds offensive or inoffensive, and, to be sure, there are lyrics that he cited that I think all of us would find terribly offensive and troubling. I would urge him to talk to some of his colleagues who are raising issues of so-called censorship, saying that the government wants to censor production, when that, in effect, is what he is proposing in his speech.

I want to state from the outset that our government not only recognizes both hate crimes and violence against women as serious issues and issues deserving of serious treatment by the criminal law, but in the last two years our government has acted in tangible, meaningful ways to better protect women, better protect all Canadians from those who would do them harm.

I do want to consider the existing criminal law on this issue. Section 319 of the Criminal Code prohibits publicly inciting hatred against any identifiable group. Identifiable group is defined as any section of the public distinguished by colour, race, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation.

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In 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *R. v. Keegstra*, considered whether this offence violated the accused's freedom of expression as guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court unanimously found that the hate propaganda offence did indeed infringe on freedom of expression. However, by a narrow majority the court upheld the offence under section 1 of the charter on the basis that its infringement constituted a reasonable limit upon freedom of expression that could be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

The judgment underscores the importance, indeed the necessity, of having clear and strong evidence to support any expansion of the hate propaganda offence.

In 2004, statistics from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics study on hate crime in Canada reported that of the 928 hate crimes reported to 12 major police forces in 2001, only 8, or less than 1%, were reported as having been motivated on the basis of sex. Compare these statistics to the fact that 57% were reported to be based on race and ethnicity, 43% based on religion and 10% based on sexual orientation.

Other existing Criminal Code offences can be used to address the type of messages against women that motivate the proposed expansion of the hate propaganda offence. For example, subsection 163.8 of the Criminal Code prohibits making and distributing material, the dominant characteristic of which is "the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty and violence.

• (1835)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Mr. Speaker, initially, as the parliamentary secretary began, I was a little discouraged because he began diverting into various tangential discussions. However, he then came back to our legislation and to the essence of the matter. In fact, he quoted the particular section that lists out the groups that are covered by the legislation, the identifiable groups based upon race, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Gender is not covered.

Bill C-254 calls for the addition of one word, "sex", the legal term for gender, into the existing legislation.

When he said that the government has acted, it has. Three times members of the government blocked the passage of Bill C-254.

Just a couple of hours ago I received an excited phone call from my wife. She had received the results of an ultrasound and we now know that this summer we will have a baby daughter. I know that she will be born—

• (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): As I interrupt the hon. member, I must congratulate him.

The floor now belongs to the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on the joyous news of his forthcoming child. However, as someone who just had a baby daughter four and a half months ago, I must warn him to be prepared for the late nights and, of course, the concerns that we have because we both want to make our Canada a better and safer Canada for our children and the next generations to come.

That is why our government has been taking very clear and substantive steps. The cornerstone among those steps was the Tackling Violent Crime Act, an act to get tough on those who prey on innocent individuals, on those who would break the law, who would be recidivist, on individuals who have shown a disregard for the law.

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in February, I asked a question in this House concerning the impact of the crisis in manufacturing on my constituency of Kitchener Centre and across the Waterloo region.

The Waterloo region is home to over 62,000 workers who make their living in the manufacturing sector. Several companies have had to make deep cuts to their workforce or close their doors entirely. This is a serious crisis and it is having a tremendous impact, not only on the economy of Kitchener Centre, but on the individual lives of those affected.

The manufacturing crisis is having a devastating effect right across Canada. In response to my very serious question on a serious issue, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance chose to speak to the burgeoning job market in the oil and gas industry in Alberta.

The manufacturing industry has been facing significant challenges in recent years as a result of the rapid, unexpected rise of the Canadian dollar, increased competition from emerging economies and higher energy prices.

The manufacturing workers in Waterloo region are worried about the future of their jobs and these workers have good reason to be concerned. Over 130,000 manufacturing jobs were lost last year. These are jobs that Canadians cannot afford to lose.

We are disappointed in the government's dismissal of this very important issue. In February, I asked the government when it would introduce and implement a plan to deal with this crisis in manufacturing. I asked the government to consider the financial and emotional repercussions felt by thousands of Canadians who worry about the future of their jobs.

I asked those questions because the workers of Kitchener Centre, just like the workers right across Canada, deserve better than the government's "laissez-faire, I don't care" approach to our economy.

The answer I received when I asked this question in the House speaks volumes to the Conservatives' fend-for-yourself attitude toward governing. Instead of acknowledging what is a very real crisis facing Canada's manufacturing sector, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance skirted the issue and replied that he would be cautious in his comments about Kitchener-Waterloo because he did not want to comment on the kind of representation it deserved.

Sadly, this kind of partisan jab is typical of the Conservative government's divisive style of governing. Instead of coming up with a plan to help Canadian workers, the Conservatives busy themselves coming up with empty catchphrases and baseless accusations to try to distract Canadians from the real issues at hand.

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In fact, the Prime Minister made a similar glib comment when he met with the Canadian Auto Workers on a visit to Kitchener. The Prime Minister suggested to the members of the CAW that those out of work might consider seeking employment in Alberta.

I and my colleagues on this side of the House have no interest in playing games with the livelihood of Canadian families and with our national economy. We simply cannot ignore the devastating impact that the crisis in manufacturing is having on Kitchener Centre. The loss of good, well-paying jobs has a significant impact in even the most diversified local economies such as Waterloo region enjoys.

Waterloo region is home to a heavy concentration of manufacturing businesses representing a diversity of sectors, including food processors, furniture makers, high tech and digital media sectors.

• (1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question from the member for Kitchener Centre.

I want to remind her that it was her government that was the laissez-faire government and she continues to promote it. According to the *Ottawa Citizen*, I think the Liberals only voted 59% of the time in the House.

All members of the House and the government are concerned any time Canadians lose their jobs or factories close their doors. That is why this Conservative government is addressing these issues head-on.

I cannot believe the hypocrisy of the member. What the opposition whip fails to acknowledge is that the challenges facing the sector started under her government. Where was she when the job losses started under her party? She was nowhere to be seen. When a record number of auto factories were closed, where was she? She was nowhere to be seen.

Furthermore, I draw her attention to recent findings by CIBC World Markets. It points out that not only did the Canadian economy generate close to 360,000 new jobs in 2007, but the vast majority of them were in high paying sectors.

Under this Conservative government, Canada's unemployment rate is the lowest in 33 years. The loss of manufacturing jobs is being offset by jobs gains in sectors with the equivalent or higher employment quality, even in the Kitchener region. The number of full paid employees in high paying sectors, such as computer services, construction, research and development and public administration, rose by 3.6% last year. In fact, the bank's employment quality index rose by 2.8% last year, the largest yearly increase since 1999.

This index measures such things as the distribution of part time versus full time jobs, self-employment, paid overtime and compensation. In Canada the employment quality index rose despite continental and international economic uncertainty. However, we know some sectors are facing significant challenges and that is why the government has taken action to help.

On January 10, the Prime Minister announced a \$1 billion community development trust designed to help vulnerable communities that depend on a single employer, or a sector under pressure to adjust to challenging circumstances. Communities will use these funds for job training and skills development. Some will use the funding to develop community transition plans or to build infrastructure that will help them diversify their economy.

However, if we remember last year's budget, the budget that the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters said was the best budget for manufacturing, she voted against it. Not only that, but she, as her party's whip, forced every member of her party to vote against the best manufacturing budget ever.

In budget 2008, the party whip forced her colleagues to sit on their hands. She talks about laissez-faire. She and her government sat on their hands for budget 2008, which allocates an additional \$90 million to the targeted initiative for older workers, bringing the total funding available to \$160 million. This will extend the program intended to help and reduce the number of unemployed people by 2012.

This Conservative government has taken other important steps. We have lowered taxes, bringing over \$9 billion in tax relief for manufacturers and processors over the period 2006 to 2013. We have extended the two year accelerated capital cost allowance for an additional three years. This combined with other measures outlined in our recent budget and previous budgets will make our manufacturers more competitive and will help preserve jobs.

This Conservative government is acting for those industries that have been affected by economic change and the current market conditions. The hon. member and her party can ignore the good news, say the sky is falling and can radiate this toxic doubt on Canadian employment numbers if they wish, but they should not equate good news for the economy and Canadian workers as a whole with a lack of action.

We remember that the Liberals did absolutely nothing. Worse than that, they voted against the best manufacturing budget and they sat on their hands for the most recent budget. This is shameful.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend does a better job than I ever could of talking about the government's vitriol and hyperbole.

What I have done in the House for the last 11 years is fight for my community. I supported Technology Partnerships Canada, which helped places like Budd Automotive, as it was called at the time, Teleflex GFI and ATS bring new technology, often green technology, to the marketplace.

His government, in its wisdom, not only cut back these programs, but then decided it would reintroduce them at a much reduced level. It also did away with a lot of the green initiatives that our government had implemented, which would have boded well for the future of Canada and Canadians.

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The \$1 billion community fund that he talks about is a great start if it happens to be a single manufacturing or resource sector in northern Quebec dealing with forestry or mining. We have a very diverse economy. I challenge the government to come forward with any kind of comprehensive plan that will indeed help Canadians, help the manufacturing sector, which is huge in Ontario, instead of supporting a finance minister who—

• (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, her answer proves that she has no idea and she has not even read the previous two budgets.

She talked about technology partnership. Technology partnership was the most corrupt program that was out there. It was handed out to Liberal-friendly firms. It is most ridiculous. We have put in programs to treat all companies equally.

The Canadian economy remains strong. We have record low unemployment and we are continually adding jobs to the Canadian economy. The Chicken Little attitude of the member opposite ignores blatant facts. We can see that in her speeches. It is intellectually dishonest.

On January 10, 2008 our Prime Minister announced \$1 billion. What did the Liberals do? They ignored it.

Furthermore, the Conservative government has delivered over \$9 billion in tax relief for manufacturers and processors. We have increased funding and programs that support science and technology, research and development and infrastructure; \$33.1 billion of record spending in infrastructure to benefit all Canadian manufacturers.

As always, I want to thank the Liberal whip for supporting us and allowing our mandates to get through.

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 27, I asked the Prime Minister to launch an inquiry into the Mulroney-Schreiber affair. It is now April 7. My question of February 27 had to do with the timing of a public inquiry. I find it strange that, in response to my question on launching a public inquiry, this government continues to demonstrate its lack of transparency and public accountability.

[*English*]

The Conservative government has now received the ethics committee report which was in serial a main report and an opposition dissent and a government dissent. The main body of that report calls for a broad scope of study. The government has also received the recommendations from Professor Johnston which calls for a narrow scope public inquiry. Professor Johnston has also suggested that it would be unnecessary to have a fully public inquiry.

I should think that the government's greatest wish would be to offer Canadians clear information on Mr. Mulroney's dealings. It would be the government's greatest wish, I would think, to get to the bottom of this issue, but we would not know it from the members of

the committee who saw no evil, heard no evil, spoke no evil, although that is not always true, but they heard and saw no evil.

They must have thought that Mulroney was a ghost. His presence is felt in the House. His presence is felt in the boardrooms and corridors of the nation's businesses. His presence is certainly felt in a number of hotel rooms where he received cash.

Unlike the script that the government was willing to provide Canadians, Professor Johnston did not go totally along with the ending. In fact, Professor Johnston's report which should call for the immediate, fully public inquiry of the Mulroney-Schreiber affair was very clear in suggesting that yes, Mr. Schreiber should have all documents presented to the inquiry. We agree with that, all opposition parties. I think the government agrees with that, although we would never know from the committee members. They seem to say there was nothing wrong.

Professor Johnston has concluded otherwise. He has concluded that there is grist for the mill of a fully public inquiry by what I would call the good, the bad and the ugly. The good is, on the report of Dr. Johnston that an inquiry should start immediately, Bear Head is alive. Bear Head was a project in Cape Breton that called for the manufacture of armoured vehicles in Cape Breton. It was killed by the then prime minister of Canada, Mr. Mulroney, in a communication with Mr. Spector who gave evidence, yet lobbying went on fully in the year 1991 with government officials. The question is, why? Dr. Johnston asks, why did this occur? We agree with him. Dr. Johnston concludes that there is great public concern over what payments were made, when, how and why. It is a matter of public concern, but the government spokespeople do not seem to be saying that.

Dr. Johnston has said that there is great public concern over what services were actually rendered by Mr. Mulroney when he was over meeting with Mitterrand, Yeltsin and other now deceased public leaders, as evidenced by a conversation with Fred Doucet who only heard those two names in one and a half hours of conversation in a room in the Hotel Pierre in New York.

The bad is that the libel suit for which Mr. Mulroney was paid \$2.1 million will not be reopened. The Airbus and GCI money which was spread over this country through the PC Canada fund, through back doors of the prime minister's—

• (1855)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, today the final report of Dr. Johnston was tabled in the House. The hon. member has raised several important aspects of Dr. Johnston's recommendations and he should be pleased to know that our government will be implementing Dr. Johnston's recommendations.

As members may recall, the Prime Minister had asked Professor Johnston to finalize his recommendation on the terms of reference for the public inquiry once the work of the committee was completed.

To give some background, back in November 2007 Mr. Schreiber filed an affidavit in court that included a series of allegations. In light of these claims, the Prime Minister took the first in a series of steps to get to the bottom of this matter once and for all. The Prime Minister appointed an independent adviser to conduct an impartial review of allegations respecting the financial dealings between Mr. Schreiber and the former prime minister.

The mandate assigned to the independent adviser included four areas: to conduct a review of the allegations concerning financial dealings between Mr. Schreiber and the right hon. Brian Mulroney; to make recommendations as to the appropriate mandate for a full and public inquiry into these allegations, including the specific issues that warrant examination; to determine whether any prima facie evidence existed to suggest that criminal acts had taken place; and to indicate whether any additional course of action was appropriate.

To fulfill this mandate, the Prime Minister appointed Professor Johnston, the president of the University of Waterloo. Mr. Johnston has impeccable credentials and is widely admired for his considerable legal experience and expertise. An eminent lawyer with a distinguished academic career, Professor Johnston has also served as dean of the faculty of law at the University of Western Ontario and as principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University.

In honour of the commitment made to the Prime Minister to launch a public inquiry, the independent adviser released a report in January of this year. The Prime Minister accepted the independent adviser's report and immediately announced that a public inquiry would be convened once the ethics committee had concluded its work.

I am convinced that only by following this approach can the complete and truthful story of this affair be written. To date, as all Canadians and members of the House know, the media has reported many allegations, the standing committee has heard many contradictory statements, and the principals have filed suits and counter-suits against one another. Despite this activity, a clear image of the truth has yet to emerge.

We cannot allow this confusion to erode the public's faith in Canada's democracy. As much as all Canadians, including those on both sides of the House, are eager to know the truth, we must also be

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patient and allow the course that has been set out to work its way through.

I have every confidence that in due course we will learn the truth in this affair. I trust that the independent adviser has provided sound guidance and wise advice regarding the mandate of the public inquiry into this matter.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, Professor Johnston concluded that he agreed that the uncertainty about the status of the Bear Head project would be important to the commissioner during his or her work. There was uncertainty surrounding the question of what payments were made, when, how and why.

Professor Johnston's report concludes that it remains unclear for what year or years the amounts that Mr. Mulroney received were declared as income. He concludes that the treatment of the retainers by Mr. Mulroney, at a minimum, were unusual in light of ordinary business practice. He says there are questions that may lead to an exploration of these matters.

On these matters alone, we are ready for an inquiry. We are ready for one now. It should be a full public inquiry. The question is, finally, when will this inquiry be up and running and will all of the members who were on the ethics committee and members of the Conservative Party at the time be banished for the attitude they took at the committee hearing saying that nothing was wrong, when Professor Johnston clearly—

● (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, as I have already stated, the Prime Minister appointed Professor Johnston to look into this matter. Professor Johnston has provided his recommendations.

The hon. member seems to be unable to take yes for an answer because, as I have already indicated, our government is accepting the recommendations that Professor Johnston has made. These recommendations will be implemented shortly.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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