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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

• (1330)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

* * *

• (1520)

OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Her Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the Senate.

Accordingly, the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned:

The Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to report that, the House having attended on Her Excellency the Governor General in the Senate chamber, I informed Her Excellency that the choice of Speaker had fallen upon me, and in your names and on your behalf, I made the usual claim for your privileges which Her Excellency was pleased to confirm to you.

* * *

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

OATHS OF OFFICE

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-1, respecting the administration of oaths of office.

The Speaker: It is moved that this bill be now read the first time and printed. Motion deemed adopted.

(Motion deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, it is a long-standing parliamentary tradition for the Prime Minister to present pro forma legislation that asserts the right of the House of Commons to present legislation and, following in the practices adopted in some legislatures and in some of our provincial assemblies, I am proposing today to actually table an actual document that asserts that right.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, dealing with Bill C-1 in the proceedings at the opening of a Parliament is largely a symbolic gesture, as described in Marleau and Montpetit, to assert Parliament's right to act as it sees fit quite apart from what may or may not be in any Speech from the Throne.

Unfortunately, with the gesture the Prime Minister is making, there was no preliminary consultation with the opposition parties about what the government had in mind. We spent a good portion of the day yesterday talking about the importance of consultation, inclusion and reaching out to all members of the House to involve them in the proper procedures of this place to try to establish a better atmosphere and a more conducive feeling among members to work together on important topics of the day.

While the process that the Prime Minister is now proposing may not change anything in substance, I would on this occasion like to ask for two things. First, the assurance of the Prime Minister and, indeed, from the Chair, that this gesture does not change anything in substance since we have not had any opportunity to be consulted in advance or to examine the precedents that might exist in the provinces. I would like that assurance.

Second, I ask for the general assurance of the House, in the spirit of goodwill trying to make this place work better for all of us, that there is a sincere effort made at advance notice and consultation so this kind of awkward point does not need to arise again.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly give all assurances that this does not change any of our practices. In fact, it merely provides an actual hard copy documentation of our long established practices as is done elsewhere.

I would just point out that the tabling and first reading of all bills in the House of Commons is not debatable.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Just very quickly, Mr. Speaker, because I do not want to belabour the point, but I am sure the hon. House leader for the official opposition is well aware that we made the text of this available to his office at 12:30 p.m., some three hours ago.

The Address

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, there is a new element involved in this and that is, as I understand the motion that you read, you are seeking the approval of the House for the bill to be printed. That has in fact never happened before and it must be clear that nothing of substance is changing by this new procedure. Otherwise there should have been notice and consultation.

• (1530)

The Speaker: The Speaker made a mistake. I have read the words “be printed” into the motion because I always say it that way. I did not read it carefully, I was just babbling.

Accordingly, the words “be printed” should not have been included in the motion. The order is not to be printed.

The Prime Minister tabled a document after the motion had been carried. In my view the motion that should have been put to the House, and I was going to stand and correct the record but I was waiting for these points of order to sort themselves out, should have only been as follows. I think I did it in French, if I am not mistaken.

[*Translation*]

“That the bill be now read the first time.” Nothing more. The other words usually follow. I simply said it all at once.

[*English*]

I apologize to the House for my blunder. There is no bill being printed. We have followed the practice of the past except that there has been a document tabled.

I am sure the point by the hon. House leader for the official opposition will be considered if there is something irregular in the tabling, but the Prime Minister is free to table whatever he likes. The Chair will get back to the House.

* * *

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when this House did attend Her Excellency this day in the Senate chamber, Her Excellency was pleased to make a speech to both Houses of Parliament. To prevent mistakes I have obtained a copy, which is as follows:

*Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

Two hundred and fifty years ago, on October 2, 1758, the first parliamentary assembly of its kind in Canada was held in Nova Scotia. It is worth solemnly remembering in this Chamber the historic significance of that event.

Because today, we are free to reach our full potential thanks to the efforts of women and men, young and old, who established democracy in this country, where anything is possible.

This country is made up of every hope we cherish, every dream we pursue, every project we realize.

Upholding the ideal of democracy that we embody in the world is a responsibility that each of us bears.

As the great-great-granddaughter of slaves, I know just how precious this legacy is to the citizens of this country. They have again and again expressed their pride in this legacy to me, through their words and deeds, over the past three years.

In these uncertain economic times, it is more important than ever that our spirit of solidarity prevails and reaches beyond our borders, so that Canada represents not only a hope of renewal, but also a promise for the future.

Today, in this democratic tradition, the representatives of the Canadian people gather for the 40th time in this great nation’s history to open a new federal Parliament.

For over 140 years, since the era of Queen Victoria, Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir George-Etienne Cartier and the other Fathers of Confederation, the Parliament of Canada has assembled to deliberate upon the great issues of the day.

This institution thus represents one of the longest and most unblemished records of peaceful, democratic self-government anywhere on Earth.

The people spoke once again in a general election on October 14th, and entrusted this Government with a renewed and strengthened mandate.

At the same time, the people also chose to elect a minority Parliament. And in a parliamentary democracy such as ours, the government must always be responsible and accountable to the people’s representatives.

Our Government is mindful of both the privilege and the responsibility with which we have been entrusted.

This is a time of extraordinary global economic challenge and uncertainty. The world’s financial system faces pressures not seen for many generations. Governments around the world have taken unprecedented steps to restore confidence in the face of a global economic slowdown.

As Canadians watch these developments unfold, they rightly wonder about what they might mean here at home, for their jobs, their savings and their families’ well-being. Canadians know that, as Canada is a trading nation in the global economy, these events—while originating outside our borders—will nevertheless reverberate here.

In the face of this uncertainty, just as when faced with difficulties before, Canadians will prevail.

Canada was founded on the belief that, by joining our strength in confederation, our united country would be able to meet and rise above any challenge set before us.

From the explorers and pioneers to the settlers and railroad builders, this vast country was built by people who took tremendous risks and braved unforgiving elements for the prospect of a better future.

The Address

The dawn of a new century saw new challenges. In a war that ended ninety years ago last week, our young country came of age on battlefields whose names echo across our history—Ypres, Vimy, Passchendaele. The generation that followed overcame the Depression and again confronted the devastation of war. The achievements of these generations are marked not only by monuments to their bravery and sacrifices, but also by their legacy in forging Canada as one of the most peaceful and prosperous nations on Earth.

We know that Canadians will face the problems of today with the same spirit of determination and resolve as those who came before us faced the challenges of their generation. And like them, we know that we will emerge stronger than ever.

In this time of global economic instability, we can be reassured that the hard work of millions of Canadians has laid a solid foundation for our country. We have pursued policies different from those of many of our trading partners. We have paid down debt and kept spending under control. We have set public pensions on a sound footing and refinanced important programs such as health care and post-secondary education. Our banks are among the strongest and best regulated in the world. Canadian households and businesses have been prudent and avoided taking on the excessive debt witnessed elsewhere.

Embarking on its renewed mandate, our Government is committed to providing the strong leadership that Canadians expect. It will protect Canadians in difficult times. It will work with Canadians to secure our future prosperity. It will support Canadian workers and businesses in their pursuit of a better future. And our Government will continue its pursuit of distinctly Canadian policies that will contribute to a better economy.

Our Government has a clear approach to Canada's economic security. It will work with its partners to help address the current international crisis. It will maintain a prudent course for the country's finances. It will take action to support the economy today while building a stronger economy for the future.

As our Government dedicates its efforts over the months ahead to supporting the Canadian economy, so too does it rededicate itself to working in partnership with others to achieve this goal. Canadians expect federal and provincial governments to work together to steer us through the current economic turmoil and, ultimately, build a stronger Canada. To this end, First Ministers met on November 10th and will meet again in the new year.

Reforming Global Finance

The first order of business must be to put the international financial system on a sounder footing. Just as these troubles began beyond our borders, so will their solution demand that Canada engage its partners and allies around the world.

Canada will use its experience in developing a strong model of financial regulation to help lead the world in the repair and strengthening of the international financial system. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance began this important work on November 15th, joining the leaders of the G20 in Washington, D.C., to re-examine and renew the rules and institutions that underpin the global financial system.

The financial sector exists to serve the economy. Without sound financial institutions, loans would not be available for home ownership. Businesses would be cut off from the credit needed to expand and hire new workers. By choking off financing to the global economy, the credit crisis has dramatically weakened the prospects of growth. Canada will play a leading role to help resolve the crisis, maintain free and open markets, and advance Canada's interests.

The credit crisis has also underlined the dangers of a fragmented financial regulatory system. To further strengthen financial oversight in Canada, our Government will work with the provinces to put in place a common securities regulator.

Ensuring Sound Budgeting

Canada's relative success in weathering the global economic turmoil thus far can be attributed in no small measure to our country's solid fiscal fundamentals, the best among all major industrialized countries.

A strong fiscal foundation is not an end in itself, but it is the bedrock on which a resilient economy is built. Responsible budgets, significant debt repayment, and declining corporate and personal income taxes have provided an important competitive advantage. As Canada navigates today's economic uncertainties, it is even more important that we keep our sights fixed on responsible fiscal management.

The Minister of Finance will provide details on our Government's approach to economic and fiscal management in the Economic and Fiscal Statement to be delivered next week.

Ongoing, unsustainable deficits are quite rightly unacceptable to Canadians. These structural deficits must never return. At the same time, in a historic global downturn, it would be misguided to commit to a balanced budget in the short term at any cost, because that cost would ultimately be borne by Canadian families.

Hard decisions will be needed to keep federal spending under control and focused on results. Grants, contributions and capital expenditures will be placed under the microscope of responsible spending. Departments will have the funding they need to deliver essential programs and services, and no more. Our Government will engage Parliament and encourage members to take a more active role in scrutinizing spending and suggesting areas for restraint.

Our Government is also committed to responsible fiscal management of public sector compensation, and will table legislation to ensure sustainable compensation growth in the federal Public Service.

Our Government will ensure that the provinces receive the generous transfer payments planned for health care and social programs. We will ensure that Equalization payments also grow, but that they do not grow more quickly than our economy as a whole.

Any new measures to support the economy will also be carefully chosen and targeted for maximum benefit.

*The Address***Securing Jobs for Families and Communities**

Global turbulence is translating into real challenges for Canada. Our Government understands the pressures on ordinary hard-working Canadians and the businesses that provide them with jobs.

Canada's economy will only remain as strong as its workers and families. Our Government will strengthen Canada's workforce for the future by continuing to support student financial assistance and taking measures to encourage skilled trades and apprenticeships. Our Government will also work with the provinces to make the recognition of foreign credentials a priority, attract top international students to Canada and increase the uptake of immigrant settlement programs.

Our Government will also take steps to ensure that Aboriginal Canadians fully share in economic opportunities, putting particular emphasis on improving education for First Nations in partnership with the provinces and First Nations communities.

Our Government will support workers facing transition. It will ensure that existing programs and services are as effective as possible in meeting the needs of Canadians. Targeted help will be available to those who need it the most.

Our Government has already cut taxes to lower costs for business and help them compete and create jobs. To further reduce the cost pressures on Canadian business, our Government will take measures to encourage companies to invest in new machinery and equipment.

The Canadian manufacturing sector, particularly the automotive and aerospace industries, has been under increasing strain. Our Government will provide further support for these industries.

Canada's traditional industries, such as fisheries, mining and forestry, sustain the economic well-being of many regions and communities. Our Government will continue to assist these industries through measures aimed at marketing Canadian products abroad and helping businesses to innovate.

Our Government will continue to support Canada's farmers by ensuring freedom of choice for grain marketing in Western Canada and strongly supporting our supply-managed sectors at home and in international negotiations.

Public infrastructure is vital not only to create jobs for today, but also to create the links between communities and regions to help generate jobs for the future. Our Government is committed to expediting our Building Canada plan to ensure that projects are delivered as quickly as possible.

Expanding Investment and Trade

Canada's prosperity depends not just on meeting the challenges of today, but on building the dynamic economy that will create opportunities and better jobs for Canadians in the future. As one of our greatest hockey legends has observed, we need "to skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been."

Building a more dynamic economy will require new ideas and new investment. Our Government understands that advances in science and technology are essential to strengthen the competitiveness of Canada's economy. Our Government will start at home,

working with industry to apply the best Canadian scientific and technological know-how to create innovative business solutions. It will invest in new world-class research facilities.

Our Government will also expand the opportunities for Canadian firms to benefit from foreign investment and knowledge, while taking steps to safeguard consumers and our national security. Our Government will proceed with legislation to modernize our competition and investment laws, implementing many of the recommendations of the Competition Policy Review Panel.

Cultural creativity and innovation are vital not only to a lively Canadian cultural life, but also to Canada's economic future. Our Government will proceed with legislation to modernize Canada's copyright laws and ensure stronger protection for intellectual property.

Both investment and trade matter to Canada's prosperity. Our Government is committed to seeking out new opportunities for Canadians and to promoting global prosperity through free trade. It will work with the new administration in the United States in addressing shared challenges, especially during the current economic downturn, and seek opportunities to enhance North American competitiveness. New trade agreements will be pursued in Asia and the Americas, as well as with the European Union, to open markets for Canadian firms. Our Government will proceed with legislation to ratify the results of trade negotiations that have been concluded with the European Free Trade Association, Peru, Colombia and Jordan.

Our Government will continue to invest in expanding gateways on our Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and in vital border corridors such as the Detroit River International Crossing, to ensure that Canadian goods and services can reach markets in Europe, Asia and the United States.

Better positioning Canada to compete for investment and market opportunities will require action at home. A fragmented regulatory environment for internal trade and commerce has for too long restricted the flow of labour and investment across the country. Our Government will work with the provinces to remove barriers to internal trade, investment and labour mobility by 2010.

Making Government More Effective

Part of a solid economic and fiscal foundation is the sound management of government. To make Canada's national government more effective, our Government is committed to reform and streamline the way it does business.

Our Government will pursue innovative reforms to the administration of programs and services, drawing on the successful experiences of other governments around the world. It will build partnerships with third parties and the private sector to deliver better services at a lower overall cost.

Our Government will review all program spending carefully to make sure that spending is as effective as possible and aligned with Canadians' priorities.

The Address

Our Government will cut the red tape faced by the private and not-for-profit sectors when doing business with the government.

Fixing procurement will be a top priority. Simpler and streamlined processes will make it easier for businesses to provide products and services to the government and will deliver better results for Canadians. Military procurement in particular is critical: Canada cannot afford to have cumbersome processes delay the purchase and delivery of equipment needed by our men and women in uniform.

Our Government will also strengthen and improve the management of Canada's federal agencies, boards, commissions and Crown corporations to achieve greater cost-effectiveness and accountability.

Securing Our Energy Future

Energy is vitally important to our country. Our geography and climate mean that Canadians depend on affordable and reliable energy. The development of our rich energy resources is an important source of wealth and Canadian jobs.

Our Government will support the development of cleaner energy sources. The natural gas that lies beneath Canada's North represents both an untapped source of clean fuel and an unequalled avenue to creating economic opportunities for northern people. Our Government will reduce regulatory and other barriers to extend the pipeline network into the North.

These measures will bring jobs to northern Canada and create employment across the country, just as they will bring new energy supplies to markets in southern Canada and throughout the world. Economic development in Canada's North, led by a new stand-alone agency, is a key element of our Northern Strategy.

Nuclear energy is a proven technology, capable of reliable, large-scale output. In Canada and around the world, energy authorities are investing in nuclear power to meet both energy security and climate change goals. Our Government will ensure that Canada's regulatory framework is ready to respond should the provinces choose to advance new nuclear projects.

Tackling Climate Change and Preserving Canada's Environment

Our Government understands that Canada's economic prosperity cannot be sustained without a healthy environment, just as environmental progress cannot be achieved without a healthy economy. Our Government will continue its realistic, responsible approach to addressing the challenge of climate change.

Our Government has committed to reducing Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020. We will meet this goal while also ensuring that Canada's actions going forward remain comparable to what our partners in the United States, Europe and other industrialized countries undertake. We will work with the provincial governments and our partners to develop and implement a North America-wide cap and trade system for greenhouse gases and an effective international protocol for the post-2012 period.

To meet the challenge posed by climate change, we will also need to make greater use of technologies that do not emit greenhouse gases. Our Government will set an objective that 90 percent of Canada's electricity needs be provided by non-emitting sources such

as hydro, nuclear, clean coal or wind power by 2020. In support of this ambitious national goal, our Government will continue to provide support for biofuels, wind and other energy alternatives.

To ensure protection of our vital resources, our Government will bring in legislation to ban all bulk water transfers or exports from Canadian freshwater basins.

Our Government will work with all parties in Parliament to introduce sensible policies that can help consumers and improve our environmental well-being, such as increasing incentives for energy-saving home retrofits.

Helping All Canadians Participate

Canada is built on a promise of opportunity, the chance to work hard, raise a family and make a better life. Today, it is more important than ever to deliver on this promise, and ensure that all Canadians share in the promise of this land, regardless of cultural background, gender, age, disability or official language. This Government will break down barriers that prevent Canadians from reaching their potential.

Many working-age Canadians are faced with the dual pressure of holding down a job and caring for their family. Increasing numbers of Canadians are taking care of elderly parents while also raising young children. Our Government is committed to supporting working families and helping make ends meet.

Our Government will improve the Universal Child Care Benefit and take measures to increase access to maternity and parental benefits under Employment Insurance.

We will act to help families caring for loved ones with disabilities and to assist Canadians buying their first home.

Some Canadians face other barriers to participation in the economy and society, whether in the form of homelessness or debilitating illness. Our Government will extend the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and help more Canadians find affordable housing. It will take creative measures to tackle major heart, lung and neurological diseases and to build on the work of the Mental Health Commission.

Keeping Canadians Safe

In times of uncertainty as in times of prosperity, Canadians need to be assured that they are safe in their homes and communities.

The Address

Canadians look to governments to ensure that the justice system is working effectively and that Canadians are safe. Our Government will take tough action against crime and work with partners to improve the administration of justice. Serious offences will be met with serious penalties. Legal provisions will be strengthened in key areas, such as youth crime, organized crime and gang violence. Gun laws will be focused on ending smuggling and stronger penalties for gun crimes, not at criminalizing law-abiding firearms owners. More broadly, Canada's criminal justice system will be made more efficient. Citizens need to know that justice is served, and that it is served swiftly.

Safety and security also mean that Canadians must be assured that the food on their dinner table, the toys they buy their children, and the medicines on which they rely are safe. Our Government will follow through with legislation providing better oversight of food, drug and consumer products. It will strengthen the power to recall products and increase penalties for violators. It will also move quickly to launch an independent investigation of this summer's listeria outbreak and act quickly upon its findings.

National security is the most fundamental duty of any national government to its citizens. Our Government will table a national security statement to explain how we intend to balance the new threats and challenges to national security that we face with the need for oversight, accountability and the protection of civil liberties.

Contributing to Global Security

Our national security depends on global security. Our Government believes that Canada's aspirations for a better and more secure world must be matched by vigorous and concrete actions on the world stage.

Security ultimately depends upon a respect for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Where these values are imperilled, the safety and prosperity of all nations are imperilled. Canada must have the capacity and willingness to stand for what is right, and to contribute to a better and safer world.

Our Government is transforming Canada's engagement in Afghanistan to focus on reconstruction and development, and to prepare for the end of our military mission there in 2011. The hard work and heroic sacrifices of Canada's men and women in the field—military, diplomatic and development—will leave the people of Afghanistan the lasting legacy of a more secure, more peaceful and better governed country.

Our Government will also continue to rebuild and arm the Canadian Forces with the best possible equipment. We will renew all of our major air, sea and surface fleets over the next two decades, creating new, high-technology jobs in Canada in the process.

Canada's international assistance will continue to increase and will be spent more effectively in the promotion of development goals. A new, non-partisan democracy promotion agency will also be established to support the peaceful transition to democracy in repressive countries and help emerging democracies build strong institutions.

Building Stronger Institutions

Canada's institutions are the cornerstone of our democracy, our freedom and our prosperity.

Parliament is Canada's most important national institution. It is the only forum in which all Canadians, through their elected representatives, have a voice in the governance of the nation. Parliament should be an expression of our highest ideals and deepest values, our greatest hopes and grandest dreams for the future of our children. Our Government believes these ideals can only be achieved if Parliament truly reflects the character and aspirations of the Canadian people.

Our Government will introduce legislation to move toward representation by population in the House of Commons for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Legislation will also be introduced to allow for nominees to the Senate to be selected by voters, to serve fixed terms of not longer than eight years, and for the Senate to be covered by the same ethics regime as the House of Commons.

The Public Service of Canada is a key national institution. Public servants inspect our food and police our borders. They deliver programs and services to millions of Canadians in every region of this country, from our largest cities to the most remote Arctic communities. Drawing on the recommendations of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on the Public Service, our Government is committed to the continued renewal of the Public Service.

Our Government will also take steps to strengthen the Canadian confederation. It will respect the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories and will enshrine its principles of federalism in a Charter of Open Federalism. The federal spending power will be constrained so that any new shared-cost program in an area of exclusive provincial responsibility will require the consent of the majority of the provinces to proceed, and that non-participating provinces can opt out with compensation, provided that they implement compatible programs or initiatives.

Conclusion

Canadians have renewed their confidence in our Government. They have placed their trust in their representatives. And they have asked us to work together to meet the challenges before our country.

Our Government is committed to Canada's continued success at this time of global economic instability. All its energy will be directed to addressing the challenges Canadian families, businesses and workers face, both today and in the future. It will continue to establish effective policies that give a competitive advantage to this country. It will strengthen the institutions that keep Canadians safe, secure and prosperous. And it will work in partnership—with its allies, with the provinces and territories, with industry and with the millions of Canadian families—to keep Canada the true North, strong and free.

Canadians have faced times of uncertainty and renewal before and have always emerged a stronger and more united people. Gathered here in this Chamber, we remember the men and women who went before us and the legacy of freedom and prosperity that they have bequeathed to us. It is now our duty to protect and enhance this legacy for those who will follow us.

Honourable Members of the Senate and Commons, yours is a most important task. May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Speech from the Throne delivered this day by Her Excellency the Governor General to both Houses of Parliament be taken into consideration later this day.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the following members have been appointed as members of the Board of Internal Economy for the purposes and under the provisions of the Parliament of Canada Act, subsection 50(2).

[*Translation*]

The members are: the hon. Jay Hill and the hon. Gordon O'Connor, members of the Queen's Privy Council, Mr. Jacques Gourde and Mr. Joe Preston, representatives of the government caucus, the hon. Mauril Bélanger and Mr. Marcel Proulx, representatives of the Liberal caucus, Mr. Michel Guimond, representative of the Bloc Québécois caucus, and Ms. Libby Davies, representative of the New Democratic Party caucus.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the business of supply be considered at the next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a total of two days will be allotted for the supply period ending December 10, 2008.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be appointed to prepare and report lists of members to compose the standing and standing joint

The Address

committees of this House, and that the committee be composed of Harold Albrecht, Barry Devolin, Guy Lauzon, Joe Preston, Tom Lukiwski, Scott Reid, Marlene Jennings, Roger Cuzner, Marcel Proulx, Michel Guimond, Claude DeBellefeuille and Yvon Godin.

• (1535)

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House proceeded to the consideration of the speech delivered by Her Excellency the Governor General at the opening of the session.

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election as Speaker in this 40th Parliament of Canada.

It is my honour to open the debate in consideration of the Speech from the Throne. I wish to begin by thanking the Governor General for her eloquent speech. Her Excellency was quite clear in laying out the challenges that currently face Canadian families and businesses in this time of global economic instability.

Canadians can rest assured that we will devote all of our energy to addressing the challenges that they face today and in the future.

I also want to express my gratitude to the Prime Minister for asking me to move this motion on the reply to the Speech from the Throne. It is an honour.

I want to take a moment to thank the good people of Portage—Lisgar for putting their faith in me as their representative in the House of Commons.

I also want to thank my husband, David, and our children, Lukas, Delaney and Parker, for their support and encouragement.

Indeed, all 308 members of this chamber have been granted a high honour by their constituents. I want to congratulate all of the members of the House for having earned that honour.

In a time when many around the world cannot count on these democratic liberties, our ability to work out our different opinions peacefully and openly is testament to a country that is healthy and a democracy that works. Canada is blessed.

However, we all have constituents who are touched by the current instability in the global economy. These are real people with real worries. The prospect of Ottawa becoming an insular, distant and trivial place during these times would alarm them. It should also alarm each of us.

The Address

From the government side, we recognize that while Canadians have entrusted us with a renewed and strengthened mandate in the recently concluded election, our position remains that of a minority. Minority governments are supposed to consult and cooperate with other parties whenever possible and, indeed, in these unstable economic times, such cooperation is in all of our best interests regardless of parliamentary standing.

I am happy to note that the Prime Minister has already personally consulted with the leaders of all of the opposition parties in the search for common ground in this Parliament, just as I am pleased to note that our government is prepared to heed good advice and listen to good ideas no matter where their source as long as this advice and these ideas are themselves offered in good faith.

At the same time, we will be expecting the opposition parties to keep their end of the electoral bargain, to stay out of denial when it comes to respecting the clear wishes of all Canadians, for while this remains a minority Parliament, it is beyond debate that Canadians granted this government a much stronger mandate. They chose our platform as a governing blueprint and they chose the Prime Minister as the best person to lead Canada in uncertain times.

Canadians, therefore, deserve to see a government that is granted a reasonable accommodation to implement its governing agenda free of the tabloid politics and partisan gamesmanship that has often paralyzed this chamber in the past. Parliament must be allowed to work.

The Governor General has already outlined the broad priorities of our government. Allow me to comment on some of these in a little more detail.

First of all, let me talk about our government's core commitment to reforming and strengthening the global financial system. To some this might sound an awfully abstract concept. It is anything but.

Prior to entering public life, I made my career in the financial planning industry. I have seen firsthand the kind of tough decisions that many individuals, small businesses and families have to make. The fact of the matter is that today we are all interconnected. Individuals and businesses throughout the world rely on a sound international financial system in order to protect the value of their investments, savings and pensions.

• (1540)

By almost every measure, Canada's monetary policy, financial regulations and real estate sector are among the soundest in the world. We certainly avoided the excesses and pitfalls that are now plaguing our American neighbours. However, in real terms, being blameless has nothing to do with being safe. This problem is not of our own making, but it is ours to deal with all the same.

The international credit crisis has made it more difficult for Canadians to obtain mortgages and pursue the dream of home ownership, just as it has made it more difficult for businesses to obtain additional credit so they can expand and create jobs. Of course, the slowdown in global growths, spurred on by this crisis, poses significant risks for our export-based economy.

That is why we consider addressing this challenge priority number one. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance have already

concluded a series of meetings with our international counterparts to return the global financial sector to a more stable footing, based on sound domestic regulations and accountable peer review. Even though Canadians are on a more secure footing than many, this is not to say that we cannot strengthen our own way of doing things. This is no time for complacency.

Our government believes that as long as securities regulation in our country remains fragmented, families and businesses will be left at unnecessary risk. That is why our government remains a strong advocate of a single securities regulator in Canada, and will continue to advance this position with our provincial counterparts.

It is also why we will be keeping our own house in order, and thoroughly modernize the laws and regulations around investment and competition in Canada. We will take the same pragmatic approach when it comes to ensuring sound budgeting in Canada. This includes our firm opposition to long term structural deficits, as well as our vigilance when it comes to scrutinizing all government expenditures, curtailing spending growth, eliminating waste, and streamlining the way government does business. This will require some hard decisions, but we will keep our sights focused on delivering real results.

As part of this effort, we are prepared to help secure jobs for families and communities, and expand investment and trade. In the modern, interconnected global economy, these two goals are forever linked. We must do more to help businesses struggling with the challenges of the new economy when such assistance is pragmatic, well-reasoned, and in the long term interest of all Canadians.

Our government has already reduced the tax burden on families and businesses. The next step is to reduce other government barriers to success, whether those barriers are red tape standing in the way of entrepreneurs or an outdated monopoly standing in the way of our grain farmers.

We will do all of this while remaining focused on the ultimate goal: a better quality of life for new Canadians and long-time Canadians alike, to work, to gain an education, to build a home and raise a family. We must help all Canadians participate.

Government policies must help these people and never stand in the way. That is why we will make sure that Canada's laws, regulations and support follow the model of our universal child care benefit, with real benefits for real people. This includes ensuring more Canadians have access to maternity and parental benefits, and it includes making it more affordable for those Canadians who care for loved ones with disabilities.

There is much more to say about our governing agenda, and my colleague from Mississauga—Erindale will have plenty more to add, but before I yield the floor, let me offer this one last observation.

The Address

I am a new member of Parliament and I am not embarrassed to say that it was an awe-inspiring moment to take that first walk up Parliament Hill and to take my seat in this chamber for the first time. I know that many in this House have served as members for a long time and I can only imagine that it does become easy to lose that idealism in the cut-and-thrust and give-and-take that comes with the issues of the day.

However, whether we have been a member of Parliament for two weeks or two decades, we must always remember that, first and foremost, serving here is a unique privilege for all of us. With the responsibility that is entrusted to us today, we are simply custodians to a national story that is far greater than any of our own. The next chapter of this story will require us to make some difficult decisions in an uncertain time. Of course, that chapter is not yet written. All of us must live up to the ideals of this institution by doing what it takes to protect Canada's future.

• (1545)

To that end, it is my honour to move the following:

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale, that the following address be presented to Her Excellency, the Governor General of Canada:

To Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the House of Commons of Canada, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me offer my congratulations to the member for Portage—Lisgar on her maiden speech.

The government now admits that despite the Conservative rhetoric on the campaign trail, Canada is back into a financial deficit. It did not have to be that way. No, we cannot blame it on the failed policies of George W. Bush. In three short years Conservatives led the highest spending government on record. They squandered a \$12 billion surplus and they burned through the \$3 billion contingency fund. The government had been warned of an economic slow-down—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: Decorum, please.

While experts argued against its policies, the government failed to listen. Conservatives ignored the warnings: slowest growth in the G8; loss of 200,000 manufacturing jobs; lowest productivity in 18 years; loss of business and consumer confidence. And the government has made no effort to put money away for a rainy day.

An article in today's *Globe and Mail* states:

IHS Global Insight Canada managing director Dale Orr said Mr. Flaherty and the Conservatives should have taken better precautions against a deficit—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member knows that even when reading quotes, she cannot use members' names in the House. She will want to move to her question.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

—noting they cut some rainy-day cushions and drove program spending up 13.8 per cent in their first two years.

The government has failed to anticipate the impact on working families, seniors on fixed incomes, and new Canadians. Instead, it has delivered a throne speech that is long on rhetoric and short on specifics.

Will the government finally admit it was ill prepared, and through its mismanagement, created a made in Canada, distinctly Conservative deficit? Will it commit to returning Canada to the fiscally prudent and socially responsible practices which have served us so well in the past?

• (1550)

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, in response to that question, I would like to say first of all that Canadians sent a strong message and a strong mandate to Parliament. That mandate is twofold.

This government has a strong record of fiscal management and responsibility. Canadians said they want to continue with that record and take that into the future.

The second mandate we have is to work together. The Speech from the Throne outlined what this government will do. We will continue to provide Canadians with sound fiscal management. We have a plan. We want to see Canadians from coast to coast supported. We want to see the economy strengthened.

This is the time to work together. I look forward to working with all the members in the House, not arguing and fighting, but working together for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, may I begin by extending my congratulations on your election as Speaker of the House. I also wish to congratulate all members of the House on their election, and of course also to welcome the new members.

I must now express my surprise at what I have just heard. The hon. member is pleased with such a speech, yet there is a total lack of any intent to improve employment insurance and provide a support program for older workers. That, in my opinion, should be a priority in an economic crisis such as we are in at present.

What is more, there is no guarantee of complete reimbursement for seniors who were swindled out of their guaranteed income supplement. As well, the age limit for retirement savings plans should be raised from 71 to 73 years, because people are required to withdraw their funds at age 71, when we know that at this time those plans are at rock bottom and people are losing a third of their investments. So another two years could be added. These seniors are being given no attention whatsoever.

I am extremely surprised that the hon. member could be pleased with such a speech. As far as cultural is concerned as well, there is really a total lack of any sensitivity toward the world of culture.

*The Address**[English]*

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, again, this government is committed to all Canadians, to families, to seniors. We are committed to businesses. We are committed to farmers. We are committed to Canadian sectors that are creating jobs in this country. Our commitment is to continue.

One of the things we want to do is secure jobs for families and communities. We believe we can do that in two ways. One way is by keeping our own house in order. We have to make sure that the government is curtailing spending. We have to make sure that our budget is sound and that we are introducing and implementing sound fiscal policy.

We also want to invest in infrastructure. We want to invest in communities and make sure there is a bridge between what is happening in provinces and communities, and as a federal government support that. We want to extend parental benefits to individuals who are self-employed. That sends a strong message of the value we have for families, for seniors, for all Canadians.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to offer congratulations to the member for Portage—Lisgar on her election to this House and on her first speech in this House.

I speak in the interest of the cooperative notion that was presented in the Speech from the Throne this afternoon and say to the government that anybody who understands the impact of a downturn in the economy and the seriousness of the one we are in now and what is coming at us will be wondering why the government does not realize that the biggest impact will be felt by those who are most at risk and marginalized, and they are the poor in our communities across the country.

I ask the member, after all of the input the government received particularly from this side of the House and others in this place, why did her government not take this opportunity to reform the employment insurance system? That system is in desperate need of reform so that more people who qualify can count on it, the hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their jobs in the manufacturing and the forestry sectors and in other sectors across this country. Why did the government not take this opportunity to reform that very important insurance system that was put together to protect people in difficult times, especially at this time with the very serious difficult economic downturn that is coming at us?

• (1555)

Ms. Candice Hooppner: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a time of economic uncertainty. This is a time when the government is responsible to the people of Canada to lay a strong foundation for the future.

We want to help, and our endeavour is to help all Canadians. That is why we are ensuring sound budgeting and securing jobs for families and for communities. We are also expanding investment in trade.

We need to make sure that our industries, our small businesses, our manufacturers and our farmers are strong. That is the way to have strong families and strong communities. That is what we are committed to.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today and second the motion for an Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I want to thank the Governor General for her gracious remarks. I also want to thank the Prime Minister for granting me this great honour, and I especially wish to thank the voters of Mississauga—Erindale for granting me the honour and privilege of serving them as their member of Parliament.

I would also like to thank my wife, Ruth, for her care and support, and my parents for instilling in me, at an early age, a respect for this great institution.

My colleague from Portage—Lisgar has spoken already about much of our governing agenda. I would like to add some thoughts.

In the broadest possible terms, Her Excellency's speech focused on a single key theme: protecting Canada's future.

We live in a time of challenge and change. This is true internationally, and it is most certainly true here at home.

Our government is mindful of the responsibility with which we have been entrusted. We will protect Canada's future. We will follow through.

Of course this begs the question of what it means to protect Canada's future. It means, first and foremost, protecting Canadians' personal financial security. This means taking action, in concert with our global allies and trading partners, to address the global credit crisis. The credit crunch is still causing hardship to too many current and potential homeowners, as well as to businesses looking to grow and expand. The Minister of Finance has already announced several steps to protect the finances of Canadians in these uncertain times, and I am sure my fellow members join me in looking forward to his upcoming economic update.

Protecting Canadians' personal financial security also means understanding the distress caused by the current turmoil in global stock markets, including Canada's own. This is a frustrating challenge, to be sure. Free markets, by their very nature, cannot be controlled by government policy. They are as much about psychology as they are about economics, but the impact of the roller-coaster ride on the markets is very real. These are people's personal pensions, their savings, and their RRSPs.

Turmoil on the markets is therefore not just a Bay Street concern; it is a Main Street concern, which is why we must reassure investors inside and outside Canada that our regulatory system, our monetary policy, and our overall financial balance sheets remain strong.

The Address

What we must not do is provide investors inside or outside Canada with as much as a whiff of panic. That is why we know that knee-jerk reactions to the latest economic headlines are the wrong way to go. That is why we maintain that Canada's financial sector is well managed, on a sound footing, and in far better shape than those of most other countries, an assessment that is shared internationally by groups ranging from the World Economic Forum to the IMF, and that is why we will continue to work with our allies and trading partners on a smart, coordinated, long-term and global response to this crisis, because it is impossible for any one country to stabilize its own markets when everywhere else there is turmoil.

Protecting Canada's future also means protecting Canada's economy, and that includes Canadian jobs, investment, and trade.

My own professional background happens to include international business and trade law. I have seen a lot of economic cycles over the years, and it is true that this situation currently before us is unlike anything we have seen. Some of the reactions, however, are predictable. In a time of economic instability, there is always a tendency by some to respond by proposing closed borders, restricting trade, and advocating protectionist measures.

Protectionist sentiment is an unfortunate and natural reaction to economic anxiety. It is unfortunate because protectionism ends up destroying jobs and reducing the standard of living of the very people it is supposed to help.

Our government will continue to support open trade. We will do so by continuing to seek out new trading opportunities, be it through pursuing cross-border opportunities with the incoming Obama administration in the United States or through pursuing new trade agreements in Europe, Asia, the Americas and elsewhere.

We will also continue to invest in the Atlantic and Pacific gateways and in vital border corridors, such as the Detroit River international crossing. This will increase trade, investment, and jobs on both coasts and in border towns as well as ensure that Canadian goods and services reach the markets of our trading partners. We will encourage economic development in the north by reducing the regulatory hurdles on the construction of pipelines so that northerners can see more real benefits from their natural riches.

• (1600)

Canadian workers facing transition can continue to count on our support. We will continue to look for new ways to support vital sectors of our economy, whether they be in manufacturing, forestry, agriculture, fisheries or mining, so Canadians can continue to compete and succeed on the world stage.

Protecting Canada's future also means protecting the environment.

I cannot put it more plainly than this: the environment is now an economic issue. We cannot separate the commitment to long term environmental sustainability with that of long term economic growth.

Our government remains firmly on course to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 and, as the Governor General informed us, we will set an objective that 90% of our electricity needs will be met by non-emitting sources by that date as well.

Where once Canadians found themselves adapting to a time of unprecedented high oil prices, today we find ourselves adapting to the new normal of a lower international price of oil. In some ways this is a benefit. Canadians who were shocked by high gas prices in recent months are now saving money each time they fill up at the pumps.

However, at the same time, given that much of our economy is dependent on the energy sector, these lower prices create certain economic challenges as well. Our government sees this as an opportunity to diversify the energy sector in our country and, in particular, an opportunity to continue to develop new, cleaner energy sources.

Protecting Canada's future also means protecting the health and safety of Canadians. Our government will continue to build on the successes of the last Parliament to ensure that our laws respect the victims, protect the innocent and hold the guilty accountable for their crimes.

Considering that the threat of global terrorism is still very real, we will also table a new national security statement that will clearly detail the steps we will take to ensure that Canadians are protected from terrorism and other serious global threats.

We will also continue modernizing our food and safety laws to ensure that Canadians can always have faith in the products on their store shelves. There will be new accountability, more oversight, more recall powers and increased penalties for those who put the health and safety of Canadians at risk.

Protecting Canada's future also means contributing to global security. Just as our financial security is linked to the global economy, Canada's physical security is linked to the stability and security of other nations around the world.

We will continue to protect Canada's borders, including our Arctic frontier. We will continue to promote the Canadian values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law on the world stage. Canada will not shirk its obligation to stand up for these human values and human rights because freedom, democracy and the rule of law are the pathway to a better, safer world.

We will continue to rebuild the Canadian Forces with the best possible equipment to protect our brave soldiers when they are in harm's way. While we will continue to engage in the international mission in Afghanistan, we will focus more of our attention on reconstruction and development, while preparing to end the military side of the mission in 2011.

Protecting Canada's future also means building stronger institutions and strengthening our representative democracy.

The Address

Politics is a competitive business. We all know that. However, when it comes to big national projects, projects that by nature and necessity transcend traditional, regional or partisan divides, we owe it to ourselves, our constituents and future generations to make government accountable and effective.

Now our government has introduced some positive reforms to our democratic institutions that we believe are examples of positive, non-partisan reforms.

Ensuring that the House better reflects the Canadian population or introducing democracy to the Senate are concepts on which all Canadians should be able to agree. We will continue to pursue these stronger, more democratic institutions, and we will welcome any cross-party support.

We will also continue to strengthen Confederation itself. As members know, it was just last week that the Prime Minister met with the premiers to discuss the current global economic instability. Canada works best when we all work together. We will continue to respect the jurisdiction of the provinces while ensuring that federal transfers are sufficient to ensure that all Canadians can count on world-class health, education and other services close to home.

Perhaps the most important institution of all is this House. In this chamber every Canadian is supposed to have a voice through their elected representatives. Canadians do not expect us to agree on everything, but they do want our voices, their elected voices, to be focused on solutions and not on divisive rancour.

• (1605)

I am proud to second this motion, and I throw my full support behind the Governor General's remarks. May we conduct this debate, and all of our debates, with the passion and vigour of our beliefs while at the same time respecting this House, respecting each other and respecting our common obligations to all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I would like to take a moment to thank the people of Papineau for giving me the honour of representing them here in this House. It is a responsibility I will fulfill with grace and humility.

The government is at last admitting that Canada will, as it has under previous Conservative governments, again have a budget deficit.

[*English*]

Through this past decade Canada has faced many other crises, from SARS to BSE to currency crises in Mexico and Asia to September 11 itself and always we have managed to maintain our surplus while investing in innovation, in families and in opportunities for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Had this government followed the basic principles of financial administration that were in place when it took over, it could have defended the interests of Canadians, while at the same time being in a position to generate a budget surplus.

Will this government make a commitment to restore Canada to a healthy and socially responsible economy, with practices and principles similar to those it inherited two and one half years ago?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, I am sure all members of this august House will agree that Canada needs strong leadership and responsible fiscal management in these uncertain economic times. People's jobs and the economic stability of their savings, pensions and financial retirement incomes are of paramount importance. The initiatives laid out by the Governor General today will keep our economy and the health of our people strong and secure.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will understand that before I say anything else in this House, I want to thank the voters of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

The Speech from the Throne made it clear that the Conservative government did not understand the message Quebeckers were trying to send. Seventy-eight per cent of Quebeckers did not vote for the Conservative Party, and there is a reason for that. They did not like this government's positions, and they did not want what it had to offer. They did not like what the government planned to do with young offenders, and they really did not like the idea of cuts to culture. In Quebec, there was an outcry against such cuts. Clearly, the government did not get it, because the Speech from the Throne had nothing to say about bringing back that funding. Yet culture is hugely important in Quebec. We not only love and respect our artists, but we also consume a lot of what they produce. Why? Because we are a nation, and our artists represent Quebec culture. We are very proud of them. Yet there was nothing at all in the Speech from the Throne for artists and the arts.

I had the opportunity, if not the pleasure, to attend the Conservative Party convention last Thursday, where I heard the Prime Minister give a speech about his election campaign to his supporters. He did not say that he understood what Quebeckers wanted, nor did he acknowledge that they were not happy with what he had to offer them. He did not suggest that the government should therefore be more conciliatory and offer something else to Quebeckers, or that it should change, or that it should reach out to them and listen carefully to what they have to say. He said nothing of the kind. He said that, basically, Quebeckers did not understand the Conservative Party, that the party was going to find some other way to get its message across, and that it was going to repeat that message as many times as necessary to convince Quebeckers that it was right.

Given the current economic context, it is understandable that the government would deliver a throne speech focused on the economy. That makes sense, and the Bloc, too, wants to act on the issue without delay. However, this raises the following question: why would the government indicate, in its throne speech, that it wants to hurt a thriving economic sector—the cultural industry—all the while seeking to create programs that will help industry in general?

The Address

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, I believe all members in the House will agree that the people of Canada want us to work together to ensure that Canada's economy remains strong and that their jobs and the health of their families are secure.

The Governor General outlined today that the government would make it a priority to secure jobs for families and communities throughout Canada by encouraging skilled trades and apprenticeships, supporting workers facing transition and providing further support to automotive and aerospace industries.

It will expand investment in trade by modernizing investment, competition and copyright laws, while working with the United States to address shared challenges and pursuing trade agreements in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

By keeping our economy strong and people's jobs safe and working together to do so, I believe we will be able to address all the concerns of Canadians in the months and years ahead.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the constituents of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for returning me to this place. They sent me here with the understanding that we would do better.

As I listened to the Speech from the Throne today, I realized that Canadians were hoping for more and New Democrats were certainly expecting more. I waited to hear about affordable housing, child care or an increase to the pensions of Canadians.

Just a few days before the election, a citizen came into my office. He brought a pronouncement from the government which informed him that his pension would increase by 42¢ a month. In times such as these, it takes me back to the late days of the Harris government in Ontario when one of its ministers said, "Let the poor eat tuna". Are we returning to that?

• (1615)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, Canadian people understand that in these tough economic times, their jobs contribute to all our government institutions. In order to ensure that we can fund health care and education, we need to keep our jobs and our economy strong.

Today the Governor General has laid out a very clear plan to show Canadians how we will continue to keep our economy strong and make their incomes and pensions secure so we can have all the good things that government provides to us.

Mrs. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say in the chamber is thanks to the good

people of Newmarket—Aurora who saw fit to elect me to represent them here in the House.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale has given a great speech today. I want to thank him for his important contribution to today's debate in reply to the throne speech.

I know the hon. member has a strong background in trade and investment issues from his work in his private career and I am sure he will bring his expertise and experience to the House and to the committees.

Could the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale once again tell the House why it is so important to protect Canada's future in these uncertain economic times?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, all members of the House will agree that Canada needs strong leadership and responsible fiscal management in these uncertain economic times.

People's jobs and economic stability, their savings, pensions and retirement incomes are of supreme and paramount importance. The initiatives as laid out today by the Governor General will ensure that the economy and health of our people and our country remain strong and free.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all our colleagues who were re-elected and those joining us in the House for the first time. But I would point out that today's Speech from the Throne is extremely vague and short on substance considering the economic times. Therefore, we will have to obtain the specifics from the government in our debates, which will start tomorrow.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(On motion of Mr. Stéphane Dion the debate was adjourned)

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 4:19 p.m.)

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