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OFFICIAL REPORT
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Tuesday, November 25, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1000)

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS CALENDAR

The Speaker: Order, please. Pursuant to Standing Order 28(2)(b), I have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons calendar for the year 2009.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADA WATER PRESERVATION ACT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-228, An Act respecting the preservation of Canada's water resources.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to be here today to reintroduce my bill called an act respecting preservation of Canada's water resources. It was a bill I introduced in the last Parliament. Its goal is to eventually prohibit the large displacement or removal of water from major basins within Canada and at the same time to prevent removal of water in bulk outside of Canada.

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

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

ECONOMIC STATEMENT

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among all parties and I would like to state that I am very pleased with the cooperation that the opposition parties provided for this. I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, at 4 p.m. on Thursday, November 27, 2008, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings to permit the Minister of Finance to make a statement; after the statement a member from each recognized opposition party may reply for not more than 15 minutes; after each recognized opposition party has replied, or when no member rises to speak, whichever comes first, the House shall resume consideration of the business before it prior to the interruption; and that all questions necessary to dispose of any ways and

means motions related to the said statement may be put on Monday, December 1, 2008, at the end of government orders provided that, for the sole purpose of introducing a bill based upon the said ways and means motion, the House thereafter revert to the rubric, introduction of government bills, after which the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day.

•(1005)

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader 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)

HOUSE OF COMMONS CALENDAR AND BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe you will find agreement on the following motion regarding the parliamentary calendar for 2009. I move:

That, notwithstanding the calendar tabled by the Speaker pursuant to Standing Order 28(2)(b), the House not sit on Friday, January 30, Thursday, April 30 and Friday May 1, 2009; that, notwithstanding the Standing Orders and usual practices of the House, on Wednesday, April 29, 2009, after the daily routine of business, no dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Speaker, and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 81(10)(a), there shall be six days allotted to the business of supply pursuant to Standing Order 81 in the period ending March 26, 2009, with three days allotted to the official opposition, two to the Bloc Québécois and one to the NDP.

The Speaker: Does the chief government whip 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 motions. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Address

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

HEAVY TRUCK TRAFFIC

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the fourth day in a row, I have the pleasure to present a petition, mainly but not exclusively on behalf of the people of Ottawa—Vanier, because people from throughout the national capital region have signed it, to prohibit heavy truck traffic or, in any case, move it out of downtown Ottawa. The petitioners would like to see two bridges eventually built to create a ring road around the national capital region. One bridge would be in the east end of the city and would connect the Canotek industrial park with the Gatineau airport.

The petitioners are also asking the National Capital Commission not to convert parkways into truck routes. They are calling on the Government of Canada to require that the National Capital Commission conduct a thorough study of a proposed bridge to connect the Canotek industrial park with the Gatineau airport, option 7 of the first phase of the environmental assessment for interprovincial crossings.

[English]

ADULTERY

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition that was orchestrated by Harold Splett of Ottawa, who is calling on the Government of Canada to restore a penalty for committing adultery.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition from constituents in Langley. They state that there are a number of severe, life-threatening conditions that do not qualify for disability programs. The current medical employment insurance benefits of 15 weeks do not adequately address the problem. Therefore, they are calling on the House of Commons to enact legislation to provide additional medical EI benefits at least equal to maternity EI benefits.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from November 24 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in debate today.

First, allow me to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Speaker, on a successful election to the role of Speaker. Since my election in 2004 I have only known one Speaker and that is yourself. It is good to see you back in the chair once again. It will be interesting to see how you deal with some of the challenges facing the House of Commons today.

Let me also begin by extending congratulations to our fellow colleagues here who have been elected to the House of Commons. Some have been re-elected and are returning again. There are a considerable number of faces new to this chamber who will inject a new sense of lifeblood into the debates of our nation. Congratulations to all.

It is a tremendous honour to be returned once again. I want to thank the good folks of the riding of Essex for expressing their confidence in me once again and also for making a bit of history.

My election first in 2004 then 2006 and now again in 2008 makes me the first Conservative elected in three consecutive elections in my riding in over 75 years and only the second since Confederation. The people of Essex have decided to make a certain amount of history. It would be fair to read into the record the name of the last such member of Parliament to do that back home and his name was Eccles James Gott who did it in 1925, 1926 and 1930. It is good to follow in those footsteps.

I also want to commend the good folks back home in Essex for their choice and their wisdom in choosing a member of Parliament with a seat on the government side of the House as opposed to the opposition because at this particular time our region is facing a number of challenges. My constituents recognize the value of having a seat on the government side of the House. It also demonstrates that there is some resonance for our platform as the blueprint for moving forward for our region.

The City of Windsor is a neighbour to my riding and facing an unemployment rate of 10%. By returning me citizens are saying they want a partner in government who will be able to take the challenges of the region forward and look for solutions.

I think it also is an expression of confidence in the leadership of our Prime Minister and his ability to steer us through what is widely acknowledged as tough global economic times with a lot of instability. That trust is well placed.

The Address

Our Prime Minister is an economist and who better to understand economic trends with some amount of foresight and able to act proactively and pre-emptively in some cases to address those challenges. We have seen a number of proactive measures taken by the Prime Minister and the government over the last three years which have positioned Canada to best weather the storm.

Our measures are now being replicated by other major countries. After reading the headlines today, I noticed that a lot of other major industrialized countries are now duplicating our measures themselves with only a couple of differences.

First, these countries are doing it with the problem of mounting debt from ongoing structural deficits. We do not face that challenge here in Canada as we face these tough economic times. Second, these countries are doing it in response to the crisis rather than demonstrating foresight and getting out ahead of it.

What kinds of measures are we talking about? The United Kingdom, for example, made a 2.5% cut to its version of the GST. In a couple of successive budgets, our government has lowered the GST in Canada by 2% to help stimulate what has been a robust domestic demand for everything from automobiles to durable goods.

In the United States, president-elect Obama has proposed an economic stimulus package. He is talking about everything from maintaining the Bush tax cut for the wealthy to extending tax relief to middle income and lower income Americans, and massive infrastructure spending. Some of this sounds a little familiar.

In the last fall economic statement we had tax relief for lower and middle income Canadians, and tax relief for businesses and corporations. In two consecutive budgets we made historic investments to stimulate infrastructure projects in this country.

●(1010)

Essex is one of those sort of bellwether regions in Canada. It is often said back home that as Essex goes, so goes the nation.

For me, the win that we experienced in the last election was both a stronger margin of victory personally but also a demonstration of an increased mandate for the Prime Minister and the government to tackle some of these tough economic questions. It is a mandate, of course, that includes more seats in Ontario. Many people are pointing to Ontario as one of the tougher spots of the economy, with our region within Ontario being one of the more troubled spots in the province and yet there is an increased mandate for the government. There are more seats in south and southwestern Ontario, which is the manufacturing heartland. We are restructuring in the auto industry in particular but manufacturing in general has perhaps been affected most acutely.

We have emerged through the election with a stronger mandate for the Prime Minister and the government, including these tough economic areas. I think we are seeing an expression of confidence in the Prime Minister to lead us through troubled times.

If we look at the global landscape and some of the difficulties that are facing us, we see this is global in magnitude. I think we need to appreciate what we are facing. These problems started outside of our borders but they certainly affect us within our borders. The U.S. meltdown in the housing and financial sectors is the touchstone for

what is becoming difficult global times. Canadians are resilient though. We believe in the ability of Canadians to band together, to demonstrate the typical resilience of Canadians to get through this.

It is very much the same as the DNA of our folks back home in Essex. We have been through some very difficult times, some of it cyclical in terms of the nature of the boom and bust cycles of the auto industry and some of it dating back as far as when we were a frontier town, on a frontier landscape pushing railroads through and pushing trade through. Our people have demonstrated an ability to roll with the times, to come through the times and come out stronger on the other side of it.

However, we cannot escape the reality that tough economic times mean that we are dealing in human terms, both in terms of the opportunity side and with the types of opportunities we can create for real people. There are hard-working families and some family members are not working. We need to know the human costs of making the wrong decisions or right decisions or of acting or not acting.

If we are looking at the human side of it there is one factor that we cannot control and that is American consumers who are exhausted or worse, bankrupt, which affects some of the demand for the products we build here. We are seeing layoffs and job losses in places like Windsor, Oakville and Oshawa as a result of it. It is tough times for families.

I have come through some of that myself. For those in the House who do not know, I came off the assembly line at Chrysler Canada after just over six years. It was at a time when they closed the Pilette Road truck assembly plant where I was working and, of course, there was no government assistance at the time. It was at the beginning of some restructuring in the market. It was a time when we had just taken out our very first mortgage. I think it was about three months before that. I had never been in home ownership before. Our 10 year old vehicle had just stopped working and we were looking at a massive expenditure there, as well.

Families are obviously living through those same types of things as we face tough times right now.

Canadians are rightfully concerned about their futures. We cannot take lightly their choice of who they have chosen for leadership in this. What is the vision forward? This is what brings us to our throne speech. It lays out some of the broad parameters for where the Prime Minister and the government intend to lead the country.

I will address some of the criticisms I have been hearing in debate so far about the throne speech. One of the biggest ones we hear is that it is not prescriptive enough. People were looking for specific line items mentioned in a budget. They said that they were looking for this or that but did not see it so they will oppose the throne speech. We have a number of folks on our opposition benches who are hanging their hats with respect to their votes on whether their specific issues are mentioned in black and white in the throne speech.

The Address

•(1015)

The throne speech is a broad outline and it has taken a certain amount of flexibility precisely because we are in extraordinary circumstances with respect to the global economy. I think the experts will agree that we are in a global recession and perhaps heading for a depression that has not been seen in the lifetimes of most members in this House. Therefore, having a flexible throne speech that lays out a vision of where we are going without having to prescribe every single measure on how we are going to get there is important for the government moving forward.

The Prime Minister, in terms of flexibility, also has said that he is looking for constructive measures from the opposition in terms of what the specifics will look like coming through this. It will not just be on the expenditures side in terms of coming up with what spending stimulus could be there, but also on the cost savings side. We will be looking for constructive measures from the opposition about where we can generate savings from things that perhaps are not working.

We needed a flexible throne speech that was not overly prescriptive because we wanted some input from members on the specific tools to get there, including on the expenditure side. To simply take the position that the throne speech is not prescriptive enough and therefore it simply cannot be supported is the wrong approach.

I do not think anyone in this House can disagree with the five broad themes that have been laid out in the throne speech. I would encourage our members to support it.

What are those five pillars and themes that the Governor General laid out on behalf of the Prime Minister? One, of course, is that we are taking very seriously the foundational issue of reforming global finance.

Two, we will deal with our own domestic foundation, which is to ensure that we have sound budgeting.

Third, we will secure jobs for families and communities across Canada.

Four, we will expand investment in trade.

Five, we will make government more effective.

Let us examine those points a little more in detail, the starting point being reforming global finance.

Obviously the global economic turmoil we have been through started in financial markets in the United States. No financial system was immune from that. Our own financial institutions had some exposure to some of the sub-prime investments themselves and a number of countries around the world were woven into that. Putting the global financial system on a solid footing is one of those foundational things that had to be done. We saw it with the G-20 meetings where our Prime Minister laid out that Canada has a very good model to demonstrate to the rest of the world in terms of how we stabilize and handle our financial institutions. We will continue to take a leadership position to ensure the foundation of the global economy is sound.

Domestically, regarding ensuring sound budgeting, the Prime Minister has been clear about what this will look like. We want to learn from some of the past mistakes. I was a student of history at university, which was my major. It is important to look back at similar situations in terms of economies that have happened in our history. If we look at the Great Depression, for example, in the 1930s, there are some very pertinent examples of measures that we should not duplicate because they will lead to the same result.

We have an opportunity here to learn from the mistakes of history and one of those is by ensuring that we do not lock ourselves so rigidly into engineering a balanced budget or a small surplus just to say that we did it. That was one of the precursors that plunged the United States into a great depression, and others by extension.

Instead, what the Prime Minister has said very clearly is that we will focus on appropriate economic stimulus while ensuring that our investments in benefiting Canadians and Canadian families are maintained and do so while avoiding a return to the structural deficits of the past, that is the chronic overspending year over year over year. We want to ensure that we have sound budgeting while we are addressing some of the historical challenges ahead of us.

•(1020)

In order to secure jobs for families and communities, we will build on some of our past achievements. When we are talking about stimulus for our economy at this time, we are not just starting now to respond to the crisis. We have some past achievements from budgets 2006, 2007 and in 2008 already. For example, we have record infrastructure investments, historic, of \$33 billion in the Building Canada plan, which is the most since the Great Depression over 60 years ago.

We have provided help for communities in transition with the billion dollar community development trust fund earlier this year, which is a very significant measure. Ontario's share is \$358 million over three years. Some of that money is already beginning to filter down into communities, like Windsor, which have been heavily reliant on the auto industry to help some in the parts sector diversify their businesses. Therefore, we are already seeing some of the first of that much needed money beginning to flow into some of our communities.

Last February we announced our auto action plan, our four pillar strategy on how to address investment in the auto industry to catapult it forward, particularly into the area of green technology commercialization but research and development first and then commercializing it to help the auto industry retool its operations here in Canada to produce those technologies and the vehicles that will use those technologies here.

We have already had the first example in terms of a proposed investment coming out of my region back home, right next door to Windsor, the Essex engine plant for Ford. The government announced an \$80 million investment over five years to help, not only retool the operations to produce fuel efficient engines but to house and co-locate within the facility a green research and development centre investigating the next breakthroughs, not only in combustion engine fuel efficiency improvements but other alternate fuels and even down to alternate sources for power generation for its vehicles.

The Address

It was announced in the election and talked about in the throne speech that we would sweeten the pot. We will improve the auto innovation fund with additional funds to help out the auto industry. We will also be building on our success of historic labour market agreements for retraining for those who find, in the restructuring that is going on, that they need to train for new careers. It means \$1.2 billion for Ontario and that is for training people outside of the employment insurance stream. This is not dependent on whether one's EI benefits have run out. We have an additional stream where we are able to retrain and create a flexible, highly skilled workforce for the new opportunities in our economy.

We will be building on historic settlement funding which has allowed us to unlock the potential of new Canadians to access not only the skilled labour markets but to unlock their entrepreneurial advantage for those who want to create businesses. In Windsor we have historic levels of funding to settlement agencies, including the new global business centre which is effectively a one-stop shop, turn key operation for new Canadians who come in with a business plan so they can know what the regulations are. All they need to worry about is actually executing their business plan. This makes it very simple for them. Those are job creators for the future as well.

There are historic transfers to the provinces to address the historic fiscal imbalance question. It is important to look back. When the Liberals say that they balanced the budgets back in the early nineties, they may have turned the fiscal fortunes of the federal government around but how did they do that? They did that on the backs of the provinces, putting them in a very difficult fiscal position. Many of them never achieved a surplus position until our government this year. These types of transfers are helping them turn that around. The Liberals did it on the backs of seniors and other groups as well. It is not a good situation to have a federal government that is in a good position and have our provinces fiscally weak in all of those areas.

• (1025)

Today we have not the exact opposite, but we have healthy provincial coffers as we are heading into an economic storm and we have a federal government that has the flexibility to act.

• (1030)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment. I look forward to working with you in the future.

I listened very carefully to the member for Essex. Before the election, the Prime Minister was in the member's riding to announce some funding for an auto facility. Has that money flowed yet to that facility, and if not, given the circumstances that are surrounding the auto industry, when will that be?

The member talked about unprecedented investments in infrastructure. There is \$3 billion sitting there waiting, boggled up somewhere. Given the circumstances, all the communities across our country are asking for those funds to be released ASAP so things can move along. Can the member comment on that? Why is it being delayed?

I do agree with the member when he said that the Speech from the Throne is a broad outline. I thank him for that actually, because I have often referred to it as a general overview of a government's

intentions. Does he think there should be no vote of confidence on such a presentation given that it is a broad overview? I know other members were asking for specific things and that is their prerogative. What would he have to say on that?

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, in addressing the last question first, it is important that we take a measure of the House to see whether or not we agree on the priorities. I could sit here and speculate, but I think we all agree on what the five pillars are moving forward and what some of the potential solutions are. I think it is important for members to stand in their places and be counted on whether or not they agree with this particular issue. If they have a differing opinion, let them speak on that.

With respect to the automotive industry, this was a very significant investment decision. To give a little bit of the history on this, the auto action plan was announced in February and the budget which came out very shortly after that put the funds aside. Notwithstanding the opposition of some parties in the House and one party that did not vote on it, we did get those funds approved and set aside. That is approved money for the purpose of this investment.

We had to wait for Ford to weigh in, in terms of its fiscal situation coming out of the second quarter, on whether it could still go ahead with the investment. Ford did agree after \$15 billion in write-downs in the second quarter that it was still on track to make the investment.

As I understand it, we are now at the phase of talking about signing contracts and moving that particular investment into reality. The budgets have already been set aside. It is not something we are going to have to try to nail down. That is a very important announcement for our region.

With respect to the infrastructure investments approved in two consecutive budgets, we had federal-provincial agreements to sign. I think we are getting through that type of stuff. We have heard the minister say that we are really going to push in terms of green lighting the decision to get investments out the door.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, who spoke about the throne speech.

The throne speech is silent on the Kyoto protocol, even though Quebecers feel very strongly that Kyoto must be honoured. The throne speech also makes no mention of the fiscal imbalance, even though, during the most recent election in Quebec, the parties represented in the National Assembly and all the socio-economic players in Quebec sent a unanimous message to the Conservative government that the fiscal imbalance had not been corrected.

The manufacturing sector cannot avoid a recession, and many jobs will be lost. The throne speech does not show that the government is committed to helping people who lose their jobs, by improving the employment insurance program, for instance, or reinstating POWA—which we have been calling on the government to do for years—for older workers who lose their jobs.

The Address

I would like to know what my colleague has to say about this, because as I said, during the recent campaign, Quebeckers called on this government to take such measures. Yet there is nothing about this in the throne speech.

• (1035)

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that some of these issues have been addressed in some amount of detail in previous throne speeches. What we are talking about is the throne speech that is in front of us today which lays out five important pillars and some areas that are significant not only for my home province of Ontario, but for the province of Quebec as well.

The Prime Minister has said very clearly that we are prepared to take a number of incredibly important steps. One of the specifics we have talked about is the additional funding for the aerospace industry. I know that is an important industry not only in my province of Ontario, Manitoba and others, but also in Quebec.

The goal of the Prime Minister has been very clear. We want to see working families back at work. We may not always agree on every single item, but I think we are going to have some very productive discussions about the steps moving forward. Those will come in the debates following the throne speech. I ask my colleague opposite to look at the broad parameters that have been laid out and agree with the government on the general direction.

We want to reform the global financing system. We want to ensure sound budgeting while we address a global economic crisis. We are going to work hard to secure jobs for families and communities. We are going to make our government more effective. Rather than batten down the hatches of protectionism, we instead will burst open further markets for our goods so that we are not overly reliant on one market to the south of us.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your reappointment.

I listened to the discussion by the member for Essex with regard to the auto industry. It is a very trying time for that industry right now. Having worked in the Pillette Road plant as well as plant 3 where minivans are made to this day, I can say that a lot of people are anxious about their jobs. Men and women who have good skilled trades are really concerned.

One of the things we have not discussed is trade agreements. Market share is disappearing for the traditional three because of imports coming into Canada. We have the most open automotive market in the world. We have not seen any leadership by the government on trade issues.

One thing in the Speech from the Throne is more discussion about trade with Asian countries. My specific question for the member for Essex is, which countries is the government looking at expanding trade with in terms of Asia? Is it back to South Korea? Hundreds of thousands of vehicles are shipped into Canada from South Korea and we do not ship any automobiles there, just farm equipment, and that is probably going to dissipate as well because we recently lost our only farming equipment manufacturer in Welland.

We are going to see a greater imbalance, as well as potential trade coming in from China. Will it have open access to our markets here without our having reciprocal access there? It is important to note that, because as we look at the troubles in the industry, we know that we have to regain market share and there needs to be a better balance.

I would ask the member for Essex to describe what is meant in the Speech from the Throne in terms of more free trade with regard to Asia. What are the countries and why can it not be fair trade? Why would the government not move to fair trade instead of free trade? That would be a better balance.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my neighbour and colleague on his re-election.

I appreciate the question, but I just want to be clear for the record. I think the member said that the throne speech refers to more free trade agreements. I am going to quote page 8 of the throne speech where it says, "New trade agreements will be pursued in Asia and the Americas". It did not specifically say what type of agreements.

To understand the philosophy of this government, there are two important things. I have heard the Prime Minister speak about two very important things with respect to the auto industry. The first is that we need to find ways to help the industry be more competitive against the rest of the world. We started with our auto action plan in that regard. The auto action plan proposes a number of initiatives, including helping the industry retool to produce products that are extremely competitive not only in North America but also globally.

The second thing I have heard the Prime Minister say is very important is that deals are not going to be signed that are not going to guarantee us some access. We bring the issue of South Korean negotiations into this one because this is an important question. Everybody says, "These guys have a signed agreement and it is going to sell the industry out". The Prime Minister has been clear. First, we have no agreement in principle and the precise reason is that in the negotiations we do not yet have guarantees that we are going to get into their market. We have to have proven demonstrable access to their market before we will conclude agreements. That is the wise position to take. We have not been in a rush to conclude something that is necessarily going to expose our industries to further disadvantage. We want access to markets.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing this time with the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

It is a great honour for me to rise and speak today as the new member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. May I take the opportunity to thank the residents of my riding for electing me and to reaffirm my commitment to them and to all Canadians. I am sure everyone will understand how pleased I am to be here today in this august chamber seated with my Liberal colleagues. Particularly pleased, I must admit, because getting here has taken some time. That should, however, be proof of my sincere desire to make a positive contribution to governing this country.

The Address

This is far from the first time anyone has said this but it bears repeating: representing one's fellow citizens in the House of Commons is a great privilege and a most solemn commitment. I therefore promise to be both constructive and productive during the mandate accorded to me. I would also like to say how proud I am to be my party's spokesperson for science and technology. This is, as everyone will agree, a file of extreme importance for this country's future.

[*English*]

As a new member of Parliament, I listened intently to the throne speech last week, hoping to be inspired and to detect a sense of vision emanating from the government. Unfortunately, I was disappointed. There was nothing that grabbed my attention or excited my imagination. More worrisome, I did not leave the Senate chamber with the sense that the government understood what it needed to do in the face of the current economic downturn. In essence, it confirmed my suspicion that the government's cupboard of ideas is bare.

Handling an economic downturn is the most challenging task that any government can face. It has happened to my own party, just as it is now happening to the Conservative government. Experience tells us that to handle it well, we first have to recognize that it is happening. On that score, the government has clearly failed the first test.

I need not remind members of the government's rosy pronouncements over the past year as the global economic situation deteriorated. Even during the recent election, it was somewhat surreal to hear the Prime Minister speak as though the economy were running smoothly on all cylinders. I am assuming he thought that was the case, which is even more worrisome.

The second requirement to minimize the effect of an economic downturn is to craft one's fiscal policy to include the necessary buffers that would help one weather difficult times; they always happen at some point. Anticipating change is one of the responsibilities of a government. That of course requires that the government formulate its policies wisely, always keeping an eye on the future.

Lowering the GST by 2% was not good fiscal policy and I am sure the government regrets that decision today. Spending like there was no tomorrow over the past two and a half years was also not good fiscal policy. Eliminating the \$3 billion contingency reserve was even more reckless policy.

[*Translation*]

Today we find ourselves in a highly precarious situation and one that could have been mitigated in part by a government with more concern for our country's interests and less simple ambition to get re-elected. What can be done now? I am as anxious as everybody else to see what this government will offer us in the short term to minimize the job losses in the sectors concerned and to reassure seniors who are anxiously watching their pensions and their savings melt away like snow on a sunny day. There is no question about it: this government must take action promptly.

A long term policy is equally essential and this will be the focus of my remarks, particularly regarding the science and technology sector.

[*English*]

When the Liberal government began the process of eliminating the deficit in the mid-1990s, it also demonstrated its serious intent to strengthen Canada's scientific capacity. It implemented important programs such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Canada research chairs, Genome Canada and the program to fund the indirect costs of research. It demonstrated a long-term vision that was praised by all the universities and research hospitals in the country.

It also created scholarship programs and grants to encourage greater post-secondary enrolment in our learning institutions.

Finally, it proposed a national child care and early learning program that clearly recognized how critical early learning was to future development.

These were far-sighted programs. These were programs that demonstrated true leadership and a vision focused on a knowledge-based economy. These were programs focused on increasing Canada's research capacity so that ultimately we could mitigate the effects of both globalization or of a downturn in commodity prices, an area where Canada is particularly vulnerable. The result is that Canada is now a leader in university research among the G-7.

Canada also needs to improve its capacity to innovate. Some of the basic incentives to achieve this were put in place by previous Liberal governments. I am glad to say the current government has had the wisdom to build upon some of them. However, there is more to do and Canadians are looking to the government to address the fact that relative to our competitors we are slipping on the important performance indicators of innovation and productivity.

What is the government proposing?

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

For example, the government promises us a \$200 million increase over four years for the Strategic Aerospace and Defence Initiative. But is this really a serious investment? For comparison's sake, let us remember that this government has just spent close to \$300 million in seven weeks for a general election that could very easily have waited another year.

As far as transportation is concerned, just what exactly are we going to do to encourage the development of new, greener and more economical technologies in this sector, whether automobiles or other forms of transportation including public transit?

As far as the forestry sector is concerned, what is this government's strategy to mitigate the downturn in this sector? Hon. members will recall that the Liberal Party of Canada had proposed an ambitious strategy for this vital sector at the time of the 2006 election, a strategy involving modernization of the industry and the development of secondary, value-added forestry product processing industries. What is this government proposing?

The Address

Canadians are waiting for answers and for action. Canada would like to see a vision and some leadership from this government.

[English]

Last week I had the opportunity to ask my first question in the House of Commons. That question was addressed to the Minister of State (Science and Technology) and it asked why the government had eliminated the position of national science advisor created by the previous Liberal government. I regret to say that the answer I received was extremely disappointing. The hon. member for Cambridge simply argued that a national science advisor position was no longer required now that a minister of state position had been created.

I am very happy that we now have the Minister of State (Science and Technology), but we should also have a national science adviser. Having worked with the national science advisor, Dr. Arthur Carty, and with many other Canadian science leaders when I was President of the Canadian Space Agency, I recognized very clearly the value of such an adviser in providing unvarnished advice to our leaders on our national science priorities. The United States and Great Britain have for years recognized the value of such a position and so I have to question why the government does not feel the same way. A good idea is a good idea no matter from where it comes.

Canada faces formidable challenges. At the risk of stating the obvious, bold thinking and a long-term strategy are required for science and technology as opposed to timid responses that do nothing more than tinker with the status quo. Yes, indeed, to borrow from the throne speech, we all need to skate to where the puck will be. I sincerely hope that the government knows where the puck is going.

● (1050)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me also congratulate the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie on his election. He was right. This was his second or third try, and we finally have him where he belongs.

I recall when I was parliamentary secretary to the minister of industry, John Manley, the member came before a committee as the president of the Canadian Space Agency. He talked so eloquently about the investments that the Liberals were making and how we were moving forward.

I read and read the most recent throne speech and did not really find anything. Maybe I was missing something. I want to throw the ball back in his court. Did he read or hear anything specific that the government would be prepared to invest in so we could create the jobs of the future and attract and retain the best and the brightest whom we need to be competitive as a country?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, alas, I did not hear anything within the throne speech that addressed the issue raised by the member. That is why I, along with my fellow Liberal colleagues, am earnestly hoping that perhaps in this Thursday's economic statement, and certainly well before having to wait until next February, that we will hear something more concrete from the current government that will give us hope the jobs and investments will flow from the throne speech.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his election to the House and on making his first speech. Earlier this week, I quoted from an article in the *London Telegraph* published during the July G-8 meetings. It lamented the leadership in the G-8, but made a special exception for our Prime Minister. It stated:

Of all the leaders, only [the Prime Minister]...is able to point to a popular and successful record in office. Some will regard it as alarming that, in current times, world leadership should rest with Canada. But the Canadian Tories are a model of how to behave during a downturn. They have kept spending in check and reduced taxes.

If the rest of the world had comported itself with similar modesty and prudence, we might not be in this mess.

The hon. member referred to the 2% GST cut. Would the member acknowledge that the injection of \$14 billion into the economy, through the 2% GST cut, may be part of the reason the Canadian economy is now the envy of most of the industrialized world?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I suggest, to get back to the article in the *Telegraph*, that the Prime Minister was given a \$13 billion surplus two and a half years ago. He was given a very healthy economy. In the past two and a half years we know what has happened. The real test of the Prime Minister and of the government lies ahead of us in the time to come. That is when we will have a true measure of how well the government has performed.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his election to the House of Commons.

I am very pleased to be here representing the great riding of Sudbury, and many know that Sudbury is the mining capital of Canada. This mining capital has been creating much wealth for our country. This wealth will only be enhanced with investments in research and technology.

As critic for science and technology, does the hon. member see the importance of more research in mining and the importance of the federal government funding the Centre for Excellence in Mining Innovation in Sudbury?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, having been up to Sudbury on a number of occasions in which there is the world famous SNO facility, the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory, where world-class research is being done in the area of neutrinos, I realize the importance of that area. Having had the pleasure of going up to Science North on a number of occasions and speaking to young people there, I realize how important science and technology, particularly mining technology, is to that area, which is traditionally known for its mining economy.

In a general way, I believe in the importance of research and development, whether it is in a sector such as the space sector, in which I have been associated, or in an area that has been extremely important for Canada, the area of mining.

● (1055)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment and I look forward to seeing much more of you in the House for many years to come.

The Address

It is a great privilege to rise in the House once again to represent the wonderful people of my riding. I thank them so very much for giving me this opportunity. It is indeed an honour.

I take this opportunity to thank the people of Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor for placing their confidence in me once again and for giving me the privilege of representing them in this great institution, the House of Commons. This is not something that I have achieved on my own. Many volunteers and supporters have worked long hours on my behalf to ensure that I return to this place where I stand today. I thank all of them from the bottom of my heart.

I take the responsibility of representing the riding and I join in this debate today to put forward my views on how I feel about this throne speech, about the direction of the government and how it affects the people whom I represent, particularly of Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor and most notably for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

A number of issues affect my constituents and they have not been addressed by the government in the past. I have heard the throne speech and I stand in reply to say that, hopefully, some of the large bromides that have been put out in this speech will be addressed, although I will reserve judgment until that very point.

These are some of the issues that I consider to be very essential for our riding, certainly essential for Newfoundland and Labrador, and indeed essential for the people of our country.

The forest industry is in dire need of government help and I see nothing from the government that would suggest that this will change, at least in the throne speech. I see some general comments about how it wants to get involved more. It says that it wants to help improve the situation of the forest workers across the country, yet we do not see the concrete action. I would assume that at this point it would be a little more activist than what it has been in the past.

I know the Conservatives are going to talk about their community trust fund, but I will address more or less what it lacks a bit later. It certainly lacks in its power to help address the situation across the country for each and every person involved, all stakeholders in the forest industry.

The fishing industry is in need of restructuring, which can only happen with help from the federal government. Only a few years ago we had a summit take place in St. John's, Newfoundland. Attending it were representatives from the federal and provincial governments. It was a good summit and many of the things that came out of it have started to come to fruition, but nonetheless, still a lot of things need to be addressed. One of the issues I want to talk about restoring some dignity back into the fishery by way of licence buyouts and early retirement.

The pulp and paper industry, as I discussed earlier, is a major issue for one particular town in my riding, Grand Falls—Windsor, which is now teetering on a big decision that we hope will work out in favour of the community and for the province in general. However, it looks like the company, particularly AbitibiBowater, will make a decision by year's end that could have a great impact on my riding. Hopefully it will not be detrimental.

I have not talked about the small craft harbours program at all, and I say that in jest. We have talked about it a lot. In fact, in the last session, it was said that the deficit for the small craft harbours program, in other words, the money needed for all the harbour and wharf facilities across the country, remained at just less than half a billion dollars. Therefore, we have a long way to go.

In the last election we committed an extra \$100 million in addition to what had already been allocated in the past little while. We put in an extra \$100 million several years ago, which the Conservative government has renewed indefinitely. I hope it will continue that. I press upon the government the importance of this program, not because it is a fish issue but because it is an infrastructure issue. If infrastructure is what we are talking about, particularly roads, highways, sewer treatment plants and the like, we have to be talking about small craft harbours as well, as they are very important part of the country.

The former deputy minister of fisheries and oceans, when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, said, "The program needs \$35 million per year in order to maintain the current infrastructure", which gives us an idea of the situation in which we are now. There is an infrastructure deficit for the people who go out on the ocean.

• (1100)

I want to return to forestry and talk about profitability. Profitability is based on production costs. Many of our mills in Canada, including, as I mentioned, the one in Grand Falls-Windsor, are in need of major capital investment.

We have the resources, and there are two main resources we are proud of. One is the human resource, the people who work in the mill. We also have a power resource, hydroelectricity, that provides the great benefit of one of the lowest cost structures for power in the country to this particular mill. Certainly it has been a major factor and a major asset.

Although the company states that as owners of the mill they are certainly owners of this particular structure, they must realize that the power harnessed on the river belongs to the people who live in that particular community. That fact must be taken into account in this particular situation.

I want to again address another Conservative government solution, the community development trust, as it was called, of \$1 billion. Here is the problem with the community development trust.

In many respects, it is positive for some of the people who have benefited. However, to put this into context, what was needed at the time was a particular program for the forest industry, not just particular programs to get people over to other jobs. Indeed there are programs for transitioning someone from working in one particular job to working in another, but what about targeted incentives, subsidies, for companies to invest in the industry? The community trust fund does not properly address that aspect.

We had a billion dollar fund that was going to do just that.

The Address

I appreciate the fact that they want to put a billion dollars into transitioning people from work and want to make other investments of that type, but the problem is that the onus is now not on failing communities, but failed communities. It is almost to the point at which they will thank you for this little investment, but tell you you're just a little bit too late. My colleague, the member for Random—Burin—St. George's, can attest to that. Talk to the people in Stephenville. They will tell you it was just a bit too late.

Let me talk about another issue. In ridings neighbouring my own, a long-standing issue that has not been addressed by the government is that many hundreds of fishermen were unfairly charged taxes by the government when they sold their licences in 1999 and 2000.

I say "unfairly" because they were given wrong advice, in writing, by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with respect to their income tax return for that particular year. Not only that, the government also settled out of court with some of the people who complained.

How about the other people, the people who were quiet, the people who did not know about this wrong advice they were given? They were left out in the cold. As a result, they paid thousands of dollars in unnecessary income tax. Before the mistake was realized and an appeal launched, time had elapsed. They were told, "We are sorry, but at this point there is nothing we can do". This issue has to be addressed.

I also want to give homage or congratulations to one individual, Elizabeth Harvey, who lives on the south coast of our province in the beautiful riding of Random—Burin—St. George's, as my colleague can confirm. She has spent many hours on this issue and she should be addressed. The government should give her some straight answers.

I can honestly say what a proud moment it is for my province of Newfoundland and Labrador to now be a have province. This is the day when have not will be no more, as the expression goes. We are certainly proud of that distinction, but it came with a lot of hard work.

We are not just rich in oil and gas, we are rich in the young people we have in this province. They will make our province one of the jewels of the north Atlantic, the economic beacon of the north Atlantic. That is what it is today and that is what it will become, and it will flourish.

• (1105)

Before I say anything else about the fishery, let me just say that it has not collapsed. Rumours of its demise are simply just that. They are completely unfounded. The fishing industry contributes over \$1 billion to the Canadian economy. We must keep that in mind. In Newfoundland and Labrador it is certainly still a viable industry.

In response to this throne speech, I want to say that a lot of this has to be addressed in the coming months.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I greatly enjoyed the hon. member's fine speech. While it is clear that he is voting against the throne speech, much of what he discussed, particularly in relation to forestry, is of great interest to me and to the people of my riding.

It is clear, however, from the throne speech that the government intends to reduce services in this country to bare bones.

In northern Ontario we depend on a strong CBC for information delivered in a timely, relevant and fair manner. We depend on regional programming that connects us to the rest of Canada, in particular our first nations. It also allows us in Thunder Bay—Rainy River in northern Ontario to tell the rest of Canada our story.

I know the hon. member knows the value of the CBC, particularly in remote and rural areas of Canada. My question for the hon. member has two parts. Will the hon. member defend the CBC against these attacks by the government, and will the member support annual consistent funding for the CBC?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member asked that question. I did not get to it in my speech, but I thank my hon. colleague from northern Ontario for his question. Here is the reason.

When I sat on the heritage committee several years ago, we had Mr. Rabinovich before the committee. One of the things the CBC did, something that I thought was detrimental to regional areas, was cut the dinner-hour newscast from one hour to half an hour. It was detrimental in some markets, but the problem was that it was one decision for all regions across the country.

I absolutely agree with the member in that particular respect. Not only is it a reflection of one particular region that has to hear from itself, but the CBC also allows someone like me or someone in northern Ontario or central Newfoundland to learn about things like organ building in Quebec or modes of transportation in Nunavut. Those are the ties that bind in this particular situation.

Do I support single-year funding? Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, I will go one step further. I would also like to say that we need for the CBC a model developed by the BBC in England, a seven-year funding plan that allows it to make capital investments beyond what it has right now. It allows development of programming and culture within the country. If we want to be that cultural mix and provide a sounding board for the whole country, then that multi-year funding has to be done.

It was a \$60 million one-off. It should be \$60 million per year, but on a multi-year basis so that the people of the CBC can—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne.

Please allow me first to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. I would also like to congratulate the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and the member for Victoria, who were also appointed, and of course congratulate our Speaker, who has been a long-standing icon in this Parliament and who has done such a good job in the House. We have a very good team of chair occupants this session. I give you my congratulations again. It is a great honour to serve in the House, and I am sure you will all do us very proud.

The Address

I would especially like to thank the residents of my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul, who have asked me to return to represent them for a third term here in Ottawa as their member of Parliament. I am honoured to serve them in what I believe is the greatest riding in Canada.

I also want to thank my family, who have supported me throughout my term in office and who continue to support me. They truly are my source of strength and energy.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the wonderful and dedicated team of volunteers who worked tirelessly to re-elect me in the last election. I am very grateful.

Kildonan—St. Paul is a diverse riding that encompasses both urban and rural populations. However, many issues unite the constituents of Kildonan—St. Paul, none more so than the current state of the economy.

As I went door to door during the election, constituents informed me that economic instability was the issue that weighed most heavily on most people's minds. I also heard from my constituents that they wanted Parliament to work. They were tired of the partisan wrangling across the floor, and their concern was for this Parliament to work across party lines to face the enormous economic challenges that confront our country and the global economy as a whole.

Our Prime Minister noted in his speech on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne that it was his wish that consensus be achieved here, so that we as parliamentarians can work productively and cooperatively in this Parliament of Canada.

This sentiment reflects the feelings of many of us as parliamentarians. During this time of economic duress, we parliamentarians must unite to meet the enormous economic challenges we face, not only as a nation but also as a global community.

Clearly our Prime Minister has taken strong leadership to protect our nation's future. The people of Canada have shown great confidence in the Prime Minister and in this government by electing a strong minority government with an enhanced mandate, even though the world is experiencing an unstable global economy.

Because our government has paid down \$37 billion on the national debt, Canada now has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G-7. That is why I was pleased to hear, when listening to the throne speech, that Canada's government has a five-pronged plan to strengthen and assist Canada's economy.

The government will work to ensure that global finance is reformed. Canada delivers sound budgets, long-term jobs for families and communities, and expanded trade and investment, providing an efficient federal government for our nation.

Our government has cut sales taxes, income taxes and business taxes. Our government's early fiscal stimulus in the form of long-term reductions in consumer, personal and business taxes has bolstered domestic spending and improved our attractiveness for investment.

Our government created the universal child care benefit. It increased health care transfers to the provinces and enhanced the

guaranteed income supplement. These initiatives help Canadian citizens all across this country to grow and prosper.

● (1110)

To ensure the real estate market here in Canada remained stable, our government acted quickly and decisively by limiting mortgage terms and by establishing minimum down payments. Through our commitment to purchase insured mortgages, CMHC has ensured that our financial institutions will continue to lend to individuals and businesses. Our new Canadian Lenders Assurance Facility created confidence to facilitate interbank lending.

Many things have been done ahead of this economic time that have really built a foundation for us here in Canada. These actions offer great hope to all Canadians, especially to those in my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul.

Confidence that our government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, will steer Canada through this time of economic downturn, and hope that with this stable fiscal management, the depression will not impact on Canadians the way it has impacted on other countries.

Clearly, all departmental spending planned for the next four years is under review. The Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer to the provinces, however, will grow as planned. Equalization payments also will grow at a sustainable rate tied to the overall growth of our economy.

I note that the Speech from the Throne states that our government will take measures to encourage skilled trades and apprenticeships. This is extremely important because as young people and other Canadian citizens take education in the skilled trades and apprenticeships, they will produce an economy within Manitoba and within Canada that will grow and will really enhance the foundation of Canada's economic development.

The speech goes on to state that our government will work with the provinces to make recognition of foreign credentials a priority and increase the uptake of immigrant settlement programs. This is important because many immigrants coming to Canada who are very well trained need to be put in jobs that they have been trained for outside our country.

These are measures that will be strongly welcomed by companies and small businesses in my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul. I have had many constituents share their frustrations trying to find skilled workers because there is a shortage of them here in our country.

I also believe it is crucial that our government continue to demonstrate sound and prudent budgeting. The current international economic crisis promises to be challenging, but I remain confident that under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister Canada will succeed in weathering this economic storm.

The Address

After all, I will remind the House that it was under our Conservative government that \$37 billion of the national debt has been paid down. That is \$37 billion that our children and our grandchildren will not have to pay interest on.

It is under our Conservative government that taxes have been cut for families, small businesses and seniors. This impacts on individual Canadians at their breakfast tables in the morning. More money is going into their pockets and that is building a foundation for more economic stability in our nation.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs in my riding were delighted to hear that our government would be increasing their access to parental and maternity leave benefits. That is what our Conservative government is doing. We are providing strong leadership.

Our government is known as one that is tough on crime. The youth criminal justice system will be addressed by our government to ensure that our youth understand that drug dealing, stealing cars, and violent crimes will require tough consequences for them. With that legislation will come the compassionate instigation of funding programs for at risk youth to keep them from falling into a criminal lifestyle.

It is noted that there are many young people who are tempted by what they consider easy money in a criminal lifestyle, and these at risk youth will be provided with programs to ensure that they can focus their energy in a different place.

Our government has already instituted numerous justice reforms to restore the rights of law-abiding citizens and to make our communities and our streets safer.

• (1115)

Our government will end house arrest for those convicted of serious crimes. This has been a very important issue in my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul because my constituents have often wondered why criminals who have committed serious violent crimes are allowed house arrest. It is very difficult to monitor their whereabouts. It is very hard to keep a finger on where these criminals are. We will also introduce legislation to target violent crimes committed by criminal gangs.

The issue of human trafficking is a crime that continues to grow in our nation. Our government is addressing this issue to ensure victims of this horrendous crime are sheltered and protected, and given the opportunity to recover and start a new life. Criminals who live off the suffering of innocent victims will be accountable for their actions.

Our nation, at this time, is becoming acutely aware of this horrendous crime and that education is one of our best weapons. Knowing how perpetrators and pedophiles work, and how youth can protect themselves, be aware and not be caught in the web is very important.

Our country is a very proud nation. It is very proud of our national sovereignty and security. As we know, generations before us have held our Canadian Forces in high regard throughout the world. Our government has provided a long-term strategy to ensure our brave men and women in uniform have the resources they need to protect

our security on Canadian soil and to assist when other countries are threatened and oppressed.

Our Canadian Forces have made tremendous contributions to the Afghanistan mission and will continue to work for freedom, democracy and human rights around the world. We see businesses starting to flourish in Afghanistan, schools and hospitals being built, and young women being able to go to school without fear. These are some impacts that the Canadian Forces have made during the Afghanistan mission that have really made a difference in the country.

Our government is also committed to ensuring sovereignty over Canada's Arctic. Canada will not only control and protect our offshore waters but our government will protect our inland waters as well.

As we know, often the equipment has not existed up north to provide for easy access to waters in the Arctic, so we are now proceeding with a new polar class icebreaker named in honour of the late great prime minister, the right hon. John Diefenbaker. This icebreaker is very important because it will allow greater access to our Arctic waters.

Canada has elected a minority government that has an enhanced mandate. This is quite unusual because historically during times of economic duress often governments will fall. That did not happen in the last election. Canadians said, with a resounding voice, that they have confidence that the Prime Minister and the government can steer the ship through the troubled waters of this very serious economic global downturn.

Canadians have sent members of Parliament to Ottawa to work together, to bring Canada safely through these economic times. This is an opportunity for all members in Parliament to lay aside the partisan wrangling and problem solve together.

I have heard ministers say in question period they welcome our ideas. Of course these ideas can be formulated not only in question period, which, in my opinion, happens to be a lot of theatre in a very small window. That is my opinion from what I have seen. I must say that letters, meetings with ministers, and time spent at committee, when new problems arise, they can be solved by all members which will make this a very effective Parliament.

• (1120)

With this in mind, I am hoping that in the coming weeks and months all opposition parties will be willing to work with the Government of Canada in a spirit of bipartisanship and co-operation to ensure that our economy and our country remain strong. In doing so, we will diligently serve our constituents and offer them the hope of a better tomorrow.

Lastly, I must say that when I was going door-to-door during the election, what I heard over and over again was Canadian citizens telling me they were tired of turning on question period. They were tired of the catcalls across the House and they were tired of what parliamentarians felt were very cutting remarks. They were tired of that. What they wanted was a Parliament that worked together to problem solve, especially now in these very tough economic times. This is a very serious issue that we are all dealing with.

The Address

I know that members on all sides of the House have the best interests of our country at heart. I know I have many friends on all sides of the House. I believe they are very dedicated people who care very deeply for our country and for their constituents.

I must say that we are in a new era now. For the first time, we are in an era when we really have a demand from the Canadian public to work together in a non-partisan way to problem solve the issues that we are facing at this time.

I wish to thank the House for allowing me to put my comments on the record in Parliament. As I said, I am very honoured to be the member of Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul. I always think that a member of Parliament is a servant of the people. I look forward to the coming months because, and I am going to be optimistic, I think we are going to have a very collaborative, problem-solving environment in the Parliament.

Why do I think that? It is because we are facing one of the most serious economic times that we have had in many years. We need the talents and the problem-solving skills of each and every member of Parliament in the House to work together to help get us through these troubled waters.

• (1125)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member speaks eloquently about the threat to sovereignty in the far north. I am not sure whether she has actually ever been to the far north or not, but as someone who has lived in the subarctic, I know many of the problems that are faced in that area of the country. The area of the country that she represents may not know that climate change is probably the greatest threat to sovereignty in the far north.

We may protect it with frigates and we may protect it with all kinds of military operations, but the caribou herds and the people are all threatened by glaciers that are melting and water levels that are rising. I am wondering what the government is planning to do. What is in the throne speech about climate change and how will the government respond to it?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome the member to the House, and welcome his comments and question this morning. It is a very good question.

As the member knows, under the former government greenhouse gas emissions went up over 30%. I think it is in the range of 32% to 33%. What we have done is put in a plan for a 20% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2020.

I thought it was a very astute question because the member is right. We not only protect the Arctic in terms of sovereignty but also because of environmental issues. I welcome any solutions the member might have to bring forward on this issue to continue to build on what we have already started to do. I think this is very important. And yes, I have been to the north several times. It is just a beautiful place.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my concern and the concern of many Canadians is that in these difficult times we need specific concrete solutions to the problems facing average Canadians. One area is that of job loss and the security program we have had in place called employment insurance. Something in the order of \$55 billion has been taken out

of that fund and put into general revenue. At the same time, 20% to 30% of those people who are applying for employment insurance are eligible to receive benefits, and the benefits do not last as long as they should in these difficult times.

Does my hon. colleague agree that we should be zeroing in on the employment insurance program? We should ensure that those people who are displaced from work get the maximum amount of benefits possible in order to sustain themselves while the economy is floundering. We need to ensure that those people once again obtain well-paying jobs, but in the meantime they need access to that program which has been taken away from them over the years.

• (1130)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the EI fund was spent by the former government and there is now a dedicated fund that is set up just for that purpose.

In my view the important thing is to look at the overall picture. What did our government do to build a stable foundation for this economy? Our Prime Minister predicted tough economic times. What did he do? He put the money back into the pockets of Canadians. He cut taxes for ordinary families. He brought in the child care benefit. The money went into the pockets of families across the nation. He gave tax breaks for children's sports. He also gave corporations tax breaks.

Looking at it all, the money was not spent on special programs. The money did not go into a black hole. It went back into Canadians' pockets. This stimulated the economy. People continue to spend. They continue to provide a life for their families that reflects the lifestyle they want and they provide education for their children. It is very practical and down to earth. We are taking care of Canadian citizens. They have a right to choose the way they spend their money. That is when new businesses occur. That is when entrepreneurs reach out. Women are starting home businesses. They are a real contributor to the economic engine of this country.

The Prime Minister has done practical things.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the member on her third re-election. I had other questions and comments to make but the member from the NDP asked specific questions.

The member said that we must lay aside the party wrangling and all the catcalls. I could not agree more, but if we are going to do this, the Conservatives have to find a way to change. A moment ago the member said that the EI fund was spent by the previous government. That is inaccurate. Those funds were invested in Canada and in Canadians.

If the Conservatives expect us to change, I want to remind the member that when her party first came here as the Reform Party, that party made innuendoes about limousines and fancy exercise rooms, and who could forget the pigs on the lawn, and then that party's members changed their minds and took the pay.

The Address

We showed that we are willing, but the Conservatives misled Canadians. Even the newspapers said that. The Prime Minister said that they have done more in two years than the Liberals did in 13 years. If that is the case, why did the Conservatives say that Parliament was not functioning? When the Conservatives talked about crime legislation, we stood with them. What did they do? They prorogued Parliament and everything fell by the wayside. If the Conservatives are truthful with Canadians, we will support the government.

• (1135)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, I was not here when there were pigs on the lawn of Parliament Hill so I cannot comment on that, but the member has made a very good point.

The big difference is that our government has put \$37 million back into the pockets of Canadian families. That is phenomenal. Governments are learning how to do business in a new way.

I do not want to place blame on anyone, but I will say that Canadians have made a concerted effort to tell us that they have a lot of confidence in the Prime Minister and this government to steer our economic ship through troubled waters. They brought us back with a huge mandate. Part of that involves working collaboratively. I know that when a few issues are pointed out, we try to do it in the most gentle way possible. However, the difference is that the money was put back into Canadian taxpayers' pockets rather than doing other things with it because we know that Canadian families know best how to spend their own money.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I will be sharing my allotted time today with the member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin by congratulating you on your reappointment, and the Speaker on his re-election to the chair. I am confident that all members share my goal of supporting the Speaker in making this, the 40th Parliament, a far more dignified and productive one than experienced in recent years. I wish to join my fellow New Democrats in offering my congratulations to the Prime Minister, the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the Bloc québécois. I extend particular congratulations and good wishes to fellow new members as we tackle the myriad challenges we face in handling our responsibilities effectively on behalf of our constituents. I wish to thank those members who have extended a hand of welcome to me, despite our different party affiliations.

It is with a considerable sense of honour and gratitude that I rise in the House today to deliver my inaugural speech in this 40th Parliament. I share the honour of several others in this House of continuing a family tradition. In my case, it represents a somewhat longer time gap. My family roots can be traced back to William Steeves, Father of Confederation. I know little detail of his motivations to join those founding this Confederation, except that he supported this historic union in the hope of providing good governance. That same goal was my singular reason for seeking election.

I am deeply honoured to have been elected as the member of Parliament for the constituents of Edmonton—Strathcona. I am grateful to the countless enthusiastic Edmontonians, from ages 8 to 80 years, who came from every corner of my constituency and

across the city to join my team in getting out the vote on election day. I am awed by the time and energy Canadian communities volunteer to our democratic process. It should be honoured.

I encourage all members of this House to not lose sight of the privilege we share in living in a nation where we can freely participate in the electoral process without threat of violence or corruption. It is no lesser a privilege that our affairs are dictated by the rule of law. We do well to recall that the very definition of a democracy is a nation governed by rules, made and enforced by those we elect, a government that remains open and transparent, where laws enacted by the majority are effectively implemented and enforced, including laws for the protection of our health and our environment.

It behooves this House to be diligent in ensuring that the needs and interests of all Canadians are placed at the forefront of our minds when making decisions affecting their lives, their families, their children, their communities and their futures. My constituents did not just elect a new representative to speak on their behalf. More important, I have promised to doggedly pursue a more participatory democracy. I will pursue reforms to bring Canadians proportional representation to this House. I will also champion more constructive and inclusive means to ensure their direct engagement in the decisions affecting them.

Nowhere is this more critical than in the hinterland. I have long advocated for the right and opportunity of members of the affected communities—farmers, trappers, fishers, first nations, Métis, immigrants and women—to have a seat at the table. This is the real democratic reform Canadians have called for.

Now more than ever, as we face dire threats to our environment and mounting economic distress, it is incumbent upon us as members of Parliament to open the doors to our decision-making processes. If we are truly committed to seeking answers to climate change, to safe food and drinking water, to clean air and liveable communities, it behooves us to hear directly from and respond to those who bear the brunt of impacts downwind and downstream.

It is my hope during this Parliament that we can move away from basing decisions on polls and hand-selected advisory groups. Our federal laws and policies will be strengthened when they are grounded in the voices of the communities most directly affected, when we engage Canadian communities in exploring solutions that speak to their special needs and circumstances.

The Address

Canadians want their federal government to assert federal jurisdiction and powers. They have called for bold measures to protect our environment for the benefit of this and future generations. Strong federal laws are in place. Federal agencies and tribunals are mandated. As an advocate for federal engagement in these areas for over 30 years, both inside and outside government, I decry the announcement by the government of its intent to claw back the powers of these agencies and tribunals, to label the valid assertion of federal measures and powers as mere red tape.

• (1140)

Contrary to the assertions made in the throne speech, less regulation cannot be equated with more effective government nor certainty for investment. Empirical evidence shows that industry looks to regulation as the key determinant for shifting investments toward cleaner production.

For those reasons, I register my vote opposing the Speech from the Throne.

Now is the time to set aside petty partisan debates and work together to expedite the necessary economic and regulatory reforms, to convert our fossil fuel dependent economy to a more equitable, secure and greener future.

Parliament has already wisely passed laws prescribing specific targets for greenhouse gas reductions. Stricter pollution control standards are, hopefully, imminent for release. The next step is to direct the federal spending power, our fiscal measures and our regulatory arm toward incenting conversion to a greener economy.

We must deploy these powers at our disposal, revamp the outdated national building code to prescribe energy efficient buildings, reconsider these fast-tracked approvals for export of coal-fired and nuclear power and raw bitumen. We must consider stalled investments in tar sands expansion as a welcome window of opportunity to redress the cumulative health and environmental impacts.

Let us expand partnerships with provincial, territorial, municipal and aboriginal governments by significantly increasing our share of the cost to expedite on a much larger scale initiatives for renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The throne speech wisely lends support to such an initiative. Let us make it monumental. The result will bring all Canadians a triple bottom line benefit: energy savings to struggling families, farms, businesses and governments; reduced environmental and health impacts; job creation and job choice. This is what can be deemed a sensible policy for our time.

For many, the retired, those on fixed incomes and struggling students, reducing energy costs is a necessity, not a frill. Many in the House may be shocked to learn of the extent of poverty suffered in Alberta. These sad truths were revealed to us just this past week in reports by the food banks and the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

We must join forces to right these wrongs, to close the growing prosperity gap, to accord the equal right to a better quality of life for every Canadian.

I welcome the opportunity of working with all members in the House to achieve this reality.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had a chance to meet with the new member and I welcome her to the House. I originally came from that part of town, the south side of Edmonton, which is a great area where I spent many years. I welcome her to the nation's capital and look forward to working with her.

In one breath she said that we should set aside petty party politics and work together and then in the next breath she said that she would be voting against the throne speech. I think, in the spirit of cooperation, we need to find solutions to deal with the economic crisis that we are facing not only in Canada but around the world.

During the campaign the leader of her party kept talking about the kitchen table, not the boardroom table, and about standing up for working individuals but he did not provide any tax incentives to help the profitable companies and encourage them to continue on in good business practices. He only reinforced the negative bad business practices of the big three auto sectors and bailing them out.

Could the member try to explain how if we reward negative behaviour and penalize companies that are positive that is standing up for the working people? if there are no businesses making money and employing people there will be no one working, no kitchen tables and no boardroom tables.

Could you please inform me of your ideology and how that will help our economic situation?

• (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind the hon. member from Kelowna that when posing questions or comments he should address his comments through the Chair and not directly to the member. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to respond to the question put to me by the member opposite and I thank him for his greetings from Alberta.

Contrary to what the member asserts, the New Democratic Party is fully in favour of giving full support to the alternative economy. It is not only through dirty jobs that we can employ Canadians. Our goal is to provide a choice in employment.

However, we need to stand back and look at the kinds of businesses and jobs that we want to incent and create for the future of our children. It does not behoove us to continue to beef up and buoy up those industries that are destroying our environment and causing health harms.

At this point in our economy, where there is slowdown in areas such as the tar sands, it gives us a genuine opportunity to stand back and identify and redress those harms that may be created and perhaps avoiding them.

The Address

I welcome the opportunity to work with the other members in pursuing a strong economy but through targeted measures and targeted incentives for the kind of economy that will create good jobs for the future for a clean and healthy liveable community.

• (1150)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, and welcome her to the NDP mountain time caucus. In the mountain time caucus we are geographically the largest group in Parliament but numerically we are not in the same position. It is great to have a voice from Alberta speaking in Parliament, in opposition and in our caucus. It gives Parliament the opportunity to hear the differing points of view that do exist in that wonderful province to the south of my riding.

Again, I welcome my colleague and I trust that her role as environment critic will be an excellent one in this Parliament. I have worked with her for some 30 years on environmental issues and I know that her breadth of understanding and commitment to them are very large.

She touched on the issue of the regulatory process. In the throne speech we heard the government talk about reducing the regulatory burden. In its pronouncements in the past year it talked about reducing the regulatory—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must cut off the hon. member so I can give the member for Edmonton—Strathcona a chance to respond.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments and encouragement by the member from the Northwest Territories. I will repeat that we have had a very co-operative, wonderful working relationship for more than 30 years in pursuing common pursuits for the communities that cross the borders between the province of Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

I welcome the opportunity of working with the member from the Northwest Territories, as well as other members of the House, in pursuing policies that will protect the fragile Arctic and the fragile areas of northern Alberta while at the same time creating jobs. However, we must quickly put in place an energy security policy and strategy for Canada similar to what our neighbours to the south have done to ensure that the way we develop our resources is to our citizens' benefit.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your re-appointment to the Speaker's chair. I thought you did a good job in the last Parliament and I am looking forward to working under your guidance in this Parliament.

I want to thank my colleague, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, for sharing her time with me this morning. It is a real honour to do that. I am really excited by the fact that she is with us in this place and will bring her wealth of knowledge and experience to the debates that we will have and contribute in a very positive and exciting way to the development of this new economy that I know we have the potential to put in place in Canada.

She reflects, in very wonderful ways, the great wealth of talent that we as New Democrats have welcomed to our caucus after the last election. There are 11 new members from across the country

with experience and knowledge that will only benefit this place and the country in some important ways.

I would like to mention a couple of items. I googled the member for Edmonton—Strathcona before I came to deliver my speech this morning and she is a powerhouse. She has an unbelievable background of experience in her own province of Alberta, nationally and internationally. I will share with the House a couple of things she has done.

She held a senior portfolio as the chief of enforcement for Environment Canada. She founded Alberta's Environmental Law Centre. She served at the international level as head of law and enforcement for the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation. She spent four years working with Canadian, American and Mexican officials. She served as a senior legal advisor to Indonesia, Bangladesh and Jamaica in instituting programs for effective environmental enforcement for CIDA, Asian Development Bank and World Bank funded projects. This is just the tip of the iceberg to indicate the contribution that the member will make in this place as she fulfills her role as environment critic for the NDP caucus and on behalf of our leader.

I also want to say how pleased I am to be back in this place after the election. It was a tough and hard-fought election. We all worked hard. I dare say that the candidates who ran against me ran good campaigns. It was a clean election and one that we all came out of feeling better about the politics and democracy in this country.

I am just happy that I was the one who came first past the post and that I am able to be here today to speak on behalf of my wonderful city of Sault Ste. Marie in the district of Algoma. It is a riding that is diverse in the ways people make a living and how they take care of each other as a community. It is very important. It is an industrial city with steel, paper and wood. To the east of the city, we have communities that are served by agriculture and farming, and to the north of the city we have the wonderful forestry which is in so much difficulty these days. It is an industry that we have taken advantage of, enjoy and love so much. Lake Superior is in our back yard.

I want to take a few minutes this morning to share a few thoughts that were indicated in the Speech from the Throne, however so briefly, when the government indicated that it understood that it was elected as part of a minority Parliament. I present my thoughts in the spirit of co-operation, which is what I have heard from the government members across the way as they have given their speeches in response to the Speech from the Throne.

In fact, I give my thoughts in the spirit of co-operation because the minister is here today. I will be the critic of that minister's department over the next however number of years that we get to be in this Parliament. When I approached her a couple of days ago to tell her that I would be her critic, she offered to work co-operatively with me and I thank her for that. I say very publicly this morning in this place that I offered to do the same in the interests of the people we all serve. My thoughts will reflect that in just a couple of minutes.

I think I would be remiss if I did not put on the record how disappointed I was with the vision presented in the Speech from the Throne and how disappointed collectively we as New Democrats were with that vision.

The Address

•(1155)

No bold picture has been painted as to where we might go as a country over the next couple of years, as we deal with this very difficult economic situation and global meltdown coming at us. We were disappointed with the stay-the-course, steady-as-she-goes, more tax breaks, less government approach to which the government seems so attached. We hope we can help it see some different approaches over the next while as we work together.

Personally, because my critic area is poverty and social policy, I was very disappointed that there was absolutely no mention of poverty in the Speech from the Throne. As everybody knows, in a difficult economy and even in good times, when government makes a shift in a direction that reduces services, reduces government and gives tax breaks to people who are more wealthy, the people who are hit hardest and first are the poor in our communities.

I say that in a spirit of hopefulness. Over the last few days, the Prime Minister has recognized that we might be heading into a recession. It is good that he is willing to say that very publicly, because he has not said that up until now. We hope, in recognizing we have a recession coming at us and the impact that will have particularly on those who are most risk and vulnerable, he will work with his treasurer, his Minister of Finance, and his Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development to bring forward programs that will help those who need them most.

I present a few strategies that could be adopted if the government is serious about working co-operatively with us on this side of the House. I invite the government to work with all of us in opposition to fix a few things that could immediately affect the lives of a number of our fellow citizens, neighbours, family members who are losing their jobs as we speak this morning because of the downturn in the economy.

The government, the Prime Minister and his ministers need to poverty-proof our communities. We need to stabilize our communities. We need to move away from the notion that somehow more tax cuts is the answer to everything.

It is very easy because we have all studied it. We actually have studied it to death. The member from Nova Scotia who sits with me on the Standing Committee on Human Resources and Social Development will agree to this as well. We could do it today. We could move expeditiously to reform the employment insurance system, which, as we speak, only now serves to help less than 25% of those who lose their jobs. Hundreds of thousands of people who pay into employment insurance through their employment and work hard expect that fund will be there for them. However, when they apply for it, they find out that they do not qualify or if they do qualify, there is really very little there compared to what was there 10 or 15 years ago and what is there lasts such a short period of time. We need to move quickly. We are all committed to that on this side of the House. We invite the government to work with us to reform the EI system.

I believe the money is there. If we are to be going into deficit spending anyway, we need to be spending money in those areas. Government has a no more fundamental responsibility than to look after those citizens in its jurisdiction who are most at risk and

vulnerable. We could move, if we wanted, to use the money we have at our disposal to put in place a more generous child tax credit so families with children do not have to make those very difficult decisions of whether to pay the rent, feed the kids or put fuel in their tanks to heat their homes.

I would ask the government to consider, again in keeping with the need to invest in infrastructure, a national housing program. When we talk to people who deal with poverty and look at poverty, the first thing they say is that we have a lack of affordable housing right now for people.

I hope I have put on the table a few simple things on which the government could work with us. We on this side of the House are committed to making these happen. If it does, it will reflect the co-operation, good spirit and seriousness needed to deal with this very difficult time coming at us. We need to do something significant about it.

•(1200)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague. We sat on the human resources committee and did some very important work there, including a study on poverty which we commenced in the spring. I know how committed he is to this issue.

A lot of places in the world have become serious about tackling poverty, not only in Canada. Even a province like Newfoundland and Labrador has produced testimonies of the significant work it has done. Recognizing poverty is a problem, putting down benchmarks and producing a plan that says we are going to do something about children and seniors living in poverty and the crushing problems of persons with disabilities who have so little assistance today is important.

I know the member has had the opportunity to travel to Ireland, whereas our parliamentary trip was unfortunately cancelled. I hope we get the chance to do that. If I am back on HR, I hope we have a chance to have a real look at some places that have already reduced poverty or have made a start on a good plan to reduce poverty.

Could the member talk about a couple of things that other countries have done and which he thinks Canada could easily adopt right now to help the crushing burden of poverty in our country?

Mr. Tony Martin: Madam Speaker, let me first congratulate you, as the member for Victoria, for the wonderful appointment you have been given. You look very comfortable in that chair, and I think you will do a great job.

I thank the member for his kind remarks and offer him my congratulations. We do not have to reinvent the wheel where poverty is concerned. We can look at jurisdictions like Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia for all kinds of examples and ways that we could be effective in dealing with poverty. Even in our own country, some provinces have begun anti-poverty strategies. They are waiting for us as a national government to become a partner and participate.

I look forward to working with the member on committee to make some of these things happen.

*The Address**[Translation]*

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's speech, and I agree for the most part with some principles. In times of economic crisis and recession, it is important to stimulate the economy and help our businesses. We need a more interventionist government. In terms of the manufacturing sector, we need to help our companies modernize and purchase new equipment so that they can produce more, but we must also provide social protection for people who lose their jobs, through employment insurance measures and social measures to support the workers suffering from the economic recession.

So, I agree with the hon. member, but I did not hear him talk about culture. In the throne speech, the government did not announce that it would rescind the cuts it has made to culture. These cuts greatly affected Quebec, because our francophone culture and our identity are much different from those of the rest of Canada. When the government makes cuts to culture, it is making cuts to our very identity, our language and our means of promoting Quebec throughout the world.

I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say about this, because we are calling on the federal government to transfer the money for culture. More and more, Quebec is calling for cultural sovereignty, because culture is still very important.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on his re-election to this place. I did not speak about culture and I will not provide him with an answer this morning because it would take too long.

We want to talk about a lot of things over the next while in this place, and culture will be one of them. I am certain our member for Timmins—James Bay, who is our critic, will speak very eloquently and adequately to that when he gets an opportunity in the House.

• (1205)

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

I am pleased to rise today to participate in this debate and stand before the House on behalf of the people of Nipissing—Timiskaming in response to the Speech from the Throne.

Before addressing the content of the speech itself, I will take this opportunity to thank the people of my riding for their continued support. My success in the recent election campaign would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of hundreds of volunteers who assisted in my re-election bid and the thousands who turned out to vote for me on election day. I want to make it clear, however, that I am not simply here to represent those who voted for me but every constituent in my riding.

I take great pride in being the member of Parliament for Nipissing—Timiskaming and I will continue to work extremely hard to ensure that the needs of my constituents are being properly addressed by the current Conservative government.

[Translation]

This responsibility begins today, Madam Speaker, as I convey the views I have received from the people in my northern Ontario riding. They believe that this Speech from the Throne does not satisfactorily respond to a number of issues that are important to them.

And so, in a spirit of cooperation and with the hope of working together with my colleagues from other parties, I would like to touch on three key areas during my speech. I hope that the Conservative government will recognize the importance of these issues and will immediately treat them as top priorities.

[English]

The first and most pressing issue is Canada's ailing economy. In less than three years, the current Conservative government spent more money than it brought in. The Prime Minister made the decision to leave no buffer, no room to manoeuvre to help to protect our country's finances in the event of an economic downturn.

[Translation]

Canada is now in a vulnerable position, on the edge of recession. Canadians expect the government to present a plan to help our economy in these difficult times. This plan should protect Canadian jobs, houses, savings and retirement funds.

[English]

Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance are trying to blame a global economic crisis for Canada's ailing economy. The truth is they must be held accountable for putting Canada on the brink of deficit. The current economic downturn did not start last month but nearly a year ago. We know that Canada had the worst performing economy in the G-8 for the first half of 2008.

Canadians recognize that it did not have to be this way. Canada could have been better prepared by maintaining its reserve fund and investing wisely in increased productivity and creating jobs.

What exactly happened to get us where we are today? In just two short years the Conservatives have squandered \$12 billion in surplus that was left to them by the previous Liberal government. They also got rid of the \$3 billion contingency reserve, their rainy day fund used for economic downturns which are here with us now. This is the money that could have helped Canadians in need by creating jobs, stimulating the economy, and addressing seniors' pensions without going into a deficit.

It is also worth noting that the Prime Minister currently heads the biggest spending federal government in Canadian history. It increased annual spending by \$40 billion in just three budgets while at the same time generating less revenues than ever before, and called this good management.

Let us not forget that just a day after the finance minister signalled pending public service cuts the Prime Minister increased the bulk of his cabinet by 20%. Now this sends a contradictory message to Canadians who are told that they have to have leaner, tougher times.

The Address

Despite the increased size of the Prime Minister's newly minted cabinet, the three ministers responsible for regional economic development agencies, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Western Economic Diversification have been reduced. They no longer have a minister. They now have a minister of state, which is a junior position. This is in the midst of an economic crisis where the regions of the country are most vulnerable.

Of even greater concern to the people of my riding is the fact that the agency for northern Ontario, FedNor has been downgraded and absorbed into the industry portfolio. This is in addition to the fact that the Conservatives have slashed FedNor's annual budget by nearly \$7 million since taking office. This serves as a clear indication that the Prime Minister and his Conservative government eventually intend to scrap the program altogether.

The importance of regional economic development programs such as FedNor cannot be overstated. An example of economic development that should be examined is North Bay's Jack Garland Airport. It is currently one of 15 public airports in Canada that boasts a 10,000 foot runway. It is often used as an official alternative landing when flights cannot land in Toronto or Montreal or other larger airports. This ensures safety for passengers and pilots, and it is an economic engine for present and future growth to the city of North Bay and the surrounding areas.

Now the government wants to shorten the runway to 6,500 feet. It is worth noting that according to current estimates the cost of reducing the runway from 10,000 feet to 6,500 feet would be about the same amount. The financial change would be negligible but the real change would be a shorter runway that could not be used.

This is a file that has to be examined. I am confident that in the end common sense will prevail and North Bay will keep its 10,000 foot runway for both the safety of Canadians and the economic growth of northern Ontario.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

That brings me to my next point: infrastructure. Canada is facing an infrastructure deficit of billions of dollars. We must invest at once in order to reduce this deficit, and we must partner with the provinces, territories, cities and communities. In these difficult economic times, we, the Liberals, understand that the government must allocate funds to the industries that increase our ability to compete and that also create decent, well-paying jobs for Canadians.

[*English*]

Ensuring that Canada has high quality sustainable infrastructure to meet the needs of Canadians is a critical part of managing our economy. It was in fact a Liberal government that launched the first infrastructure program that created the new deal for cities and communities, which provided a GST rebate to municipalities and transferred the equivalent of 5¢ of every gas tax to municipalities for investment in infrastructure. We recognize that provinces, territories and municipalities need long-term predictable funding to eliminate the infrastructure deficit that faces the country.

The government needs to provide better access to services that are essential to fight against poverty. We need programs such as

affordable housing, universal child care and public transit. Unlike the Conservatives, whose ideology leaves no room for vulnerable Canadians, Liberals believe that when we invest in every Canadian, Canada succeeds, not only socially but economically.

Also of grave concern is that the Conservatives have given no indication that they will reverse the cuts that they have made to the arts programs. Currently, there are about 1.1 million jobs that flow from cultural industries. Conservative cuts continue to undermine that important part of the Canadian economy. What is worse is that the finance minister has publicly acknowledged that the cuts were nothing more than political decisions.

The people of Nipissing—Timiskaming, and indeed all Canadians, expect and deserve more when it comes to dealing with our current economic crisis.

My Liberal colleagues and I recognize that greater investment in infrastructure, regional economic development, and addressing the growing deficit in social spending are keys to stimulating Canada's failing economy.

Just before he came to Ottawa, the current finance minister left Ontarians with a \$5 billion deficit. He made a mess of Ontario's books as finance minister and now he is looking to do the same thing for Canada. Canadians know that it does not have to be this way.

The Liberals are a party that conquered the \$42 billion deficit created by the last Conservative government and we are the party that set the country on a track of unprecedented growth prior to the current government.

I look forward to working with colleagues on all sides of the House to ensure that investment in economic development, infrastructure and social programs are part of a comprehensive strategy to reverse the ongoing trend of Conservative fiscal mismanagement.

• (1215)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, congratulations on your appointment to the chair.

I was curious about the infrastructure comments that the member made, particularly for my region, the Windsor-Detroit corridor. A massive infrastructure project there is in the initial stages of getting under way.

There has been a site selection for a new border crossing. It is very important for our economy despite the troubles that we have right now. We do need to have a new bridge replacement and a new plaza. The city as well is pushing for a solution for the roadway system up to the actual new border crossing. It is a little bit controversial because the Ontario Liberal government will not move ahead with a proposal to make it a greener project and although it is an insignificant difference it just seems to be stuck on not doing it.

The Address

Given the importance of the corridor and the fact that 40% of Canada's trade goes along the corridor and adding another bridge is very essential, not only just to Ontario and Quebec but the rest of the country with our GDP so tightly wound around basically a private American operator that owns the current bridge, why did his party take the position of objecting to the project going ahead?

In fact, a former cabinet minister was one of the Liberal candidates in our region and did not want the project to go forward. Why would the Liberals not want to support that when it is going to create many jobs, it will green and improve the corridor efficiency, and provide a great opportunity to actually have economic development during this time?

Mr. Anthony Rota: Madam Speaker, infrastructure is one of the areas that we have to promote and get going. Infrastructure is one of the areas where the more money we put into it, it will grow and stay in the country. What happens with some of the throw-away incentives from the Conservative Party is that people might get an extra \$100 a month, but it often goes to products that are made abroad. So it helps retail a bit, which is important, but with infrastructure investment, there is money that gets built in and the money gets spent locally and is invested and reinvested. By the time it hits retail, it has actually expanded to more than the original investment.

Part of that infrastructure really does have to take place and help trade across the border. When we look at the United States, it is our greatest trading partner. In this particular case, we have to do everything to increase trade and facilitate that trade, so that there are no barriers between the two countries. Increasing trade and allowing trade to go smoother is definitely something that has to be considered and improved upon as part of the complete infrastructure program.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to welcome my colleague back to the House. I always enjoyed the brief times we had talking together and I know he fancies himself as an outdoorsman coming from rural Ontario.

The member talked about the surplus and how we squandered surpluses. We must remember that a surplus occurs in a government because of overtaxation. We have taken that money in surpluses and pounded it against the debt. We also made sure we gave back money to the taxpayers through a number of tax credits as well as tax reductions. That has benefited Canadians from one coast of this country to the other.

We also know that the fictitious contingency fund that members on the other side continue to talk about was only there to pay for Liberal pet projects which became a pet peeve of mine. That was one of the reasons I jumped into political life because Liberals were taking the funds and putting it into programs to help their friends.

In the throne speech we said we are finally going to get rid of the gun registry. It has been an ineffective program brought forward by the previous Liberal government. I know constituents right across rural Canada hate the gun registry. How is my hon. colleague going to vote when it comes time to vote on eliminating it?

• (1220)

Mr. Anthony Rota: Madam Speaker, this is a question which has come up many times. Why have the Conservatives not brought

anything forward? It was one of the promises they made a long, long time ago. This was going to be their platform. They were going to eliminate the gun registry. Well, nothing came up, just like many other promises they made. They just did not bring it forward.

Based on what they bring forward that will determine which way I vote. To have a blank statement that says I am going to vote a certain way on a certain issue, any fool would say he or she is going to vote one way or another without seeing it. However, we have to read the detail and find out exactly what the Conservatives want to do. They have made some promises and brought out topics and bills that really do not make a lot of sense. Initially something might look good, but when it comes down to the vote we have to look at the details. I will look at whatever the Conservatives bring forward and I will vote accordingly.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to see you in the chair. Congratulations.

I am pleased to rise in the 40th Parliament of Canada on behalf of the citizens of the riding of Winnipeg South Centre, a vibrant and diverse riding in the heart of the continent, in order to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Before doing so, I want to thank the people of my community for their endorsement of me for the fourth time in eight years and to say to them that it is with much gratitude and a deep sense of responsibility that I take my seat here once again. I want to extend a special thanks to the many volunteers who helped me keep my job and to fly the Liberal flag in Manitoba.

It is with a deep sense of responsibility that I am acutely aware that the actions taken by the Conservative government and the response, oversight and decisions by those assembled here will determine how many individuals will live their lives and will determine the opportunities they have or not.

As many people are aware, the Liberal Party has always stood for helping people in communities. As one senior citizen on Grant Avenue in Winnipeg said to me, "The Liberal Party has always been there for us and I will be there for the Liberals". Creating opportunities through generating prosperity and sound fiscal and economic management are the underpinnings of the Liberal Party.

Against the backdrop of a collapsing world economy, it is incumbent upon the Conservative government to take firm action on the economy, present a plan, outline a vision for the future that will protect jobs, safeguard pensions, and support economic stability, and to do so in a forthright and consistent manner with a balanced message that addresses the realities of the day, not one designed for political gain.

Prior to October 14, the Prime Minister assured Canadians that he would never run a deficit. It was clear he had information at that time that indicated he would not be able to keep that promise without large funding cuts because of a weakened economy, a weakened economy in Canada made worse by the mismanagement of the Conservative government's finances.

The Address

When the Conservatives took office, they stripped the government of financial safety measures and went on an aimless spending spree. They spent irresponsibly and left Canada's economy vulnerable to the economic global downturn. In fact, to use an analogy, they were like a teenager who just got a hot rod, blew his or her money on a fancy paint job and a stereo, but took out the seat belts and the air bags.

Having inherited from the Liberals the strongest economy in all the G-8 countries, a \$13 billion surplus and a \$3 billion contingency reserve for emergencies, unprecedented job creation and no deficit, we are now on the brink of a recession, and the Conservative government's mismanagement is in part to blame.

As confirmed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the government has squandered Canada's fiscal stability and we have now acknowledged the "R" word, a recession. We are told it is only a technical recession. There is nothing technical about this recession. There is nothing technical about people who have lost or are about to lose their jobs. There is nothing technical for the thousands of Canadians who have already lost their jobs under the Conservative government. They are not technically unemployed, just as they are not technically suffering, or technically worrying about their children's education, or technically concerned about their pensions.

The Conservative government needs to get back to reality by being straight with Canadians and not play word games and insult their intelligence.

The throne speech and subsequent remarks by Conservatives in the House reference a prudent course, "essential programs and no more" and to "review all spending carefully and make sure it is aligned with Canadian priorities". Who will determine Canadian priorities?

Canadians should be concerned about the Conservative promise to put federal spending under the microscope. They might use the microscope to look at the expenses, but programs cannot be hacked and slashed with a machete rather than a scalpel. Canadians need to be vigilant that Conservative cuts are not based on ideology, but truly on value for taxpayers.

● (1225)

In the last Parliament we saw unprecedented cuts to programs related to climate change, the court challenges program, literacy, the Kelowna accord, national child care, arts funding, and so on.

In my city of Winnipeg the Canadian Wheat Board has been under attack from undemocratic processes such as altering voter lists, using numbered ballots, stacking the Wheat Board with anti-single desk appointees, and opening up spending to third parties. In times of economic uncertainty, the government is willing to put at risk 480 direct jobs of the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg and over 1,800 full time job equivalents sustained in Winnipeg by the Canadian Wheat Board expenditures. Many thousands more in Canada who also support Wheat Board activity are also at peril.

The port of Churchill will be endangered. The Canadian Wheat Board is responsible for over 90% of the traffic. The northern rail line in all likelihood will be shut down. Head offices in Manitoba are at risk of disappearing.

People in my community expect much more of their government. Manitoba is a relatively small community. There is a community of interests. The community is speaking with one voice in its efforts to establish an inland port, a transportation hub which is a priority of government and business. There is an expectation the Government of Canada will come forward as a full partner in this endeavour. Winnipeg has many natural advantages for this.

The government also speaks to advances in science and technology, but let the Manitoba Innovation Council be the model.

Funds have been committed and allocated by the government for the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg, but the dollars are slow to flow, and at best, it is a trickle. For two summers water samples have been collected and they sit in a cooler somewhere with no funds available to analyze them. When a commitment is made, the expectation is that it will be honoured.

The residents of Winnipeg South Centre have many other priorities, such as health care and access to health care professionals, as well as access to post-secondary education without incurring debt burdens that cripple young people's ability to go on in school.

The Speech from the Throne speaks about helping all Canadians participate. It also speaks to securing jobs for families and encouraging skilled apprenticeships. Many Canadians want to work. They want to retain jobs. They want to upgrade their skills. However, they cannot do this without the full knowledge that their children are safe and secure. For many the lack of national early learning and child care makes it impossible for them to go to school or get a job.

The residents of Winnipeg South Centre have great concern for those who are vulnerable, particularly children and the poor, and fear that they will be forgotten in the economic crisis in which we are living.

I note particularly the senior citizen who expressed concern that she and her husband feared who would die first, because the other would not be able to pay the rent on their existing apartment and where would that person go.

On the justice agenda, safe communities are a common objective of all. However, I note with interest that while speaking to the issue of controlling crime, there is no mention in the throne speech of other initiatives of great importance in Manitoba, such as controlling auto theft, nor is there anything to address the social determinants of criminal activity.

I wanted to speak about securities funding but, Madam Speaker, I note your indication that I have to wrap up.

The Address

I want to make a quick note about democratic reform and reforming the institutions of Parliament. There are small steps and gestures of good faith that the government could address before undertaking a major constitutional reform. These include participation by all candidates in debates in an election, non-conversion of the tools of the House for partisan purposes, and not taking members' words out of context in order to serve another's own purpose.

• (1230)

The residents of my community want straight talk from their leaders. They do not want to hear partial information. They do not want to hear spin for political purposes. The task at hand is great and they want cooperation, fair-mindedness and openness as we move forward.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre for her comments on the throne speech. Even though they seemed a little long, I still appreciate her comments.

One concern I do have is in regard to the Canadian Wheat Board. Of course farmers across the Prairies have voted in favour of changes to the Canadian Wheat Board. Does she not recognize that the biggest threat to the Canadian Wheat Board is to do nothing? The biggest threat to the board not surviving in Winnipeg would be for the board to exist in the same format in which it has existed over the years and not to modify it to meet the needs and wants of western producers. Would she not recognize the fact that producers have been very clear that they want change? They made it very clear not only in a plebiscite but in the election of members across the great western Prairies where the Wheat Board acts. Of course, if we look across the House, how many rural members does the Liberal Party have compared to the Conservative Party?

Does she not recognize the cost to farmers that this organization has borne over this last year? A report which came out last week mentioned the figure of \$40 a tonne. On my farm, which is a small farm, \$40 a tonne is \$40,000. If we apply that across the Prairies, how much money has been left on the table by this organization?

My question is very broad, but regarding the comments she has made on the Canadian Wheat Board, has she focused on what is important to Canadian farmers or on what is important to her and her political background?

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Speaker, of course I am concerned about farmers and I am concerned about the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. However, I am more concerned that farmers have a fair and open opportunity to speak to the issues. I am concerned that the processes not be thwarted. I am concerned that the farmers indeed have control, that their positions are not misrepresented in this House and outside this House.

If it is a fair and open process whereby the farmers determine the future of the Wheat Board, I have no difficulty with it. However, we all know that it was stacked. It was loaded. Secret meetings were held. Only some proponents were invited and others were excluded. We know how those who disagreed with the government's position involved with the Wheat Board have been ruthlessly treated.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on her return to the House and on her speech today.

I would like to ask her about her party's philosophy on supporting the Conservatives' continued policy of large corporate tax cuts. Specifically, another point will be shaved off in January and the continuation of the policy will cost another \$7 billion to \$8 billion. Interestingly enough, the member referenced a number of different serious needs. Many economists have said quite conclusively that putting money into infrastructure and social spending is much more important at this point in time for a number of different reasons, but even for job creation alone.

I would like to ask the member why the Liberals continue to support that policy, especially given the fact that we are moving into a deficit. Canadians need to understand that we are going to have to borrow money to provide large corporate tax cuts. We are going to have to finance these corporate tax cuts out of our public revenues. That is an improper way to look at our economic development. Also, it is not fair to Canadians to see their taxpayer dollars used in such a way. If those dollars went back into infrastructure and social services, they would see job creation and supports in the communities.

• (1235)

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on his re-election.

I agree with his position that money must be spent on infrastructure. We must ensure that those who are most vulnerable in our community are not left behind, but I differ with his view on business tax cuts. In this time in which we are living, it is most important that businesses have the opportunity and wherewithal to create jobs and to ensure that their employees are retained, and one would hope, new ones hired. I am not sure what the member is proposing would work in that direction.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment as Acting Speaker, as well as our other colleagues who have been appointed to the Chair and, of course, the recent election of the Speaker.

Before I begin my reply to the Speech from the Throne, I want to thank everybody in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake for again putting their trust in me and returning me back to this fine House. It is a humbling experience to be the representative of such a fine group of people that we have in Selkirk—Interlake.

Of course, to do the job as a member of Parliament, we could not do it without the support of our families. I need to thank my wife, Kelly, and our three daughters, Cortney, Taylor and Cassidy, for their love and understanding through the time it takes to be a member of Parliament and carry out these great responsibilities in representing everyone in our ridings, not only those who vote for us but every person who resides in our ridings.

Getting elected is a tremendous undertaking and we could not do it without the support of volunteers. I need to thank my campaign team and the hundreds of volunteers who worked on my campaign to help get me re-elected.

The Address

Selkirk—Interlake is just a fantastic riding. I always say that I get to represent the best riding in all of Canada. I know everybody here thinks they represent the greatest riding in all of Canada but I can say that, aside from the fact that my rural riding is beautiful, I have the greatest people in all of Canada in my riding and that is what makes it the best riding in the nation.

My riding is a big riding with 91,000 people and 71 communities spread out over 56,000 kilometres. We have 10 first nation communities and 27 Métis locals. We have a real balance in European representation with Ukrainian and Icelandic descent, along with the original Selkirk settlers and the recent immigrants who have moved into our communities. It is a dynamic area that is always very exciting. Often, people do not realize that although it is a very large riding, a very agrarian riding with lots of ranching and farming, it also has the two great lakes of Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba. We have some tremendous fishing on those lakes, both commercial fishing and sport fishing.

The Speech from the Throne did focus in on the tough global economic crisis that we are facing. The news always focuses in on how it is impacting the auto sector, the financial sector and the housing market but we often forget about the importance of rural Canada. I do want to talk about how important that is.

While we have this watchful eye on the manufacturing and service industries, we need to think about our agriculture industry, our fishing industry and other resource-based industries. Rural Canada is very important to the overall economic stability of this great nation. In 2006, there were 327,000 farm operators working on about 189,000 farms across the country. That is only 1% of the national population but that 1% makes a huge impact on the economy of Canada.

On top of that, there are more than 52,000 people who are directly involved in commercial fishing in Atlantic Canada, on the Pacific coast and in the inland freshwater fishery.

In Selkirk—Interlake, there are 2,500 cattle ranches, over 2,000 mixed grain operations and 1,200 commercial fishers who are actively involved in the fishery on both Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg.

The Canadian fishery was very productive in 2000. It generated over \$4 billion in revenues for the country. It has been increasing at a rate of about 2.8%, which is significant growth. In terms of trade, the fishery exported over \$3.9 billion of commodities in 2007. Canada is the seventh largest exporter of fish and seafood. The value of the catch of the commercial fishery out of Lake Winnipeg alone, and this is freshwater fish, is \$18.2 million. It has a number of spinoffs because of its importance. The inland commercial fishery is something that is very near and dear to my heart as well as supporting that fishery.

We do have a small craft harbour program. The government, in the last session, increased the annual funding to the small craft harbour program to \$20 million per year. Last year, we increased it another \$10 million over the next two years to help deal with some of the small craft harbours that are in desperate need of repair and environmental cleanup.

● (1240)

In August of this year, I made a number of announcements for fishing harbours in my riding at Easterville, Arnes, Matheson Island and others to ensure that we deal with safety issues surrounding landing the catch and also ensuring that people have the facilities to get in and out without damaging their equipment.

We are also putting money into the Lake Winnipeg water stewardship fund. This is important because we must protect the overall viability of our lakes. Lake Winnipeg is not only a major source of the commercial fishery but it is also a major source of freshwater in our aquifers. It is a major recharge for most of Manitoba and it also supports a huge tourism industry. Some of the nicest beaches in Canada are located in my riding.

We have \$18 million that has been put into the action plan for clean water just for Lake Winnipeg, to establish the Lake Winnipeg water stewardship fund. Out of that \$18 million, a lot of that money is already starting to flow to help address the environmental issues that are surrounding the lake. We also established a \$3.65 million fund to help community based organizations, industry organizations and municipalities to use those dollars to leverage against municipal dollars, provincial dollars and even other federal departments to look at reducing nutrient loading into Lake Winnipeg. This is for the entire basin, not just the inner lake. It is for Manitoba, Saskatchewan, parts of Ontario and Alberta that actually drain all the way into Lake Winnipeg. Over \$1 million were set aside this year to deal with it.

The fund has five goals to reduce nutrient loading. First, we want to reduce the blue-green algae blooms. We want to ensure that there are fewer beach closings. We need to keep in place a sustainable fishery and provide a clean lake for all recreation and restore the ecological integrity of the lake.

As I mentioned earlier, agriculture is a key economic driver in the Canadian industry. Eight per cent of Canada's gross domestic product is generated from agriculture which is equivalent to \$86 billion. In Canada, agriculture generates one out of every eight jobs, which means that agriculture employs directly and indirectly 2.1 million people. That is all generated by 327,000 farmers who generate 2.1 million in this economy. Agriculture and agri-food exports in 2007 was \$31.7 billion representing 6.8% of total exports.

When we look at these spinoff benefits and job creation, we always have to ensure that we have strong agriculture policy. For every \$1 of direct GDP created in primary agriculture, an additional \$1.08 of GDP is indirectly created. For every job created in agriculture another, .91 indirect jobs are created in the overall economy. We are talking truckers, people working in retail stores selling groceries and working in the food distribution system. For every \$1 that we create in the GDP in the food processing industry, which is huge when we take a look at our packers and food processors, an additional \$1.81 is created indirectly in the economy. Similarly, with food processing for every direct job created in the food processing it creates another 2.5 jobs in the economy.

The Address

Agriculture is a significant driver and one that we cannot ignore, which is why this government has revamped our entire agriculture policy programs with Growing Forward.

AgriInvest is a self-directed investment tool for farmers. It generates to help offset the top 15% of farm revenue. We provided over \$400 million to kickstart those funds.

AgriStability will continue to work with producers and promises to address the need of dealing with these short-term ebbs and flows in the marketplace and the cost of inputs. There will always be a need to change and revamp the program but we have made significant improvements to the old CAIS program and most farmers are thankful for that.

We have AgriInsure, which is the old crop insurance program. We are looking at ways to improve crop insurance to make it more consistent across the country but also to deal with the challenges of trying to include the livestock industry under that.

We have the great new program AgriRecovery to help offset disasters, things that are completely unpredicted and things that we cannot manage through any type of program except through some sort of ad hoc relief and working with the provinces to develop programs that address those needs.

There will always be a need for improvement but I believe the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is well aware of what programs will be best to deal with each individual disaster as they occur across this wide country.

● (1245)

In the last election, Conservative Party's platform talked about making even more improvements to agriculture policy. One improvement is setting up over \$500 million over the next four years to deal with agriculture flexibility programs. I know some producers in certain areas of the country will say that is for certain risk management programs they might have within their own provinces. However, I personally see these dollars not tilting the playing field from one province to the next, but actually reaching out to help those commodities that are falling through the cracks, that are not best served because of long-term market conditions and have not been well served by current programs. It will reach out to things like livestock and horticulture that need a few more dollars to get along.

We also announced that we will provide \$50 million to increase processing and slaughter capacity in this country. That is especially important for areas where we do not see significant slaughter capabilities. If we look at packers in Manitoba, B.C. and Atlantic Canada, there is nobody to help support our livestock producers, especially under the current market conditions south of us. We need to have local packers and processors.

We promised in the last election to cut the federal excise tax on diesel fuel in half, which will generate \$47 million in savings just for farmers, and that is significant. I would like to take a little credit for it because in the 38th and 39th Parliaments I had a private member's bill in the House to eliminate the federal excise tax on any diesel fuel that is used in farming or in the commercial fishery. Two cents is a great improvement and it extends to everybody in Canada. I know my trucking friends are very happy with that promise.

We also pledged to continue to work toward providing marketing choice to grain farmers across western Canada, which includes through the Canadian Wheat Board. We will continue to support and strengthen supply management in this country and carry its message strongly and clearly to any international discussions we have at the World Trade Organization.

Despite all this government support, the sad fact remains that not only are the taxpayers of Canada providing support and subsidies to farmers but farmers are subsidizing the cost of food. If we look at the stats that I got from Statistics Canada, it shows that for small farms earning under \$100,000 of revenue, 90% of farm income is derived from off-farm sources. When we look at large farms, 55% of their income is derived from off-farm sources. If we look at very large farms, and I am talking of farms with sales of over \$.5 million of gross farm revenue, even in those situations 35% of their revenue is generated from off-farm income.

Despite the support that is coming from the Government of Canada, to maintain a viable position somebody in the farm operation, and often it is both operators, must leave the farm and take jobs in town or generate some sort of other farm income through an in-home type businesses. Farmers are very entrepreneurial and resilient and they will look at whatever it takes to ensure they maintain their operations and land base.

Yes, farmers may be asset rich but they are always cash poor. We know that the biggest challenge for farmers these days is not just managing the marketplace, animal health or trade issues. It is being cashflow managers. With the tightening credit crunch that we are seeing across this country and around the world, farmers will be in even more need for access to equity and dollars to ensure their farms continue to operate on a day-to-day basis.

In the last Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food made significant movements and improvements to labelling in this country, especially when it comes to the issue of products of Canada. In the last session, I was pleased to chair the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and we did a lot of great work as well in looking at some of the shortfalls in product of Canada labelling.

Now we know that when people go into stores to buy a can of beans or processed food like pizza that says "product of Canada" on the label, it means that over 98% of the ingredients in that can or package is really from Canada. It is not just made in Canada, it is grown in Canada. Consumers can take a lot of refuge knowing that they are getting high quality and safe food because it is from right here in Canada.

The Address

•(1250)

We also know that in the instance where we process food here that is imported from other countries, they can still make use of the made in Canada label, which is important. We still want to create those jobs here and recognize that this food was processed under our inspection regulations and our environmental and labour standards. We know it has created jobs and opportunities in our country. We have to recognize that.

We have also moved forward with biofuels, which is very important not only in helping the environment but also in helping our farmers, improving the market opportunity for our agriculture producers for selling some of their lower value grain stuffs, now also with cellulosic ethanol, being able to move some of our byproducts and biodiesel using some animal waste. That really creates extra revenue flows in farm operations and it is something that we will continue to support.

I am disappointed that not all parties in the House support biofuels under the guise of the argument that it increases food prices. As a farmer, I will not stand here and advocate for cheap food policy. I want to ensure farmers can generate the revenues out of the marketplace so they do not have to get off-farm income nor rely on government subsidies to maintain their operations.

That is why we have to continue to concentrate on trade expansion, ensuring that we have access to markets especially in these uncertain times with the World Trade Organization and not knowing whether we are ever going to get a final deal. Canada will go out and aggressively search out new markets to open the door for our agriculture producers and the entire Canadian economy for greater opportunity to market in higher valued markets around the world.

As the Minister of Trade and Minister of Agriculture have said, we will pursue the European common market. We will also pursue countries in Asia and ensure that we have as many doors open to us as possible.

One of the challenges we have right now is the country of origin labelling from the United States. There is no question that COOL is a program that is in violation of both NAFTA and WTO. It is creating a great deal of uncertainty in the marketplace here, but more important, it is already driving down the market price. We are seeing cattle and hog prices plummet. We are seeing opportunities to sell in certain areas of the United States diminishing. We have to ensure that we take aggressive action against the United States on this very protectionist policy.

The Minister of Agriculture has already stated publicly that we will take trade action to ensure that the NAFTA rules are respected as it comes down to marketing product in the United States. When it is processed in the United States, it is a product of the United States. We also know it is in violation of WTO under the whole country of origin rules.

I want to go back to the importance of our rural economy, our rural communities and our small towns in our ridings that so many of us represent. The percentage of people living in rural Canada continues to decline. In 2001, 20.3% of all Canadians lived in rural

areas. That is only 6.1 million people. In contrast, 80% of Canadians now live in large urban centres.

These small communities are supported by agriculture, the fisheries, forestry, the energy industry and the mining industry. We have to ensure we continue to support those communities.

There has been a lot of rhetoric floating around House about our cuts to corporate Canada. We have to remember that 98% of Canadian corporations are small and medium-sized businesses. These are the businesses are on our main streets. These are the cafés, the grocery stores, the pharmacies that are up and down our main streets, supporting our people who live in rural areas. They employ over 5 million people, just in small businesses. When we add in self-employed and the medium-sized businesses, two-thirds of Canadians are employed by small and medium-sized businesses. In 2007, 100,000 jobs were created by small business, accounting for over 40% of all jobs created in Canada. Despite all the rhetoric about cutting taxes, those tax cuts benefit our local communities.

I look forward to this time in the House. It is always great to be back here. I am proud of the work we have done as a government in bringing forward the issues of rural Canada. In developing policies in the 40th Parliament, we need to ensure that we do not forget rural Canadians, our farmers, our fishers and everybody who lives in the rural areas.

•(1255)

I looking to improve decorum in the House, maintain a mutual respect and a higher level of debate.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment. I am very pleased to see a female at the chair once again. I would also like to congratulate the member for Selkirk—Interlake on his third election victory.

In the member's closing statement, he talked about remembering members in rural communities. I agree with him, but I want to remind him and members absent from the House at that time, it was a city member, the former Liberal Member of Parliament for Toronto—Danforth, Dennis Mills, who made Canada aware of the family farm. It took a member from the city of Toronto to bring attention to the importance of our farming communities.

I agree with the member that we need these products and that there is an importance we should attach to the farming communities. However, a vast number of the population lives in cities like Toronto, Montreal, et cetera. We consume so much of what they produce. Our cities today are hurting. Under the Prime Minister and the previous administration, now my city of Toronto and my former city of Scarborough, now part of the Greater Toronto Area, are hurting because infrastructure money is not coming in, jobs are in jeopardy and the list goes on.

I am glad he touched upon the labelling. Bill C-52 needs to be addressed in the way we heard during the election. I agree that we should have a strong agricultural policy, for which Canada is noted. If that is the case, will he then take it to his government and stress the importance of also supporting the cities with the funding they need?

The Address

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I suppose it is all a matter of perception. From where I sit, we see all the support going into the big cities and we do not see enough coming our way. When we look at the infrastructure being invested, especially into the major urban centres, we see a lot more dollars being spent than what we are seeing spent in rural Canada.

There has always been this argument. Do we look at funding from the standpoint of a per capita basis, or do we look at it from the standpoint of need? Need is very subjective in the eyes of the beholder, but by basing it on per capita all the dollars are going to flow into urban centres where 80% of Canadians live. I made that fact known today.

We have to address the issue of ensuring that the economy functions overall and that Canadians are getting the services they need. This is one of the reasons I jumped into political life. I am a cattle farmer. That is what I do for a living. I ran a small business in livestock export as well. I moved cattle around North and South America to our various clients.

The real issue is that rural Canadians are not second-class citizens. We have to ensure we have the same level of service from financial sectors, infrastructure and service from government that is available to people in urban centres. The member has to remember that when we have to drive to our post office, it is a 20 or 25 mile drive in some situations, whereas everybody in an urban riding may go down to the end of the block or, even better, have their mail delivered to their door.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your new responsibilities, and I wish you the best.

[English]

I also thank my colleague for his passion for rural Canada and for his hard work as chair of our committee during the past session.

How we maintain sustainability in rural communities is important for many of us who represent these areas.

With respect to agriculture, I remember a year or so ago our committee had many recommendations on food security. One of them was about championing local initiatives and about maybe having a federal procurement policy to buy locally for federal institutions and prisons. This recommendation was supported by all members of all parties on committee. Yet when we took this suggestion to the government and the department, we were told we had to be careful of trade obligations.

How can we advance the role of local food initiatives and local food supply and support local farmers when we have this cloud of trade obligations? How can we move ahead and ensure that we have access to good quality food?

I met this morning with a representative of the Island Farmers Alliance from Vancouver Island. He pointed out that there were obstacles to all the local food initiatives, one of them being the meat inspection regulations in British Columbia, which prohibit a farmer from selling from his or her farm gate to someone else. Even in my

area in the Slocan Valley a lot of farms have been shut down because of that.

How can we on the one hand ensure we have good quality food at the multinational level or the corporate levels and not get any more unfortunate incidents? At the same time, can we have flexibility for our producers at the local level to contain this thriving agricultural industry that supplies good quality food to people in the immediate area?

Could I get some comments from my hon. colleague? Maybe he is aware of some initiatives undertaken in his province. British Columbia is having a really hard time with these new regulations, which are standard. They do not seem to take into account local initiatives and certainly do not support local farmers.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I want to welcome back my friend from British Columbia Southern Interior. I have always appreciated his hard work and honesty and his passion on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. We do not always agree, but we share the same focus, which is to ensure that the lives of our farmers are better and improved because of the policies we develop.

There is no question that buying local is becoming more trendy. I encourage consumers to seek out local food and buy local products from their farmers' markets or direct from the farm gate.

There is no doubt that farmers in rural areas in Canada may not have the same advantages as certain farmers who are located close to large urban centres like Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal.

Farmers in my riding are largely ranchers and do not grow fresh vegetables or fruit because they cannot in central Manitoba. They still have to depend upon export markets.

The trade issue is important. With respect to our grains, our oilseeds, our livestock and red meats, half of what we produce is exported, so those farmers have to keep a wary eye. They have to keep a balance between wanting to sell local but also wanting to have access to export markets.

That is why I will continue to advocate for more open doors on the international scene so our farmers can sell to these more lucrative markets, especially Europe and Asia, and not have all their eggs in one basket, as they have in the past number of years.

• (1305)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member spoke very eloquently about rural Canada. I thank him for his support of the cattle ranchers in my riding. The House may not know that the Prairies actually begin in the west end of my riding. The member's love of rural Canada is clear.

I am sure the hon. member knows the importance of a national broadcaster for rural and remote parts of Canada. Will the hon. member ensure that his government will not reduce funding for the CBC, yes or no?

The Address

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I want to welcome the member to the House. The member should know that my sister, who may not appreciate this, actually works for CBC as a broadcaster. The government has increased funding to the CBC. People in my riding enjoy CBC radio and CBC television. I do not see any reason to be concerned about the future of that organization.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by saying how happy I am to begin my remarks in this House with the words “Madam Speaker”. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Trois-Rivières. I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the voters in the riding of Laval who resisted the siren song of my Conservative opponent, who was most loquacious, and placed their confidence in me for the third time.

I wanted to say a few words in the House today about the throne speech, but I do not have good things to say about it, nor am I happy with it, nor will I be voting for it. Those who know me well know how important women's issues are to me and to the members of the Bloc Québécois.

Yesterday, in her remarks, my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle referred to those who were left out of the throne speech. Today, I would like to spend some more time talking about those people, particularly women. I was not surprised to find no references to women in the throne speech.

The week before that, my colleagues from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert and Gatineau and I were observers at the Conservative Party convention in Winnipeg. When I arrived in Winnipeg, I was excited and all fired up. I was eager to see what would happen, to hear what people had to say about various things, to see how people would use the meetings to set their party's agenda and priorities. I wanted to get some idea of what we would be talking about here in the House once we all came back.

I was surprised to find out that observers were not allowed to observe. I was surprised to learn that, as observers, we were relegated to a little coffee shop on the second floor and were not allowed access to any of the rooms in which meetings were being held. Even so, there were leaks. Even parties governed by a culture of secrecy are prone to leaks. Thanks to those leaks, we were kept up to date throughout the day about decisions made during the meetings.

The first decision was made following a debate, and I was very disappointed to learn that it was about Resolution P-207, a resolution that reopened the abortion debate.

Then another resolution was passed and it stunned me completely. The resolution called for equal pay for equal value. It did not stipulate equal pay for work of equal value. What a giant step back for women.

All day long, we heard about similar kinds of resolutions. We could not believe it and wondered what was happening. We were anxious to see what was really happening and to get to the plenary meeting, which we were told we could attend.

When we left Winnipeg—I left on the Sunday morning—I knew this government would do no more for women than it has done over the past two and half years. The rights of women in Canada and Quebec have suffered a terrible setback.

This was confirmed last week when the World Economic Forum, which is based in Geneva, announced that Canada now ranks 31st out of 130 countries that were assessed based on whether the gender gap is increasing or narrowing. In 2006, we were ranked 15th. In 2007, we were 18th and now in 2008, 31st. It will not stop there. This is not surprising. We saw the cuts to Status of Women Canada; we saw the cuts to the court challenges program; we saw the changes to the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada, which made funding available. This will not stop here.

● (1310)

The United Nations commission charged with eliminating all forms of discrimination against women published a report indicating that Canada lags far behind and is struggling with serious problems of violence against women.

When all is said and done, the fact remains that, in last year's throne speech, the Prime Minister stated that there would be a plan for women, a specific and special plan of attack, which would advance the rights of Quebec and Canadian women. There is not a word about that in this throne speech. Evidently, because last time around nothing was accomplished. They only talked about it, nothing was done, they did not take action and things have not changed.

In times of economic uncertainty such as these, when we do not know what will happen in two or three months—because things are changing so quickly and there is a new surprise or disappointment every day, and something else turns up each day—a government must make investments that will yield the greatest return. It must invest in people, in infrastructure, invest in what will yield a return as quickly as possible.

This government could not be bothered to come up with a social housing plan, when there is \$8 billion available in the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation fund. This government could not be bothered to make changes to employment insurance so that seniors who lose their jobs have access to a program that will help them transition into retirement after stopping work.

This government also could not be bothered to change the eligibility criteria for employment insurance. Yet there is currently \$44 billion in the employment insurance fund, money that could be used to help the people who earned this money and invested it in an employment insurance fund, so they would have something to fall back on if they were to lose their jobs.

When we want the economy to run smoothly, we invest in infrastructure. Of course, the Prime Minister told us that he would invest in infrastructure, but between saying and doing, between talk and action, months go by and nothing is done. We have already thought about programs that should be put in place immediately, and not in three months come budget time.

The Address

The situation with the economy requires us to start thinking about people and the economy and to invest now where it is most important. Infrastructure projects are a source of many jobs and opportunities, and this would ensure some short-term jobs, which would get the economy rolling.

Furthermore, if a woman loses her job and is not eligible for employment insurance or welfare benefits because she has assets, then she is really out of luck.

The Speaker has informed me that I have only one minute remaining. I do not know which direction to take, because I have so much to say about what is lacking in this throne speech. There is so much to say about this government's lack of social conscience. The word "equality" was even removed from Conservative Party documents. They did this at their convention last week. This goes to show the ongoing contempt that this government has for women.

I am not wrapping up on a very encouraging note, but I certainly hope that the government will show some openness this time and try to go a bit further towards fixing the mistakes it has made in the past.

● (1315)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to congratulate you on your new position.

[*English*]

I have a simple question for my colleague that deals with health care. Her province has actually been quite innovative in health care and also in the provision of services for daycare. I wonder if she would join us as Canadians, as supporters of health care and the need for Canadian families to have access to daycare services, and support our efforts to convince the government that Canadians need a national daycare early learning program, and also that provinces across the country can in fact learn from the province of Quebec to look at the innovative tools that it has used so that many more of its citizens in Quebec can have timely access to quality health care when people need it and they are not hurt from it financially.

That is what we should be pursuing. That is what Canadians need. That is not what they are getting, and the government needs to get back on the page and begin to address the issues that are critical to the health and welfare of our citizens.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Speaker, of course I would like all Canadian families to have access to day care services as good as those we have in Quebec. However, day care services fall within provincial jurisdiction. When the Liberal Party unveiled a program, it decided that Quebec could opt out of the agreement and receive the money needed to continue with its own program.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, the people of Quebec have actually received a very large sum of money for the social programs they have. The member is quite correct that the responsibility does lie among the provinces, but it does not preclude the federal government from acting in leadership and in concert with its provincial counterparts across the country to deal with issues. While it is in the official area of responsibility of the provinces, it does not

preclude the federal Minister of Health from calling her counterparts together to deal with these issues.

There is a crucial issue in health care that I want to talk about and that is the issue of access to medical professionals. We need in Canada a national medical workforce plan that is going to ensure that we have enough doctors, nurses and technicians to provide the medical care that we require. We are getting older. Our medical practitioners are getting older, too. The average age of a physician in Canada is over 50 and nurses are in the mid-40s. If we do not deal with this now we will not have the caregivers in our country to be able to provide for our citizens when they get ill.

Would the hon. member support us in working with the federal government to have and push for this national health care workforce strategy? And I hope the hon. member is feeling better.

● (1320)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): If the hon. member for Laval is able to reply, I will give her the floor.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Speaker, please excuse me, I caught a cold when I was in Winnipeg. We had to go outside in order to return to our rooms; we could not get to our rooms from the inside. I thought I would be able to get to my room easily, so I did not wear a coat that morning. I had to go outside. It was very cold in Winnipeg and I caught a cold. Our good friends, the Conservatives, are responsible for my cold.

The federal government is having trouble meeting needs when it comes to its own responsibilities in terms of health care, particularly for veterans, aboriginal communities and communities in Nunavut. The federal government is not able to meet these needs. There are still problems that persist. How can the government meet the needs of people in the provinces when it does not know what the needs are and when it is so far away? It is an impossible task for the federal government.

Provinces and territories are responsible for health, not the federal government.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to congratulate you today. As a woman and a parliamentarian, I am thrilled to see a woman occupy the chair, particularly a francophone from western Canada. You will hold office with all the dignity for which you are known.

I would like to thank the voters of Trois-Rivières for their trust and for electing me for a third consecutive term. I am very pleased to be here, in this chamber. I wish to congratulate all the members elected in the recent election. It is a pleasure to work together.

The Address

Three things, among others, stand out in this Speech from the Throne. It completely ignores the concerns of Quebecers regarding the uncertain economic situation and the current financial crisis. This throne speech in no way defends the interests and values of the Quebec nation. We need only cite a few examples. The Conservative government intends to diminish Quebec's authority in the area of finance—with a national securities commission—and is following through with its young offender legislation. The Conservatives have not understood the message delivered by Quebec voters on October 14. The Conservatives continue to impose their right-wing political ideology.

As the natural resources critic, I wish to comment on the federal government's intention of promoting nuclear energy as clean and renewable energy. The throne speech illustrates this government's interest in developing Canada's nuclear industry. For this government, nuclear energy is as environmentally friendly as hydroelectricity or wind energy. Of course that is not true. Nuclear energy is quite dangerous and the consequences for the environment will be a burden for future generations.

Furthermore, the federal government supports and promotes this industry's development. We should remember that it is a shareholder in a company that builds nuclear power stations and at the same time it is the guardian of public and environmental safety. The government is responsible for the industry's safety regulations through the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. Hence, the government currently finds itself in a difficult position, almost a conflict of interest. The Bloc Québécois believes that the government should not promote nuclear power. The previous minister of Natural Resources led us to believe that his government might provide financial assistance for the construction of a nuclear reactor in Ontario. This would mean that the government might help fund Ontario's electricity grid whereas it never supported Hydro-Québec.

Furthermore, in 2009, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization is supposed to submit a proposal for the selection of a community willing to take in and store nuclear waste. The Bloc Québécois will ensure that Quebec does not become Canada's garbage dump for radioactive waste. Quebec opted for hydroelectricity, a clean and renewable energy. Quebec has nothing to gain from the federal government's decision to promote nuclear energy.

In addition, regarding bulk water transfers, unlike the Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois maintains that water is not excluded from NAFTA and that strengthening federal legislation is not enough. This could jeopardize Quebec's water resources, despite the government's indication in the throne speech that it intends to bring in legislation to ban all bulk water transfers or exports from Canadian freshwater basins. I would also like to point out that water is a natural resource that falls under Quebec jurisdiction and that Quebec has its own regulations regarding water.

That is why the Bloc Québécois believes that the federal government must limit its legislative measures to the water over which it has jurisdiction and that a general legislative ban at the federal level could be disputed under NAFTA.

● (1325)

The federal government should exclude water from NAFTA and, therefore, the Speech from the Throne does not respond to the questions raised by this crucial issue.

During the last Parliament, I had the privilege of being our party's industry critic and I rose on many occasions in this House to express the concerns of all stakeholders in the manufacturing and forestry industries, including the workers and their families, as well as businesses and communities that depend on the forest. Everyone is worried about the difficult situation those sectors are facing. In particular, thousands of jobs have been lost in my riding of Trois-Rivières and in Mauricie. Trois-Rivières' economy was founded on pulp and paper, and the situation is serious. We believe the government must act.

With the throne speech, the government had the opportunity to demonstrate that it intends to help those sectors, but once again, it offers nothing for the manufacturing and forestry sectors. It does not offer a single concrete measure to help workers and businesses get through this crisis. There is nothing new for the forestry sector, which has been in a crisis situation for several years now.

Yet the Bloc Québécois had repeatedly suggested numerous ways to revive that sector. We suggested creating financial tools to encourage companies to invest and modernize, such as loan guarantees to help companies modernize. We suggested that the government provide better tax support for research, development and innovation by making R and D tax credits refundable so that businesses could benefit from them until they made a profit. We proposed paying special attention to the regions that are being particularly hard hit by the current crisis and desperately need to diversify their industrial base to counter the forestry crisis. We suggested creating a program to support the production of energy and ethanol fuels using forest waste. We proposed that the government move quickly to impose absolute targets for greenhouse gas reduction in order to promote the establishment of a carbon credit exchange market. We suggested using government procurement as an economic development lever. Most importantly, we said that the government had to support workers hit by the crisis, by making substantial improvements to the employment insurance program, increasing benefits, basing the benefit calculation on the best 12 weeks, eliminating the waiting period and reducing the minimum number of insurable hours needed to qualify for benefits to 360. We also proposed an income support program for older workers. Such a program would enable workers aged 55 to 64 who cannot be retrained and who are victims of massive layoffs to bridge the gap between employment insurance and their pension fund.

The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly proposed measures to help workers and companies in hard-hit industries. To us, the message Quebecers sent on October 14 should have been clear. The forestry and manufacturing sectors are mainstays of Quebec's economy, and the Conservative government's laissez-faire attitude is no longer the best option in these troubled times. The government must work with the members elected under the banner of the Bloc Québécois and draw inspiration from our innovative ideas to spur economic development.

The Address

If the government should decide to go into deficit to resolve the crisis, it must not just take the often dogmatic approach of reducing taxes, as this has negative effects such as reducing flexibility during difficult economic times. The government needs to intervene in the economy in such a way that the forestry, manufacturing and other industries can weather the current economic and financial crisis. Right now, judging by the throne speech, the government seems to want to take advantage of the economic slowdown to impose its right-wing reforms on the machinery of government.

• (1330)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague about an issue that is critically important to all Canadians as they get older. That issue is poverty, particularly with respect to seniors. Madam Speaker, as you well know in your work, poverty is pervasive and incessantly undermines a certain segment of our population, people who struggle to meet their basic needs on a day-to-day basis.

One of the things we did in our green shift was to shift sums of money to the poorest individuals, particularly those who make less than \$20,000 a year. People who make less than \$20,000 a year actually pay tax. Someone making just shy of \$20,000 would pay almost \$2,000 in tax.

If the government were to implement a plan to ensure that Canadians who make less than \$20,000 a year did not pay any federal tax, which can be done and I have a bill to that effect, the government would be doing a huge service to help those who are most impoverished in our society. Would my hon. colleague join us in pushing the government to implement a plan to ensure that those who make less than \$20,000 a year do not pay federal tax? We should not be taxing the poorest in our country. They are having a hard enough time making ends meet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I thank my colleague for his question. We will certainly examine his bill with a great deal of interest.

I was first elected in 2004 and I remember clearly that was when they were saying that there would not be any more poor children in Canada. Yet there are more and more of them. We know that children are living in poverty because families are poor, and women in particular. Single mothers are the poorest in our society.

Action must be taken urgently. Yet in all these years, there has been no action. Instead of giving preferential treatment to oil companies through tax exemptions and all manner of fiscal advantages, the focus needs to be—and my colleague is right in this—on the poor people across Canada.

• (1335)

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for her amazing, and amazingly accurate, speech on the manufacturing sector.

I would like to know my colleague's take on the outline of the supplementary estimates the government wants to submit to the House for approval. What does she think of the additional \$331 million it has found for Canada's military mission to Afghanistan, and the extra \$261 million for salary adjustments, again for the

Canadian armed forces? A bit more than half a billion has been found for National Defence services, but nothing for manufacturing and forest industry policies.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about this money that has been found, and the fact that there is nothing for the manufacturing sector.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his most pertinent question.

Indeed, that mission was to terminate in 2009. Contrary to the opinion of the Bloc Québécois and others, it is continuing until 2011. What is still more serious is that we note that Quebec is not getting its fair share of the economic trickle-down, particularly in the aerospace industry. One might wonder how this procurement is being done, how all this extra money is suddenly being found, with no defence strategy. We parliamentarians ought to be able to examine the various strategies in order to be in a position to decide where we are headed, where this money is spent, in order to ensure that purchases are legitimate and that we buy Canadian.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Madam Speaker, this being my initial appearance and my initial opportunity as a member of Parliament to rise in the House, I would first like to offer personal congratulations to you on your appointment to the chair, and to the Speaker of the House on his re-election, and to beg pre-emptively collective forbearance by the chair for rookie procedural gaffes.

My election to Parliament is fulfillment of an almost lifelong dream, and for that there are many to thank. First and foremost is Cilla, my bride of more than 27 years, who has supported me through the high moments and low—mostly high moments, I must admit—on my journey from the news desk to this privileged perch in the crucible of Canadian politics.

Thanks go as well to my daughter Trilby and her partner Daniel, who have cheered me on via any number of electronic technologies from overseas, regularly taking my side and covering my back in the dark and archaic recesses of the blogosphere. I owe great, sincere appreciation as well to my three sisters Susan, Adele and Norma, and to my brother Arthur, who have patiently watched their brother's erratic career path.

However, I recognize with the greatest humility that I would not be before you today had not the voters of Thornhill entrusted me with their votes and sent me here to join a Conservative government that in its first two and a half years of productive, pragmatic and principled government won those voters' trust and confidence that it would provide more of the same in these uncertain times.

In this period of global economic uncertainty Thornhillers, like all who live in and around Canada's metropolis, like all their fellow citizens from coast to coast, are rightly concerned about their individual and shared futures.

The Address

It is very clear that this concern is not limited to one sector of society or to one particular corner of this world. This global economic situation affects everyone, regardless of how much money one earns or where one lives. Most of us know loved ones who are feeling especially vulnerable in these uncertain economic times.

Yet in this period of worldwide economic challenge, there are many reasons for Canadians to have confidence in the future. Canada's economic fundamentals remain strong, and our banking system is the most solid in the world. True, we are navigating the stormy seas and shoals of an economic tempest not of our making, but Canada is well positioned to weather these gales and to emerge stronger than ever.

We have a strong leader in the Prime Minister, and Canadians have once again put their trust in a government that is committed to getting things done.

We also have a government that is willing to reach across the floor to consult and work with all members of the House, because the economy is far too important to be left to petty partisanship. We must move forward as a country. We are fortunate to have such strong and capable leadership.

Our recent Speech from the Throne is proof that this government understands the pressures placed on hard-working Canadians as a result of the uncertain global economic situation. I am proud to say that this government has been putting Canadians first. We will continue to move forward in the spirit of cooperation and openness. We will overcome these economic challenges and emerge stronger together.

Our government has wasted no time. The Prime Minister has already met with the first ministers to discuss the economic realities facing Canada at this time. Our government will continue to work with the provinces and the territories in order to find solutions that will help all Canadians. For example, our government recognizes the importance of a strong infrastructure program that will stimulate our economy while renovating or replacing or supplementing time-worn essentials of our modern society.

Our building Canada plan is the most ambitious infrastructure renewal effort in half a century. The federal government will work with the provinces to accelerate the \$33 billion plan over the coming years to ensure a stronger, safer and better Canada.

Likewise we are committed to building a stronger financial system that will serve Canadians better now and in the future. We are the government that has cut taxes to lower costs for businesses and to help families. We are the government that has reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

• (1340)

As well, our government is committed to ensuring that all Canadians can fully participate in the opportunities of this great land. As just one example, in 2007 our government announced that it will work with the provinces to make the recognition of foreign credentials a priority in order to attract the best and the brightest to Canada. A year later, there are now over 320 Service Canada centres across the country offering in-person foreign credential referral services to newcomers. This particular incentive helps many constituents in my home riding of Thornhill, as well as others across

the country. Service Canada centres continue to help ensure a smooth integration for immigrants, which benefits newcomers and Canada economically and socially.

We must remember above all that our current economic troubles started beyond Canada's borders. As a result, these economic uncertainties must be addressed at their roots.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have met with their G-20 counterparts to both re-examine and renew the rules and institutions that underpin the global financial system. Our government is committed to working with our international partners to ensure that the global financial system is fixed and ready to withstand future trials of this nature.

Last week the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Trade were in Peru to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. The event was an opportunity to engage with some of our partners in the Americas, notably with our Peruvian hosts.

At a time of economic instability, which brings with it new challenges to security and to democratic institutions in the hemisphere, it is clear to this government that Canada is seen as a valuable and trusted partner in the region. Our neighbourhood is the Americas. Our economic prosperity, our values of democracy and human rights, and our security are closely linked with those of our neighbours.

Canada has made a commitment to deepen our engagement in this region. We plan to be there for the long haul to achieve our vision, a vision based on three mutually reinforcing objectives: a more prosperous, a more secure and a more democratic hemisphere.

Canada will also continue to actively engage with its North American partners to promote our objectives and our vision for the region.

We are working to achieve strong and well-managed economies committed to open markets. We will do this by developing strong bilateral partnerships and an increasing web of economic and political agreements with our key partners in the Americas.

We are working to achieve transparent and accountable democracies that delivery social equity, prosperity, security and human rights. We will do this by actively engaging with multilateral institutions such as the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Summit of the Americas in support of Canadian objectives, interests and values.

Finally, we are working to achieve enhanced regional stability and security by continuing to increase the promotion of development goals delivered through a non-partisan democracy promotion agency.

Last week in Peru, the Minister of International Trade signed a free trade agreement with Colombia. Earlier this year, we signed a free trade agreement with Peru. These agreements will create new business opportunities for Canadians and for our partners alike. They include very strong parallel agreements on labour and the environment that commit Canada and its partners to work together to ensure high levels of protection for workers and for the environment.

The Address

As we sign these agreements with our partners, we are funding programs to support law reform and enforcement in the Americas.

Canada is now moving forward with the negotiation of free trade agreements with Panama, the Dominican Republic, the Central America Four and the Caribbean.

However, prosperity is not only about free trade agreements. We are also increasing cooperation and exchanges in numerous other fields with key partners in the region.

To deliver on the security objective, Canada is working on numerous fronts. To combat crime and violence, which impacts citizens in the region and Canadians alike, we are allocating funds for training, equipment, and technical and legal expertise on issues such as counterterrorism capacity in the Caribbean and Central America.

To deliver on the democracy objective, we are working bilaterally and multilaterally to strengthen democratic institutions and processes in the region.

• (1345)

In February 2008, the Democracy Council organized a democracy dialogue on Canadian approaches to democracy support in the Americas, assembling members of the Canadian and international community to discuss challenges and opportunities for democratic development in the Americas.

One-third of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's global democracy funding targets the Americas for support to democratic institutions and practices. Canada is actively engaged in supporting good and effective governance in the Americas. We are helping to train civil servants in such areas as public sector accountability, transparency, human rights, and modernization of the justice system.

Canada also continues to provide leadership in Haiti, where we have committed \$555 million in reconstruction and development efforts over the five years spanning 2006-2011. Along with regional partners such as Brazil and Chile, we are strengthening Haiti's enforcement capacity and border management processes and supporting Haiti's efforts to support its prison and judicial system.

As we move forward, we will face new challenges and opportunities. In the context of a global economic slowdown, it is important that we continue to promote the importance of open markets, prudent regulations, appropriate framework policies and corporate social responsibility on the part of the private sector.

The current period of economic uncertainty beyond our borders and within has affected many of my constituents in Thornhill. Their concerns are shared with citizens across the country who are working to provide safe and secure housing for their families. They have saved for their children's education and they have invested for retirement. This government recognizes the challenges that must be overcome in the months and years ahead to create jobs for an economy that will recover, to protect nest eggs for those who worked a lifetime to provide for themselves, and yes, to assist those most vulnerable among us.

This throne speech holds the answers to those challenges. Canadians can be confident that in these difficult economic times, our government is committed to protecting and bolstering Canada's economic future. We will continue to build on the solid record we have established over the past several years in government.

• (1350)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I welcome my colleague to the House.

A curious option has been raised in all the choices the government has been making over these last several weeks and months. When asked what economic analysis had been made of the various choices the government made, the Prime Minister celebrated the cutting of the GST, while every economist in the country derided it. Did my colleague's government at any point take a step back and make choices based on an assessment of the best investment to shore up Canada's economy, or was it simply politics over policy?

Did the government choose to say that offering a corporate tax cut to companies that were already profitable was a better choice than investing in small businesses or in the green economy that we need? When cutting the GST, did the government rely on any assessments that it is willing to make public?

That is my question for my dear colleague. Did the Department of Finance or his department or any other department conduct any assessment before making these enormous choices involving billions of dollars to the Canadian people, any assessment that can be offered up in this place so that we can have a fair and clear understanding of why some of these horrendous and politically motivated choices were made?

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, foresight is a precious commodity. While the government does not claim a monopoly on that commodity, we do claim to have anticipated and to have made tax cuts that began to stimulate the economy, tax cuts that are even now coming into effect.

As my colleagues oppose demand a plan to create stimulation, over the next couple of years this plan will continue to add billions of dollars of stimulation to the economy in the face of those who wish to impose new taxes at a time of economic crisis.

I would ask my colleagues to share in the offer made last week by the Prime Minister and the finance minister, which was for members to offer constructive criticism and ideas as we move forward to work together to address the crisis that faces the world, a crisis that will indeed touch on Canada.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first let me congratulate the member on his election. It is nice to have him in the House.

I have always believed that Canada has the ability to go out and get its share of the market. I am pleased with the assignment the hon. member has undertaken.

Having said that, I am concerned on behalf of my constituents as to why it took the Prime Minister almost three years to invite the premiers of our provinces and territories to come together to do the one thing for which I have always advocated, which is to bring down the trade barriers. If we are to go out and seek business for Canadian businesses, will he take a commitment to the cabinet table to bring down the trade barriers within Canada as soon as possible? Given the circumstances that our nation and other nations are experiencing, is he committed to work toward that?

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for a prescient question. Yes, indeed, this government is committed to removing internal domestic trade barriers, and has been since our election in 2006.

It is true that we raised this issue again in the meeting with the first ministers. At the same time, we will continue to work to encourage our trading partners abroad to remove barriers and to open markets to free trade. We will continue to encourage the provinces and the territories to lower the barriers which impose an unfair burden on all Canadians and on the economy.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member and I share a common background in broadcasting. It is clear that he has a perfect face for television and I have a perfect face for radio.

Will the hon. member ensure that his government will not reduce funding for the CBC?

• (1355)

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, this government is encouraging all of our institutions and crown corporations and indeed all Canadians to approach the current uncertain economic times with the same sense of prudence and economy as they would with their own family budgets. While reviews are regularly taken of all of the institutions of government, there are at this time no plans to reduce.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Welcome to the Chair, Madam Speaker.

I want to pose a question to my colleague. I certainly welcome him to the House. It is good to have him here. It seemed a long-time coming, but it is good to have him here.

His portfolio has to do with the Americas. Our government has seen the great potential to create trading alliances with countries in the Americas. I wonder if the member could elaborate on the plans he has going forward as a minister to engage the Americas not only in trade issues, but also in democracy and the rule of law, and to bring them more toward Canada's style of governance.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, certainly we have mutual goals with our trading partners in our backyard, the Americas, which has been neglected for too long. It is our intention to promote free trade, which will offer opportunities and benefits to Canadians. At the same time we want to recognize that democratic governance, human rights recognition, and the process of law are tied directly to prosperity and the ability of governments to bolster and to strengthen their institutions.

We will work with those governments. The free trade agreements that have been signed recently recognize that these countries are democracies that share Canadian values. These agreements will

allow them in the months and the years ahead to strengthen those institutions. For those governments in the Americas which may fall into the category of definitional problems of democracy, these agreements will demonstrate for them that by embracing democratic values and principles and the principles of free trade that there will be benefits not only for their governments but for the people of their countries.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I extend my compliments to you on being re-elected and chosen for the auspicious position of chair occupant.

I extend compliments as well to the member on his election and on getting into cabinet. Now he has a great responsibility. I am wondering whether he will exercise that responsibility on behalf of the electorate of Ontario and more specifically for the greater Toronto area. I am wondering whether he is going to use his influence around the cabinet table to talk about a plan to save the manufacturing sector specifically in southwestern Ontario but in all of Ontario in particular. Will he propose a strategy that calls for a continuing—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): We want to give the minister a chance to answer the question.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, with an eye on the clock, I think the questions and answers in the next hour will more than adequately respond.

Indeed, I ran on a platform of adding a strong and effective voice from the greater Toronto region, albeit from the fringes of Canada's metropolis. This government is fully committed to assisting and promoting manufacturing and all of our industrial sectors that face challenging times in the months and years ahead.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Congratulations, Madam Speaker, and to all my esteemed colleagues.

Please allow me to take this opportunity to thank the good citizens of Prince Edward—Hastings for electing me to represent them for the third time in this Parliament.

Today I wish to formally commend the passion and support exhibited by the municipality and the citizens of Tweed toward our Canadian soldiers.

Buses loaded with Canadian troops bound for Afghanistan have been passing through Tweed on their way from Petawawa to Trenton for departure, and each time they have received a huge farewell from the residents. I was honoured to join the hundreds of school children, moms, dads, grandparents, families, legion members and municipal officials who came out to pay their respects and wish them well. It was an extremely moving event to see such overwhelming and heartfelt support for our young military men and women.

Statements by Members

Tweed residents, legion members, and the town's municipal leaders deserve our respect and congratulations for illustrating just what it means to be a proud and grateful Canadian.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, November 25 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of 16 days of activism against gender violence.

We must act. Studies have shown that the economic costs of violence against women range in the billions of dollars. It can also have generational impacts. Almost 40% of women assaulted by spouses said that their children witnessed the violence against them.

Internationally, violence against women is a barrier to women's equality.

Our country's success in combatting violence against women has stalled. Progress could be further undermined if the government does not get serious about women's equality.

I urge all members in the House to work to ensure all women can live their lives free of violence and free from the threat of violence.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CHARBONNEAU FAMILY

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to the Charbonneau family of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines. Recently, the Government of Quebec awarded them first place in the bronze category in its 2008 rankings for the national agricultural order of merit. Their company, Fraisebec, is Canada's largest strawberry producer. Fraisebec's production techniques are among the best in the world, and they make a quality product available almost year-round.

The company owners have also done an admirable job of dealing with human resources management challenges. They employ over 300 berry-pickers. What is more, the company demonstrated innovation by implementing the first pilot project to hire foreign women workers in Canada, and a significant proportion of its workers are women from Guatemala and Mexico.

The members of the Bloc Québécois and I would like to congratulate the Charbonneau family on being awarded this prestigious prize.

* * *

[*English*]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1999 the United Nations General Assembly designated November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

However, we still read daily about death sentences carried out against women by stoning and other cruel and inhumane methods, female genital mutilation, honour killings, spousal abuse, verbal and

physical intimidation, and other threats against women in their homes and places of work, against women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and in all countries in the world, including our own.

I hope all members will join me and my fellow New Democratic Party caucus members in recognizing this important day and in renewing our commitment to ending violence against women at home and abroad once and for all.

* * *

SAINT JOHN ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be chosen the member of Parliament for Saint John, Canada's oldest incorporated city, is truly an honour. I am humbled by the trust that has been placed in me, and it is a tremendous responsibility that I do not take lightly.

This is an exciting time in Saint John as we are poised to experience a period of unprecedented economic growth. We are seeing years of work and preparation come to fruition with a number of energy projects beginning or already under way.

The construction of an LNG terminal, the refurbishment of the Point Lepreau nuclear generating station, and the planning for the construction of a second oil refinery by Irving Oil are all projects that have led to the increased prosperity that we are seeing.

There are many challenges that our community faces as we enter this phase. However, I am confident that our government has provided the tools that are key for Saint John to continue moving forward.

This has not happened by accident; it was definitely by design. I know that Saint John's future success will be a beacon for our Canadian economy.

* * *

● (1405)

FRANK DEACY

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this first occasion to speak in this honourable House, I see fit to speak honourably of the life of Mr. Frank Deacy.

Mr. Deacy was originally from Galway, Ireland and moved to Newfoundland in 1971. He was a high school teacher and taught at Holy Spirit High in Conception Bay South.

Mr. Deacy was very well-known for his active participation in the founding and promotion of Newfoundland rugby. As a player, coach and builder, he was an inspiration to many players who were fortunate enough to play under his leadership.

Mr. Deacy was a founding member of the two Newfoundland clubs, elected to the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of Fame, a long-standing officer of the Newfoundland rugby union and a director on the Board of Rugby for Canada. Recently he served as treasurer of the CBS Monument of Honour committee.

His life was cut short but his impact on his community, his friends and his family will be with us for a long time. I would like to extend my sincere condolences to his wife, Marie, his daughter, Robyn, and his son, Colin.

* * *

HEROISM

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to three great Canadians.

On Saturday night, a medevac airplane crashed in northern Manitoba near the community of Gods Lake. The plane was carrying a pilot, a co-pilot and three passengers: a mother, her 10-month-old son and a flight nurse who were on their way to a hospital in Thompson, Manitoba.

Shortly after takeoff, the pilot noticed a fire in the cockpit and he was forced to take the plane down. Miraculously, the crew performed a very skilled crash landing and got all five people out of the plane before it burst into flames.

The heroic actions of the flight crew saved the lives of their passengers. The pilot, co-pilot and nurse on this flight are model Canadian citizens and they deserve both our thanks and praise for their bravery.

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[*Translation*]

JULES ARSENAULT

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on October 20, my riding lost a great visionary, Jules Arsenaault.

Born in Gaspésie, Mr. Arsenaault chose to make his home in Témiscamingue because he saw our region's potential.

A man who got things done, he was a cornerstone of higher education in his role as rector of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. He proved that a region could create a high-quality university that was spread across the region, accessible and responsive to the training and research needs of local businesses and industries. Although he was retired, he continued his enthusiastic involvement in the university over the past few years.

We appreciated his humanity, his openness towards others and his profound belief in public service. The people of Témiscamingue acknowledge the exceptional contribution Jules Arsenaault made to our region. He will be greatly missed.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, too many women throughout the world are victims of violence. Our government continues to take the protection of women and their families very seriously. Last week, the Minister of State (Status of Women) announced that Canada would participate in the UNIFEM campaign to say no to violence, in an attempt to increase the commitment of governments throughout the world to eliminate violence.

Statements by Members

As one of the first signatories, Canada is a strong supporter of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. We are determined to address issues of gender equity, including violence against women. We provide desperately needed funding for the family violence initiative and other services for victims of crime.

By amending legislation, including the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Government of Canada is taking concrete steps—

The Speaker: The member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

* * *

● (1410)

SENIORS

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 27, organizers at the Centre des aînés du Réseau d'entraide de Saint-Léonard, under the capable direction of Johanne Pitt, and working closely with Marc-André Chabot, the principal at Wilfrid-Bastien school, launched a unique and innovative program. They created a website where grade six students, under the guidance of their teacher, Pierre Poulin, would teach basic computer skills to seniors, in order to help them use the Internet.

Not only did seniors gain new computer skills, but they also formed new friendships with another generation that was sharing its knowledge, and in doing so, they managed to break down some prejudices.

As the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, I would like to congratulate those responsible for this wonderful initiative. I encourage them to keep up their efforts, which are tremendously beneficial to people of all ages.

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[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 21, the third committee of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Canadian-led resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. This is an important achievement in defence of universal human rights.

The adoption of this resolution sends a clear signal that the international community is concerned for the human rights of the Iranian people. It sends a message of hope to the victims of human rights violations and to the courageous Iranian human rights defenders who seek to effect positive change in their country.

The resolution also calls on the Government of Iran to respect fully its human rights obligations, in law and in practice.

The resolution was co-sponsored by 42 other member states, along with Canada, and was supported by 70 states in the successful vote.

Canada will continue working with other concerned nations to ensure that the resolution is adopted by the General Assembly at its plenary in December.

*Statements by Members***FOREIGN CREDENTIALS**

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, I had the honour of attending the 45th anniversary gala celebration for the Sudbury Multicultural & Folk Arts Association. This event was well attended by many local residents who make up the cultural mosaic that is my great riding of Sudbury. Individuals like Dr. Rayudu Koka, Miho Halmich and Niranjin Mishra demonstrate the valuable work that is accomplished when people from different cultures and heritage work together.

It became very clear, as I met and spoke with a number of people, that there is a great deal of concern in our community about our current government's immigration policies.

With that being said, I urge the government to accelerate and streamline the recognition of foreign credentials to ensure that many skilled immigrants like doctors, respiratory therapists and even electricians are able to work in their fields of training and rectify the skilled worker shortage we have in many of these sectors.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian taxpayers have a right to know how their hard-earned money is being spent. Our Conservative government believes that too. That is why we decided that all crown corporations should be subject to the access to information and privacy process, including the CBC.

Yesterday, the CBC started criticizing other media outlets for reporting on the excessive spending of the CBC management. The CBC said, "How dare they?" All access to information that these media outlets request is confidential. The CBC should not know the identity of the person or persons who are requesting the information.

What the CBC is saying is, therefore, pure speculation and not based on fact. In these tough economic times, as always, the CBC and all crown corporations must be accountable to our hard-working taxpayers.

* * *

[*Translation*]**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, each year on November 25, we commemorate the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Despite all the progress made, the reality is that thousands of women are subjected to violence every day. In fact, more than half of women over the age of 16 will experience sexual, physical or psychological violence at least once in their lives.

With cuts being made to Status of Women Canada, a UN organization is taking Canada to task for its record on defending women's rights and providing protection against discrimination, particularly for aboriginal women. It criticized the lack of shelters for battered women and the absence of wellness criteria to protect these women.

And finally, my thoughts go out to the Congolese women, whose bodies have become, now more than ever before, the weapon of choice for the rebels.

* * *

[*English*]**RAY PERRAULT**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that parliamentarians and Canadians mourn the loss of our colleague and friend Senator Ray Perrault.

Before his 1973 appointment to the Senate, Mr. Perrault served in the British Columbia legislature before entering the Canadian House of Commons as a member of Parliament for Burnaby—Seymour. Mr. Perrault was a man of many accomplishments.

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

As a senator, he defended many causes, from the environment to economic development. He served with distinction as the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

[*English*]

I feel a special connection to Mr. Perrault, not only as a fellow parliamentarian, MLA, BC'er and environmentalist, but also because, like the senator, my father suffered from Parkinson's disease for many years before he passed away 13 years ago.

On behalf of all parliamentarians and Canadians, I offer my condolences to Mr. Perrault's family and friends at this difficult time. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

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THE GREY CUP

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1948, the Calgary Stampeders won their first Grey Cup and started the tradition that became known as the Grey Cup parade. Today, Calgarians are thrilled that this tradition has once again returned to the city.

As we speak, thousands of Calgarians are rallying in downtown Calgary to celebrate the triumphant return of the Grey Cup champions, the Calgary Stampeders. They have good reason to be proud. They won more games than any other CFL team this season, including 10 out of the 11 last games. They capped it off with a 22 to 14 victory over the Montreal Alouettes in Sunday's Grey Cup championship game in front of over 60,000 fans.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you and the members of the House of Commons will join me in and all Calgarians in congratulating the Calgary Stampeders on a job well done.

Go Stamps Go.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in these difficult economic times, Canadians have every reason to doubt the credibility of a Prime Minister who said one thing on the topic of deficits, and then said the exact opposite, with equal assurance.

A few weeks ago, he said that talking about a deficit in Canada was “stupid” and “ridiculous”. But just last week he said that this was “essential”. What will he say today? Will he say that a deficit is stupid and ridiculous, or that it is essential?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): We will do what is necessary, Mr. Speaker, to protect Canadian families, individuals and businesses so they have the necessary credit available to them, so they can invest and re-invest and so we can protect the safety and security of Canadian families. We will not artificially engineer a surplus for the next fiscal year. I will have more to say about that on Thursday at 4 p.m.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, appointed by the Prime Minister, has said that the new Conservative deficit is the government's fault. He has said that the Prime Minister should have known about the deficit.

Could the Prime Minister clarify for Canadians when he knew that Canada would run a deficit? What did he hide from Canadians during the last election?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member opposite knows or should know, if he has been paying attention the last 12 weeks or so, we have gone through a period of protracted economic slowdown. This is a global slowdown. It is a serious economic slowdown for the world.

Canada is not an island, but, fortunately, we are well prepared because we took actions from 2006-07, reducing taxes and spending on infrastructure being increased, all of which was voted against by the Leader of the Opposition and those Liberals on the other side.

• (1420)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it certainly did not support the actions of a government that brought Canada into a deficit.

The Prime Minister contradicts himself on deficits. He contradicts himself on recessions as well. He said in September that if we were going to have a recession, it would have happened by now. Now he is forecasting what he calls a “technical” recession. Recessions that are technical, deficits that are structural, recessions are not about semantics. They are about job losses, about Canadians who need help.

Why does the Prime Minister not get it?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): The member opposite, Mr. Speaker, talks about deficits and technical recessions. He ought to take the advice of the expert on deficits in his own caucus, the member for Toronto Centre, who said, “if we have a

Oral Questions

deficit now, at the federal level, is that going to be the personal fault of the Prime Minister? I don't think so, and I don't think that is a reasonable or an intelligent position to take”.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the election the Prime Minister was wrong when he told Canadians there would be no recession. The Prime Minister was wrong again when he told Canadians there would be no deficit. The Prime Minister also told Canadians that he would finally provide a meaningful action plan for the Canadian economy.

Will Thursday's fall economic statement provide real action to help protect Canadian jobs and savings, or will the Prime Minister be proven wrong once again?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are certain actions that will be announced on Thursday. I am sure the member for Kings—Hants will be here, listening eagerly when we get to that time of the day on Thursday.

Let us remember what has happened before in 2006-07: personal income tax reductions, business tax reductions and a reduction in the GST by two full percentage points. That is an economic stimulus for our country of almost 2% next year, which is more than anyone else in the G7. Those are all measures that the opposition voted against.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the OECD forecasts that 300,000 more Canadians will lose their jobs, but it seems that the only jobs the Conservatives are willing to protect is in luxury air travel for their ministers.

Where is the support for hard-working and retired Canadians? Why are they making Canadians wait for a real plan? Is it because those incompetent Conservatives have already spent the cupboard bare during the good times that they are incapable today of helping Canadians during the tough times?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there the member for Kings—Hants goes again, talking down the Canadian economy.

In the OECD report today, what did it say about the future of Canada? It said that Canada would be the country leading the recovery with the strongest growth among G7 countries in 2010.

Why did the member for Kings—Hants not point that out, so Canadians could have confidence and faith in their economy, instead of talking it down?

About travel expenses, I am sure he read about that as he flew business class back to his riding last Friday.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister called the election, he...

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. It is impossible for the Chair to hear what the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, who has the floor, is saying.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister called the election, he said it was because of the economic crisis. During his campaign he kept on repeating that there was no deficit looming on the horizon, no threat of recession. Today he is admitting that there will be a deficit in his next budget and that recession is indeed on the doorstep.

Can the Prime Minister explain to us why it was urgent to have an election because of the economic crisis, whereas now it is not as urgent to take action to deal with that same economic crisis?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is plain that no one in the world predicted the kind of economic downturn and the severity and depth of the economic downturn that we have experienced in the last 12 weeks.

I thank the member opposite and his party for at least putting forth some constructive suggestions. I had the opportunity to discuss them today with the Bloc representative. This is important in terms of all members of the House, I hope, putting forward constructive suggestions on stimulating the Canadian economy in an unprecedented time.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is all very well to speak of constructive suggestions, and I appreciate it that they are being looked at, but could he now do more than look at them and present a plan this Thursday? It is not enough to merely state that there is a crisis. Just about everybody is aware of that, except the Prime Minister, who was oblivious to it during the election campaign. Now that he does realize its existence, just saying so is not enough. What proposals will he make? Will he, among other things, put forward the proposals we have made to him?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that will be on Thursday at four o'clock of course.

In October 2007 when we brought forward in the fall economic statement dramatic reductions in business taxes, small, medium and big businesses, a further reduction in the GST of a full percentage point and advanced personal income tax deductions, the Bloc Québécois voted against all of those measures in this place.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has made public its recovery plan to deal with the crisis. It includes the creation of a modernization fund inspired by *Corvée Habitation*, a housing program highly successful in Quebec in the early 1980s. Such a fund would make it possible to immediately kick-start investment and boost productivity in the manufacturing sector with a view to stimulating economic recovery.

Will the Minister of Finance be adopting the idea of such a fund in his economic statement?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate some of the suggestions that have been put forward in the proposals brought forward by the Bloc. As I say, I hope other

members in the House and other parties in the House will similarly bring forward constructive suggestions.

We will review all suggestions as we prepare budget 2009.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is a good thing, because we have others as well.

In order to act without delay, as all sectors of the economy are calling upon him to do, and in order to support research and development, does the Minister of Finance intend to cancel the cuts to the technology partnerships program and open this program up to all leading edge sectors, pharmaceuticals for example?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, our government has made record expenditures in the area of science and technology. We have a science and technology strategy. These types of spending programs will continue because they are a stimulus to the economy, just as our tax reductions are a stimulus to the economy.

We will stay on track there because we want to protect Canadians, Canadian families, individuals and businesses, through this time of serious economic downturn.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is striking to a lot of Canadians is they see governments around the world taking this economic crisis seriously and they are taking strong and bold action.

Economists of virtually all stripes are saying that dramatic action is needed right now, but our government is saying it does not intend to do anything until 2009. It is essentially asleep at the switch. Even the Obama administration, which has yet to take office, has announced that it will take dramatic and significant steps to stimulate the economy.

When will the Prime Minister and the government realize that we need action now, not months from now, to help Canadians get back to work and restore confidence in our economy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite should be aware of what we did because he was here in the House last year and he voted against it. Now he talks about stimulus for the Canadian economy.

Where was he when we were voting on the GST reduction to leave more money in the hands of Canadian families? He was here and he voted against it. Where was he when we were reducing taxes for small businesses to stimulate the Canadian economy? He was here and he voted against it. Where was he when we were reducing personal income taxes? He was right here and he voted against it.

That is 2% stimulus, much more than the Americans have done, much more than the other G-7 countries have done so far.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the government seems to be engaged in reviewing the past, instead of looking forward to what is happening in the future.

Oral Questions

Let me cite some examples of what is coming at us. The Conference Board of Canada today said that Canada's auto industry would lose another 15,000 jobs in 2009. What was done in the past will not do anything about that. We also learn that EI recipients are on the rise dramatically in Canada and they are not getting the help they need. Food bank use is up in our country and consumer confidence is in free-fall.

When will we see some action on—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me comment on and explain what we have done in terms of tax reform in the country.

The GST reduction is permanent. The income tax reductions are permanent. The business tax reductions are permanent. Some more tax reductions come into force next year in 2009. This is a permanent stimulus to the Canadian economy, not temporary like the Americans have done.

I urge the hon. member to stand up for Canada and vote in favour of some of these measures.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are facing a crisis. We are in a crisis situation right now. People cannot wait a few months for a speech and measures. They need measures right now. The crisis is hitting hard right now. The automotive industry is falling apart, while the government turns a blind eye. People are losing their jobs, but employment insurance is not there for them and their families when they need it.

Why does the Prime Minister insist on waiting until February? Where is the plan? Where is the leadership? Where are the concrete measures we need right now?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): As I say, Mr. Speaker, we acted in advance in 2006-07 with these various measures.

The member opposite should not talk down Canada. Our car sales are up in Canada. Our home business is solid. We even had one of the Canadian banks yesterday do an equity issue in Canadian markets successfully. That is how solid our system is.

I call on the hon. member to stand up for Canada and stop bad-mouthing Canada.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was reported today that 2008 has been the worst ever year for British Columbia's forestry industry, which saw a 50% drop in sales. Forestry workers in B.C. are suffering, yet the Prime Minister says we are in a technical recession, as if it is no big deal. Well, the technically unemployed forestry workers think it is a big deal.

Where is the plan for B.C.'s forestry industry that the Conservatives promised three years ago?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way to protect forestry workers is to ensure that this great Canadian industry remains competitive and has the tools it needs in order to succeed. Through the forest industry long-term competitive strategy, we are supporting innovation, we are supporting new markets, and we are creating jobs. I remain committed to working with my caucus colleagues to ensure that these programs will work for individuals in affected communities, including in British Columbia.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what they say, the Conservatives did nothing. Just ask a forestry worker in B.C.

In British Columbia, the pine beetle devastation has crippled the forestry industry, which accounts for 20% of the province's economic base. The Conservatives promised money for economic redevelopment in 2006, but the industry has seen a tiny fraction of that money.

When will the Conservatives finally take action to help this suffering industry and its hard hit workers?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that the members opposite are well aware of the strong support that the government is giving to workers and families in forestry communities. After all, the mayor of Terrace, B.C., had the following to say about the community development trust:

We are pleased to receive these funds, and they will provide both an excellent employment opportunity and the community will benefit from the improvements provided by these projects.

We know these are difficult times for the workers and their families. We are going to get the job done.

* * *

• (1435)

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the auto sector in Canada has been bleeding jobs ever since the Conservatives took power. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost. Yet, we now learn that the Conservatives will not be presenting a plan to help the ailing auto sector until February.

Why are the Conservatives waiting for all of our Canadian jobs to be siphoned to the U.S. before even presenting a plan?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we acted before the current situation developed, with our auto innovation fund and with our reduction of corporate taxes, which included the auto sector. We have been there for consumer of confidence. That is what the Minister of Finance has already outlined in this House.

I find it passing strange that the hon. member's own party in the last election wanted to impose a carbon tax on people in this country. How are they going to buy cars when they have the carbon tax in the Liberal Party? That is wrong-headed thinking, but typical of the Liberal Party.

Oral Questions

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives had three years to help auto workers, yet the only thing they got was mismanagement and a “laissez-faire, I don't care” approach. An impact analysis has not even been done by the Conservatives. With the economic situation worsening by the day, the 600,000 Canadians working in the auto sector and their families simply cannot afford to wait any longer.

Why are the Conservatives taking workers hostage by refusing to act with real, not technical, measures to help auto workers?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we want real, accountable, solid business plans before we spend taxpayers' money. On that side, it is all about ready, fire, aim. That is not good enough for the people of this country or the taxpayers of this country. We are going to act in the best interests of the taxpayers and in the best interests of the people of Canada. That is what we were elected to do.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the OECD predicts a significant increase in unemployment in Canada—because of the economic crisis brought on by bad decisions made by senior financial executives who received enormous bonuses—the victims of the crisis do not understand why they have to wait two weeks before they receive a single penny of employment insurance.

Eliminating the wait period would not cost the government very much. Will the Minister of Finance commit to eliminating it in his economic statement?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we want to ensure that all the necessary supports are in place for our unemployed workers when, unfortunately, they must be laid off. Let there be no doubt about that.

It is insurance, and as with any insurance, there is always a wait period, because of course there must be confirmation that they are being laid off for longer than just a week or two. This is necessary to ensure the integrity of the system.

* * *

OLDER WORKERS

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the targeted initiative for older workers does not meet the needs of those who cannot be reclassified. They need an income support program to help them bridge the gap to retirement.

If the Minister of Finance can give \$2.8 billion in tax breaks to oil companies, why can he not give older workers who have been laid off a program that will cost \$45 million per year?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already acknowledged that older workers face special challenges. That is why we introduced the targeted initiative for older workers.

The program was very successful: last year, most of the workers rehired in the Quebec labour market were older workers. We have much more to do, but we have taken the first step.

* * *

SOCIAL HOUSING

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, decent, affordable housing is getting harder and harder to find. We are on the brink of an economic crisis that will make things even worse, yet the throne speech offers no solutions to this Canada-wide problem.

Will the government do as the Bloc Québécois has suggested and announce investments in the construction and renovation of social and affordable housing, a move that would create jobs and meet urgent needs?

● (1440)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member and the Bloc Québécois for their suggestions. We asked for suggestions, and we will consider them.

However, I want to point out that our government is providing support to the homeless. We are now spending more money on the homeless and on affordable housing than any previous government.

* * *

RENOVATION INDUSTRY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to revive the renovation industry in these tough times and to promote energy savings, the government should create a fund to provide financial support for individuals who renovate their homes to improve energy efficiency.

Does the government plan on following up on this Bloc Québécois proposal, which meets economic and environmental objectives, by announcing the creation of such a fund in its next economic statement?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois for its suggestions. I am happy that there is an atmosphere of cooperation here, in the House. We will consider all the suggestions that are proposed.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' inaction in the face of the economic crisis is not just hurting assembly plants in Ontario, because auto parts manufacturers in Quebec are also cutting jobs. Sooner or later, the crisis will spread to other key sectors of our economy.

Do the Conservatives think that companies like Bombardier, Héroux-Devtek Inc. and Pratt & Whitney will be magically spared? When will they introduce a plan to secure the future of the aerospace industry? Before it is too late?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have supported the aeronautics industry. Our government has announced a special program for the aeronautics industry. It is also mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

[English]

We have announced programs that are specific to the aeronautics industry and we will continue to support them.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no country can have a prosperous aerospace industry without government support. The current crisis could hit the aerospace industry if the Conservatives are not proactive.

Do the Conservatives know how many highly skilled workers depend on the aerospace industry for their living? When will the Conservatives take action to preserve these workers' livelihood?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken action. We have invested several million dollars in the strategic initiative. To date, Lockheed Martin has announced more than \$600 million in spending in Quebec. We have supported the industry, and the results bode well for the future of the industry too.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the finance minister declared that he would not artificially create a surplus, but then he went on to contradict himself by stating that in fact he would fabricate a surplus by selling what he described as non-core federal assets.

Could the minister define what he means by non-core assets and could he give the House a specific example of one?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect the government to be fiscally responsible. Therefore, we created the expenditure management system. We are looking at every expenditure, every program, every initiative of the Government of Canada and the Government of Canada's agencies. We started that work last year.

We are going to add to that work a review of corporate assets of the Government of Canada with the same test, that is, does the asset or program still fulfill a need for the people of Canada or does it not? That is simply responsible government that Canadians expect of their government.

● (1445)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Tom Flanagan claims that exposing Canada to new Conservative deficits was always part of the government's plan to push its neo-conservative agenda. Even when the Conservatives inherited a \$13.2 billion surplus, they made ideological cuts to literacy and equality programs.

Oral Questions

Why is the finance minister using his lack of fiscal discipline as an excuse to attack the vulnerable even more and hide the new Conservative deficits he caused?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fiscal discipline is an oxymoron coming from a Liberal member. In the last year when the Liberals were the government, 2004-05, they increased spending by 14.5%. Now they come to this place and talk about responsible spending. They do not know the meaning of the words.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on my first occasion to speak in the House, I would like to thank the people of Kitchener—Waterloo for electing me to represent them. It is an honour and a privilege.

It was recently reported that 1.7 million Canadians have been victims of identity theft. Canada's Privacy Commissioner estimates that the global cybercrime industry generates \$105 billion annually, much of it through the theft and sale of personal information.

What is the government doing to address what police consider to be the fastest growing crime in North America?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member and thank him for his support of our tough on crime agenda.

Over a year ago, we introduced a bill that would crack down on identity theft and organized crime. Unfortunately, we did not get any support or cooperation from the other political parties. That was too bad, but we remain committed to cracking down on identity theft and organized crime. Canadians know they can count on us.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week hundreds of students and education leaders are coming to Toronto for the historic Education is a Human Right conference that is being hosted by the children of Attawapiskat. Their fight for a school has led to the largest youth-driven children's rights movement in Canadian history.

I know that the children have invited the minister to participate and be part of the solution. I think it would be a little odd if the only no-show was the federal government. So, will the minister attend?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, that conference, which I am pleased to see taking place, is taking place while the House is sitting, so it is kind of difficult for me to be there. However, I will have officials in attendance.

Oral Questions

I hope that part of what they talk about is the fact that this government extended the Canadian Human Rights Act to apply on reserves. We are the first government to ever do that. I hope that is part of the discussion because human rights is important for every Canadian.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really think the children of Attawapiskat deserve something better than this kind of PMO platitude from the war room.

The fact is that the education leaders of Canada stepped into the vacuum because they have seen the long paper trail of commitments that were made to these children, commitments that were broken arbitrarily in the fall of 2007.

The minister can show some leadership here. All he has to do is restore the negotiations that were supported by his predecessor to build these children a school.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those discussions continue with the leadership in Attawapiskat. We are confident we will be able to continue to make good progress. We have already invested several million dollars in the school there and want to continue to support the children and education.

In the throne speech, the specific priority of this government when it comes to aboriginal people is completing aboriginal agreements across the country with interested provincial counterparts, and we are well on the way to doing that.

The question I have for that member at the other end of the House is: Will he support the throne speech because it is about education for aboriginal people?

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the last election campaign, the paper companies told us what they need to deal with the crisis and to compete internationally. They believe that Kyoto is a key part of the solution. They want absolute targets and 1990 as the reference year in order to truly implement the carbon exchange.

What is the government waiting for to adopt the Kyoto mechanisms and abandon its bogus environmental plan, which will not work and will only benefit oil companies?

• (1450)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want our country to lead the way in the fight against climate change, and renewable energy sources are key to such efforts. We need strong leadership in North America with respect to energy and environmental policies.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although everyone acknowledges that more must be done for the environment, this government has decided to do less by axing the ecoAuto program, which proved to be a success.

Will the Minister of Finance finally understand that to help the environment he must announce in his economic statement that he intends to reinstate this program?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are many programs that are of significance with respect to the battle against climate change and we will continue to pursue those. In particular, in the throne speech the target was put forward of ensuring that by 2020, 90% of Canada's future energy comes from non-emitting sources. In that context, geothermal energy, hydroelectric energy, solar energy and biomass energy are all important, as are the major technological changes that we need to make in terms of things such as carbon capture and storage which we are working on.

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AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the extension of our mission in Afghanistan was approved by the House expressly on the condition that NATO secure a battle group of approximately 1,000 troops to rotate into Kandahar which would be operational no later than February 2009.

I have two questions. First, has NATO secured additional 1,000 troops under NATO command to rotate into Kandahar? Two, our role by February 2009 by implication was supposed to have changed significantly. Is there any anticipated change and, if so, what?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague back to this portfolio.

The answer to the member's questions is yes and yes. We have secured additional battle groups. In fact, I met with defence ministers from RC (South) this past weekend in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia and we had a very frank and open discussion about this.

We continue to seek other support from NATO allies with regard to troop commitments as well as equipment, as well as the development, as well as the work that is being done in aid of Afghans living in this region. I met with the defence minister from Germany today to have further discussions.

So, yes, we are seeing progress. It is a difficult challenge but Canadians are making a significant contribution.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know specifically which country is adding 1,000 more troops.

The Manley report and the resulting resolution asked the government to be more transparent and accountable to all Canadians on the Afghanistan issue. We now know there have been serious concerns and allegations with respect to detainee transfers which may have resulted in abuse and torture.

Why is the government now moving before the courts to actually bar the Military Police Complaints Commission from conducting hearings into these matters?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, picking up on his latter question, nothing could be further from the truth. We are in fact co-operating. There have been over 35,000 documents. We have made officials available for discussions on the subject matter.

The reality is that the only issue is one of jurisdiction, not one of disclosure. As for disclosures to the House, we have had numerous opportunities before committee to discuss the mission in Afghanistan. We have had no less than 30 technical briefings. I invite my colleague to be in attendance when those technical briefings take place.

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FINANCE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the troubling economic times are leading to harsh choices for everyday consumers. In most of Canada, consumer confidence is dropping.

However, just in time for the holiday season, credit cardholders will get hit with a punishing 5% interest rate hike. In these hard times, consumers need a helping hand up, not a slap in the face from the banks.

Does the finance minister think this latest attempt to gouge average consumers is acceptable? If not, what is he prepared to do about it?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fortunately, we not only have the soundest financial system in the world, according to the World Economic Forum, we also have competition. We have banks with different interest rates. We have credit unions and caisses populaires in the same business. I encourage Canadians to shop around for the most favourable interest rate.

• (1455)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the parliamentary secretary told Canadians that while the banks can count on the government's help, consumers are on their own.

The government does not get it. At a time when consumers and the businesses they shop at are hurting, bank profits are up. The Bank of Montreal just announced today that profits in the latest quarter are up 24%.

Does the minister believe this to be a good time for the banks to be ripping off consumers? If he does not, will he do a better job this time than he did on ATM fees?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know an NDP government would want to run the banks in the country, which would be some day for Canadians if we had the NDP running our banking system.

We encourage and insist on competition in financial services in Canada, as I wrote to the federally regulated financial institutions last week. There are more than 200 of them on the RIFF issue.

There is lots of room for Canadians to decide whether their particular financial institution is giving them a good deal or not and I encourage them to shop around.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that public servants and the government are currently negotiating new collective agreements.

[*English*]

They are attempting to reach wage settlements that reflect the value of the work they do but also protect the interests of taxpayers in uncertain economic times.

Could the President of the Treasury Board update the House on the status of negotiations with public service unions?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we have reached a fair and reasonable agreement with more than 100,000 public service employees. Yesterday, we reached agreement with the Public Service Alliance of Canada and today I am pleased to announce that we also reached an agreement with the Canadian Association of Professional Employees for the translation group.

I thank our negotiators, as well as those of the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Canadian Association of Professional Employees.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's record on dealing with violence against women has been harshly criticized by the United Nations. Shockingly, a recent UN report cites the tragic cases of more than 500 missing or murdered first nations, Métis and Inuit women. Meanwhile, the Conservatives continue to ignore calls for a national violence prevention program and an inquiry. More needs to be done. The silence cannot continue.

Why are the Conservatives doing nothing about this disgraceful and shameful stain on our national and international reputation?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, ending violence against women is a priority for the government. We have worked very closely with the Sisters in Spirit program, which is a program that is funded by Status of Women Canada, and we have worked closely with the aboriginal community to identify violence against women issues.

In fact, the number of women who have now been identified is as a result of the good work of the Sisters in Spirit program. I note that in budget 2008 we announced the development of an action plan and it will include further work on violence against women, especially in the aboriginal communities.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all the economic stakeholders agree that during an economic slowdown, spending on infrastructure must be increased and accelerated. A Fisheries and Oceans Canada study showed that the percentage of port facilities that are unsafe or in poor condition went from 20% to 26% in five years.

Does the government realize that if it quickly updated these infrastructures, it could kill two birds with one stone? It could help fishermen and stimulate the local economy.

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2008 committed a further \$10 million per year to the small craft harbour program for upgrades and retrofits.

* * *

● (1500)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, identifying the number of women missing is not enough. Canada's aboriginal women are still disappearing and dying.

The Native Women's Association says that 510 aboriginal girls and women have vanished or have been murdered in Canada since 1980. One aboriginal woman has gone missing or has been murdered every month in each year for the past 28 years. This national disgrace is now an international embarrassment.

The UN committee on discrimination against women is now demanding that the government take action. Will the minister commit today that an investigation will take place?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question and look forward to working with her and all of the critics in the House on this very important issue.

Sisters in Spirit is a program that has been applauded by Beverly Jacobs of the Native Women's Association who has recognized that Sisters in Spirit now gives a voice to the women who are victims of violence.

We have made a commitment already in budget 2008 to continue to work with the aboriginal community to address this very serious issue because it is something that all members in the House would like to see an end to.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government recently co-sponsored a motion at UNESCO to honour the millions who were murdered during the Ukrainian famine genocide, the Holodomor.

Our government also supported Bill C-459, brought forward by the member for Selkirk—Interlake, which established the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day.

Would the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism update the House on what the government has done to commemorate this historic crime against humanity.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for that member and all members for their interest in this important issue, I was honoured, together with Senator Andreychuk of the other place, to represent Canada at the 75th anniversary commemorations of Holodomor in Kiev this past weekend to extend to President Yushchenko and the Ukrainian people the solidarity of Canadians who recall that terrible crime against humanity which occurred under the Communist dictatorship of Joseph Stalin in 1932-33 that left millions of Ukrainians and others the victims of that totalitarian regime.

This Parliament led the way as the first and only G8 country to recognize its genocidal nature. We should take credit for that.

* * *

[Translation]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and we are highlighting the start of a campaign to put an end to gender-based violence. The UN has asked Canada to take more action to stop violence against women, and criticized the serious cuts to the court challenges program.

When will the Conservatives realize that in order to put an end to violence against women, they will have to take women's equality seriously?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member is aware that Canada just signed on to the UNIFEM campaign to say no to violence against women. This is an issue that our government takes very seriously.

I look forward to working with the member as we develop our action plan. Not only will it talk about economic security for women, but there will be a huge component on violence against women and on women in more leadership roles across Canada.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Dr. Franz Josef Jung, Minister of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. June Draude, Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations for Saskatchewan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Address

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the Minister of Finance referred to my flight to my riding last Friday. As he said that I was in business class, I would like to table my economy class plane ticket to Halifax last Friday, and perhaps the minister could table his last economy class ticket as well.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Kings—Hants have the consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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NATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PREVENTION WEEK

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House recognize National Violence Against Women Prevention Week and call on the government to develop a Violence Prevention Strategy to deal with the growing number of victims of violence against women, particularly among aboriginal women, who are more than three times as likely to be victims of domestic violence as non-aboriginal women.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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)

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your re-election the fourth time around. I would also like to thank all my constituents in Newton—North Delta for their continued trust and confidence in re-electing me with an even greater margin. I promise them that I will continue the representation that puts our community first.

I rise to address the House regarding last week's underwhelming Speech from the Throne. Everyone in the House, and indeed the millions of Canadians we represent are aware that times are tough. On the doorsteps and on the streets in my riding of Newton—North Delta, there is a deep sense of concern about our economy that I have never seen before. There is a great unease about the future of people's jobs, people's savings and the ability to pay for post-secondary education for their children, or to build a comfortable nest egg for their retirement.

In this period of such global instability, Canadians want to know that they have a government that prepares for a rainy day. They want to know that they can count on the federal government to guide them through the tough times.

Unfortunately, with the performance that we have seen by the Prime Minister over the past few years, we now find our nation in a bigger hole than need have been. This situation is a direct result of the government's short-sighted fiscal policies.

The Conservative government inherited a \$13 billion surplus from the previous Liberal administration. In three short years it increased federal spending by a shocking 25%, over \$40 billion per year, making it the highest spending government in Canadian history. It eliminated the \$3 billion contingency reserve that the Liberal government had put in place for an economic downturn such as the current one. It got rid of \$12 billion in revenue by cutting the wrong tax, a move which every economist in the country, except the Prime Minister, warned against doing. This last point is something I would like to emphasize, because this is money that could have helped Canadians in need. It is money that could have created jobs. It is money that could have been invested in the struggling B.C. forestry industry or other sectors. It is money that could have been used to address seniors' pensions.

Now, in spite of promises on the campaign trail not to go into deficit, that is precisely what the government is planning on doing.

The simple question of this whole throne speech is the following: if responsible Canadians do not have the luxury of spending more than they are taking in, why should the government be exercising this kind of irresponsible course of action?

The throne speech stated that the government "will review all program spending carefully to make sure that spending is as effective as possible and aligned with Canadians' priorities".

Belt tightening is an easy thing to talk about now, but where was the government over the past couple of years when every fiscal expert in the country warned against its carefree spending? The answer to this is that the Conservatives just did not listen.

How can the government justify a deficit in the coming year when it is also raising spending by \$10 billion?

What is worse is that as recently as this past Monday, the Minister of Finance told Canadians that this week's financial update would "not include any major moves meant to stimulate the economy", which makes me ask, what is it going to take for the Conservatives to wake up to the reality that surrounds them?

The Address

• (1510)

As mentioned last week, the Liberals will not bring down the government on the Speech from the Throne, not only because it would be irresponsible but also because the throne speech lacks any kind of detailed plan for action, making it as empty as the broken promises the Conservative government has made for the past three years.

Canadians want an idea of what the government is going to do for the economy. What they do not want are big promises about a tough economic situation that has largely been caused by bad government decisions.

Before I conclude, I want to point out one glaring omission within the Speech from the Throne. There is little mention of our senior citizens, many of whom are going to be hit the hardest by this financial crunch. Over a third of the nation's elderly live in poverty on basic old age pensions and public supplements. There are a number of steps that the government could take immediately to ease the economic anxiety for seniors, including giving them more flexibility when they need to convert RRSPs into RRIFs.

It is shocking that seniors are being left to go it alone because of a government that is so desperately trying to cover up its past mistakes. My neighbours, my constituents in Newton—North Delta, and I will be watching with great interest the Minister of Finance's fiscal update, which he has already warned would not have an additional fiscal stimulus package.

If the government is unprepared to act and is going to wait months to offer a tangible plan to deal with our current economic crisis, then it is going to face the judgment of the voters. Canadians are demanding action, something that last week's throne speech unfortunately failed to offer.

• (1515)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the House is very interested in the full spectrum of concerns that the member has raised. He talked about the issues related to seniors and the economy in his constituency, about the confidence that people look forward to in the future, and about a prescription of action that would be required with respect to seniors, the guaranteed income supplement and the whole issue related to pensions.

In my riding, the issues related to jobs, apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships and training are also equally important. People are very concerned about that. I wonder if the member could expand a little bit. I know that in his area the economic downturn has affected the forestry industry and is even creeping into the mining community. I also wonder what actions the government has taken that have impressed him as prescriptions for creating high value-added activity, additional job activity and, in particular, investing in the housing market and affordable housing. There is a full spectrum of work-related initiatives that would help in this economic downturn.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for York South—Weston on his re-election and applaud his compassion toward our seniors and also his work on affordable housing.

When we look at the present government, it has no plan when it comes to affordable housing. Certainly, in British Columbia, when we look at the lower mainland area, homelessness is increasing. On the campaign trail, we put together a strong platform demanding an additional 30,000 low-income homes be made available, and also to refurbish the 30,000 existing affordable homes. Government can be a force of good in people's lives, but the Conservative government is thinking selfishly and dealing the ideological cards to the voters who vote for it instead of taking care of the most vulnerable in society.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was somewhat critical of the government for not acting quickly enough on the current financial situation. Yet just yesterday, I believe, Germany announced that it is cutting its value added tax, which our government did more than two years ago, cutting the GST from 7% to 5%, a substantial reduction in GST of roughly \$10 billion a year.

In the United States, president-elect Obama said that he would carry through on the tax cuts laid out by the current administration, even though he campaigned on not doing so during the presidential campaign. He has changed his mind because he realizes that personal and corporate tax reduction will help stimulate the economy, which our government started more than two years ago. We were ahead of the game by more than two years in providing stimulus that other countries are only providing right now. We are clearly ahead of the game.

I would like to ask the member this question. How can he be critical of our government for acting slowly, when we started acting more than two years ago and other countries, like Germany and the United States, are acting only now?

• (1520)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright. My first career when I moved to Canada was as an engineer in his riding.

It is not only me and the Liberals, but every economist in this country, except the Prime Minister, has said that cutting the tax that the member is talking about was a wrong step. If we look at the report from the budget officer, it has clearly stated that the government has put us into this mess for just that reason. I hope that member is able to find that report and study it.

I would like to tell him about our record. In fact, people must have more in their take home pay for us to have an economy that is stimulated. The Liberals have a great record. During their tenure, people had 11% more in their take home pay after paying taxes. The business taxes were reduced from 29% to 17% or 18%. The government came into power three years ago and raised personal income taxes from 15% to 15.5% and then still claimed it was reducing taxes. I hope the member was watching that budget. In the second budget, the Conservatives lowered the tax rate from 15.5% to 15%, to the same level, and yet still said they were reducing taxes.

This is a government that is not taking care of those people who are the most vulnerable in our society and who are having a tough time during this crunch.

The Address

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the constituents of Yukon for again putting their faith in me and electing me to this Parliament for the fourth time. It is a great honour and I am very humbled by it.

However, at the doorsteps of this election campaign, for the first time in any in which I have run, there was a new ribbon running through the comments I was getting and that was one of great concern. People were very worried about their future, their homes and their pensions, to the extent that some people were actually very scared about what might come and the uncertainty.

Then, in this crisis that is facing Canada, we have a throne speech that basically has no prescriptions to deal with it. In fact, I would ask Canadians listening out there, who I know told their politicians and canvassers throughout the campaign that they were worried and scared, if any of them feel any comfort after reading that throne speech? I would be happy to hear from any Canadian who felt comfort after reading the throne speech, Canadians who saw their RRSPs fading away, who get their monthly pension statements, people who are so vulnerable because their working lives are finished. They cannot increase their savings, and as their pensions fade away, there is no hope except here in this House and what we could do for them.

They are worried about their homes with a possible recession. They are worried about unemployment, whether they can keep their mortgages, and whether they will be able to support their families. I would ask anyone to sincerely tell me what was in that throne speech that would give comfort to those people.

I predict the new spirit of conciliation will last about two weeks in this Parliament, for one reason because we may be acting honourably but we certainly should not give up our principles to fight when the needy are detracted from or not supported, or there is an inappropriate justice strategy. However, in the spirit of conciliation, I would like to speak about some things in the throne speech that I appreciate and support.

One of the items was the democracy promotion agency. I am not sure where that came from. It seems an antithesis of a government that had apparently decreased efforts in that area, certainly decreased our foreign presence, but all of a sudden we have this idea, which if it is what I believe it is, I am very supportive of and have wanted for a long time, which is that Canada has the expertise to intervene in world affairs, to develop democracy around the world, of course with our aid and military where necessary but also with our democratic skills.

We among all nations have such strong diasporas from around the world, and have the abilities and understanding to know that it is not necessarily our way or the highway. We have a great understanding of what can work around the world, what people might want, and how we could help promote democracy in unstable situations. If that were to come to fruition, I would certainly highly commend the government on that initiative.

I am also in support of increasing the incentives for energy-saving home retrofits. This is a program that was brought in by the Liberals. When the Conservatives came in, they cut it drastically, reduced it, and made it much harder to apply for. Now they seem to have

reversed that and once again are increasing our excellent program. I am very happy for that.

Another one of our programs where there was much uncertainty was the homelessness partnering program. We started that a number of years ago and that was very successful in my riding. There was a huge uptake and very apropos to the needy. It was very successful. In the last Parliament, I and others lobbied that this had to continue because the funding was very close to expiring. Fortunately, the government has listened and has continued that program.

I was also happy to see the mention of a northern economic development agency. Members can rest assured that we will be in the north, watching very carefully to ensure that that promise is maintained and fulfilled, unlike a number of promises that have been broken by the Conservatives.

● (1525)

The Prime Minister's promise of three icebreakers was broken and reduced to one. The ice strength and supply ships are gone. The planes promised for the north have been cancelled.

I am happy to see the government has listened to all the other parties that wanted a cap and trade system. Once again, we will be watching for the implementation of that.

I am also happy to see the cutting of red tape for NGOs. I have had a number of complaints from NGOs that the government in power has made it increasingly difficult for them to get their funding through huge bureaucratic processes. We have to remember that a lot of these NGOs primarily employ maybe one or two people. They are mostly run by volunteers. They have huge complicated tasks of helping people and have sufficient problems in just existing. It does not do any of us any good for their time to be spent on unnecessarily bureaucratic application processes and reports. I am glad the government will move to deal with that problem, part of which it has created.

Another area I am very happy to see is the area for which the member for Pickering—Scarborough East, I and others have lobbied for a number of years, and that is increased provisions for the competition agency so it can be more effective in ensuring consumers of Canada get better treatment.

I was not happy with a number of things. The Conservatives did not bring back a petroleum monitoring agency. Canadians are very concerned about gas prices and home heating fuel, especially in the north. We had initiated an office to watch and control this very carefully so consumers could have information on what was happening and companies could be watched. The government closed that office and it did not bring it back in the throne speech.

A number of things related to the north, which had been talked about in previous times, all of a sudden seem to have vanished. Because of lack of details, a problematic mention of a regulation change was the only real reference to the north. I hope there is still a commitment to Arctic science, especially after we made the huge commitment, one of the best ones in the world, to the International Polar Year. I hope the government will follow up and continue the suggestion of a continuing Arctic science.

The Address

I was very disappointed not to see any mention related to potential credit card increases in these desperate times. Apparently all the retail associations in Canada are up in arms that the merchants may be charged higher rates and individuals, if they miss a payment, may be charged higher rates, as if credit card rates are not high enough. Why would the government not take a strong stand against this in such a time of economic crisis?

I also hope the government will rescind its notice of a couple of years ago that allows certain dumping in the Arctic. I have a private member's bill to stop that if the government does not.

I was also disappointed not to see anything specific about a search and rescue plane fleet. I hope it was in the military announcement. It has to be renewed to protect Canadians. I have been lobbying for a number of years to put some planes north of 60 for the first time.

There were seven items in the throne speech where it talked about the provinces and the federal government, but it did not say territories, which included work on the economy, common securities regulator, foreign credentials and international standards, education, international trade barriers, cap and trade and opting out of federal programs. Certainly northerners, like anyone else, want to be involved in those discussions. I was very perturbed to see those omissions in the throne speech.

Finally, we have come through a time when we had a rising tide and our efforts were to ensure that the rising tide affected all ships. Even the poor were included. Now we have changed the whole scenario and we have a tide going down. When the tide is going down, who is going to be the first to hit the bottom, to have the danger of crashing on the bottom? It is those least able to afford it.

When the tide was flush, the government cut the most vulnerable, the aboriginal people, people who could not defend their rights, women and literacy. What is going to happen when there are fewer resources? The tide is going down and those people are going to crash first. All Canadians should be very concerned about that.

● (1530)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Congratulations, Mr. Speaker, on your appointment to that great position.

The member talked in such a negative fashion about our country and the prospects for our wonderful country, which surprised me and disappointed me.

He talked about the throne speech and mentioned nothing at all about the fact that this government has been preparing for more than two years for some type of downturn in the economy.

The Prime Minister and the government did not know that financial institutions would collapse as they did. No one could have known that. This preparation has put Canada in a better position than almost any other country to deal with this difficulty before us.

Over the past couple of days Germany has lowered its value-added tax. Our government did that more than two years ago.

Over the past couple of days president-elect Obama has indicated that he will follow through with the tax cuts put in place by President Bush, something that our government has done over the past two and a half years.

Why did the member mention nothing about how well the government had prepared Canada for this situation compared to other world economic powers?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to answer that question.

First, the member asked why I was talking negatively about Canada and Canadians. I was not talking negatively about them at all. I was talking about the Conservative government's throne speech, which is not going to help Canadians in their time of need.

Canadians have told the government time after time that they are worried, and what did they get? The member said that the government would not do anything because it did something two years ago and that would solve Canadians' problems. Obviously it has not.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that Canada was going into deficit. Why did the member point out something that his government did a long time ago?

Now there is a problem with the ship of state and there has been no suggestion that the government will do anything, not even from the member who has had the chance to ask a question.

The member talks about the position his government has put Canada in to deal with a potential crisis. The government squandered the \$12 billion surplus it was handed that could have dealt with emergencies. That is the position in which the government has put Canada. The government has squandered revenue that it could have used now to do exactly what the Prime Minister wants to do about stimulating the economy and he cannot.

● (1535)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has paid a lot of attention in the past to issues facing first nations, Métis and Inuit.

The recent report that came out on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women noted, with regret, that aboriginal women in Canada continued to live in impoverished conditions, which include high rates of poverty, poor health, inadequate housing, lack of access to clean water, low school completion rates and high rates of violence.

The throne speech contained a couple of short lines about only first nations, but excluded Métis and Inuit.

Could the member comment on what he sees as a priority that should have been included in the throne speech to deal with first nations, Métis and Inuit and their desperate economic conditions?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member has done tremendous work in the area of aboriginal people.

That is exactly what I was referring to at the end of my speech. Canadians should be worried that in good times the government cut the most needy programs. This time when there are less resources, there is very little for aboriginals. As the member said, there is disparity between aboriginal people and Canadians.

The Address

Reference was made to education, which upset me. The government did not even work with the territories to deal with that. That is a tiny fragment of the \$5 billion that the government took away from aboriginal people and did not reinstate the money, with the exception of the part on education, whatever small amount that might be. That money would have helped with economic development and housing. It would have determined the success and health of aboriginal people in Canada. That should be a worry to all Canadians who care about the disadvantaged.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

First, as this is my first opportunity to speak in the House since the last election, I would like to thank the constituents of South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale for returning me with a renewed vote of confidence as their member of Parliament. It is truly my privilege and honour to serve them for a third time and I will work hard to keep their trust, in this Parliament.

The Speech from the Throne sets out the government's objectives for this Parliament, with the primary emphasis on the global financial situation. Without a doubt, the developed world's economy has to be the primary focus of Parliament and our government at this time.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Canadians elected us because we tackled the problems facing families and businesses in these times of economic uncertainty. The Speech from the Throne describes the crucial measures we are taking to keep our economy moving and to support the hopes and dreams of our families and communities.

[*English*]

The Speech from the Throne laid out five key elements of our government's approach to addressing the global financial situation: to ensure sound budgeting by further scrutinizing spending; secure jobs for our communities by encouraging skilled trades and support workers facing transition; reform the global financial system in co-operation with our allies and trading partners; make government more effective by reducing red tape, simplifying the procurement process and improving the management of federal institutions; and expand investment and trade by seeking out new foreign trade agreements and removing barriers to internal trade investment and labour mobility.

While I do not have the time to address all five of these in detail, I want to elaborate on a few of them and highlight what the government has already done to protect the financial security of Canadians.

To start, it is important to note that Canada leads the G8 in economic performance. The reason Canada is leading the G8 is because of our government's commitment to lower taxes, a balanced budget and our aggressive paydown of the national debt. We have paid down \$37 billion of the national debt in just the last two years. While other nations have been engaged in deficit spending, Canada has been spending within its means and delivering nearly \$200

billion in tax relief to Canadians, including nearly a 30% cut in the GST. This prudent approach to our nation's finances has allowed all Canadians to benefit, even during these uncertain economic times. Not only are taxes lower, but unemployment is at historic lows, as are interest rates, and inflation is under control.

Canada remains a great place in the world to invest.

[*Translation*]

It is clear that some sectors of the economy are facing real challenges right now. The automobile, forestry and aerospace industries have been particularly hard hit. Our government recognizes that and is making strategic investments in these industries to help them adapt to future needs.

[*English*]

My province of British Columbia hosts a huge forestry sector. As the B.C. MP, I have been very pleased by the actions our government has taken to support the industry in the last few years.

Since coming to office, our government reached an agreement with the United States over the softwood lumber trade. That ensured B.C. foresters and lumber mill workers stable, predictable access to the U.S. market for at least seven years.

In response to the pine beetle epidemic ravaging the forests of B.C.'s interior, our government delivered \$200 million in aid to support workers in communities in transition in B.C.'s interior. We have also delivered assistance and support to workers transitioning to the skilled trades. Already our government has invested \$100 million a year in apprenticeship incentive grants to encourage more young Canadians to pursue skilled trades careers.

As well, we have provided a total of \$200 million a year in tax credits, that is up to \$2,000 per placement, to encourage employers to hire apprentices.

We have also committed \$3 billion over six years for new labour market agreements with the provinces to assist those who do not currently qualify for training under the employment insurance program.

[*Translation*]

We must help workers get the training they need to build the new economy and ensure the prosperity of all Canadians. Our government saw what British Columbia needed, and it took and is taking measures to meet those needs. For example, in the throne speech, the government focused on the importance of enhancing trade opportunities.

[*English*]

Whether it is the just concluded free trade agreement with Colombia or the negotiations toward a free trade agreement with Europe or Korea, the government is determined to ensure that Canadian companies have access to markets right around the world.

The Address

Again, as a British Columbia MP, I am pleased because Canada's increased focus on markets in Asia, including Korea, China and India, is of particular benefit to my province. West coast ports will benefit from the increased trade with Asian and Pacific Rim nations. Our government has recognized the potential created by increased trade across the Pacific and has invested over \$1 billion in the Asia Pacific Gateway initiative to grow and modernize our west coast ports. It has been estimated that the expansion of our west coast ports will lead to nearly 50,000 new jobs within a decade.

Of course, our government is investing in more than just port infrastructure. Our Building Canada fund will invest \$33 billion in new infrastructure, such as highways, bridges and public transit, over the next seven years. This new infrastructure is critically needed in the rapidly expanding communities of the lower Fraser Valley, including the communities of my riding. The fact is that traffic congestion and resulting pollution has become a major problem in the Lower Mainland.

Outdated infrastructure is leading to gridlock and even increased traffic accidents and deaths. Until now, our transportation infrastructure has not kept up with the incredible growth our region is experiencing. The Building Canada fund will help to reduce congestion, increase safety and, ultimately, protect our environment.

British Columbians are also concerned about crime.

[*Translation*]

Property crime rates in our communities are among the highest in the country, and, like other Canadian communities, B.C. communities find the increase in violent youth crime particularly worrisome.

As we stated in the throne speech, Canadians have to feel safe at home and in their communities, which means that we have to crack down on violent crime, including gun crime.

[*English*]

Our government continues to take action focused on eliminating the smuggling of guns by increasing penalties for gun crimes. Our focus will be on the criminal misuse of firearms, not on criminalizing the millions of law-abiding Canadians who own firearms.

Our reforms to the Youth Criminal Justice Act will ensure that sentences better reflect the seriousness of the crime.

As co-chairman of our party's task force on safer streets and healthy communities some years past, I could not help but be struck by the universal comment from Canadians that the existing youth criminal justice legislation does not provide a sufficient deterrent to those youth who would consider serious violent offences.

The most common comment I heard was that our youth know they will get nothing more than a slap on the wrist. For some young people, the current Youth Criminal Justice Act does achieve its desired objectives. Some first-time minor offenders receive the stern and serious rebuke of the law, learn from it and do not go on to a life of crime. However, for other young offenders, the current lenient sentences for serious violent and repeat offences do not keep these young people from an adult criminal career.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

We cannot simply stand, mouths agape, before this tragedy. We have to intervene to prevent potential repeat offenders from embarking on a life of crime.

We have to protect society from violent crimes and property crimes committed by young offenders.

[*English*]

We will continue to make the safety and security of Canadians our highest priority. We will continue to move forward with our tackling crime agenda.

As members know, British Columbians are always on the cutting edge when it comes to democratic reform. In modern times, we have often been the first province in our Confederation to consider reforms such as citizens' assemblies, recall, fixed election dates and the election of senators.

In the throne speech, our government has committed to pursuing the popular selection of senators and limiting the length of term of senators to eight years. We are proposing to reform this ineffective and unaccountable 19th century institution and make it more accountable and more effective as we move rapidly into the 21st century.

Our government has also committed to act to ensure the principle of representation by population in our lower House, the House of Commons.

British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, the three provinces with the fastest growth in recent years, will gain seats in this House to properly reflect their populations.

[*Translation*]

For far too long, some regions of the country have been under-represented in Parliament. The Lower Mainland, part of which I represent, is one of those regions. I would really like it to have more representation in this House.

[*English*]

I am confident that all members will want to support the legislation our government brings forward to ensure greater fairness in the seat distribution and uphold the principle of representation by population.

Speaking of fairness among the provinces there is another issue that our government will be addressing in this Parliament, as mentioned in the throne speech. We are committed to working with the provinces to further remove remaining barriers to interprovincial trade, investment and labour mobility. Working cooperatively with the premiers, we were able to make progress on the enforcement of the agreement on internal trade.

The Address

The agreement will be amended by this coming January to reach the goal of full labour mobility for all Canadians. This will result in the mutual recognition of occupational credentials between all the provinces and territories. Of course, when we speak of credentials, our government must also continue with its important initiative to recognize foreign credentials.

Our economy depends on having the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world. We recognize that more needs to be done to ensure that immigrants are able to use all the skills and knowledge they have acquired.

We launched the foreign credentials referral office in May 2007 in co-operation with the provinces and territories. The office helps those trained overseas who want to work in Canada to have their credentials assessed and recognized in Canada more quickly.

The ability of all workers, including foreign trained workers, to have their credentials recognized everywhere in Canada will lead to a stronger, more efficient economic union. In fact, strengthening our economic union is more important now than ever, given the current global economic uncertainty.

We do not have to look far to see the positive impact that labour mobility can have on a national economy. Our major trading partner, the United States, eliminated most barriers to trade and labour mobility many decades ago and has long experienced economic growth that has outstripped ours as a result.

Reducing barriers to internal trade is not the only way our government can give the economy a boost. As a former small businessman, I know that red tape also costs our economy and results in lost productivity. Time spent filling out forms, reporting to government to obtain various licences means time not spent serving customers, producing products and creating value for shareholders.

Our government is intent on streamlining the way it does business and is committed to reducing the administrative and paper burden on Canadian businesses. Our current goal is a 20% reduction in the paper burden, but we have already taken other actions to save businesses time and money.

For example, we have already eased the tax compliance burden on businesses by reducing record-keeping requirements for automobile expense deductions and taxable benefits. We have also launched the new BizPal service in many municipalities across Canada, including in Surrey and White Rock in my community. BizPal allows businesses to quickly obtain all the forms and licences they need to comply with the requirements of every level of government with an efficient visit to a single website.

The throne speech also outlined another way our government will give the economy a boost through the creation of a national securities regulator. In a time of global economic uncertainty, investors are looking for stability and security.

Foreign investment in Canada means jobs for Canadians and growth in the economy. While Canada is already an attractive investment destination, greater certainty is provided to potential international investors by a single national standard for securities regulation rather than numerous different provincial standards.

We will work with the provinces to put in place a common securities regulator. I note that financial institutions in Canada already benefit from the existence of a national financial institutions regulator. A common securities regulator will allow Canada to respond swiftly and efficiently to any developments in the financial sector and to speak with a common voice.

Some of the advantages of a common securities regulator would be reduced compliance costs for companies offering securities and improved enforcement. Canada's lack of a national securities regulator has been identified as an area for reform this year by both the International Monetary Fund and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Our government recognizes that lasting prosperity for Canadians comes through entrepreneurship and sheer hard work. Government does not create jobs, but government can help to create and support an economic environment in which those jobs will be created by the private sector.

Another way we are helping to support job creation in the private sector is by extending the benefits of maternity leave available to other workers, to self-employed business owners through the employment insurance program.

● (1550)

Facilitating child rearing for the self-employed allows entrepreneurs greater flexibility in pursuing their dreams. No longer will the self-employed have to consider giving up their business ventures in order to raise a family. Instead, they may keep their businesses going for the benefit of their families and the other workers they employ. I have already heard from many small business owners in my community who are very enthusiastic about our plan.

As well, the throne speech re-commits our government to legislation that would provide better oversight of food, drugs and consumer products. The legislation would strengthen the power to recall products and increase penalties for violators. Our 2008 budget provided nearly \$.5 billion over five years for the food and consumer safety action plan and to support the legislation we will be bringing forward.

We have all seen news items in recent years regarding unsafe food, health or consumer products, including toys. As the father of a two-year-old, I can assure everyone that I am personally concerned about the food my daughter eats, the medicine she may take and the toys she may play with. Reports of melamine in imported food products or lead in paint in children's toys worry parents like myself.

Our legislation would ensure that federal inspectors have the power to enforce standards that parents can have the confidence in. Protecting and promoting the health and safety of Canadians, their families and communities is of paramount importance to our government.

The Address

The secure and efficient flow of goods, services and people is also essential to a trading nation like Canada. As members will know, my riding of South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale contains the busiest border crossings in western Canada.

[*Translation*]

The trade corridor linking Vancouver to Seattle and the west coast of the United States goes through my riding. The throne speech commitment to continued expansion of gateways and border corridors is essential to Canada's economic growth and cultural prosperity. It is particularly important to ridings like mine.

• (1555)

[*English*]

I am pleased to report that our government has already delivered on major investments in modernizing our land border infrastructure to accommodate the growth in west coast trade and tourism. This is particularly important for my region in preparing for the upcoming 2010 Olympic Games.

Our government is also delivering for other regions of the country, including a long overdue expansion of the critical border crossing at the Windsor-Detroit border.

While upgrading our gateway and corridor related infrastructure is essential to extending our trade and our economy, I am pleased that taxpayers will benefit from over \$13 billion of planned and committed private sector investment in this infrastructure over the next three years.

As I conclude, I want to return to the main theme contained in the Speech from the Throne: the economy. We recognize that we live in uncertain economic times and stickhandling our way forward is a major challenge for our government. As I already mentioned, our prudent approach to fiscal policy since forming government has left Canada in an enviable position compared to other developed nations during this challenging time.

Even so, the slowing global economy and its impact on Canada creates challenges for our revenue stream. That is why our government will be further scrutinizing all areas of government spending in an effort to keep our national finances on track. I am confident that additional savings can be found without unduly impacting the essential services and responsibilities Canadians count on the federal government to provide.

I encourage all members to work together to support this government's agenda as outlined in the throne speech.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to your position. I also congratulate the hon. member for my neighbouring riding, South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, on his work for his constituents.

I listened very carefully when the hon. member mentioned fairness and the fixed election date. I am sure the hon. member and Canadians well know that the Prime Minister has betrayed Canadians by breaking the promise of a fixed election date.

With regard to fairness and spending, on the one hand the Prime Minister and the Conservative government are putting our country to the verge of deficit. On the other hand, our area of Surrey and Delta

has elected four Conservative members out of the five, yet we see zero representation in the Prime Minister's cabinet, even though he appointed the biggest cabinet in Canadian history by appointing 26 ministers, 11 state ministers and 27 parliamentary secretaries. What defence can the hon. member make when on the one side the Prime Minister is putting the country to the verge of deficit, while on the other side he is snubbing Surrey and Delta?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to your position. I also congratulate my colleague for Newton—North Delta for his success. It is a privilege for all of us to be here, and we never take it lightly. It is one of the things that drives all members of Parliament. We recognize the uncertainty that the economy is facing, and we come back here to do the hard work that Canadians expect us to do.

My colleague raised a number of issues. I will not be able to address all of them, but I do want to address a few.

He made some passing reference to the lack of fiscal prudence, or something to that effect, and suggested that we were mishandling the government's finances. I think the exact opposite is the case. For the last two years I have been very proud that our government has introduced two balanced budgets, budgets that provided tremendous results for Canadians.

In my speech I referred to our cutting \$37 billion from the national debt. The interest savings were passed along to Canadians in the form of tax cuts. I mentioned that tax cuts of nearly \$200 billion are working their way through the economic system in Canada and that families and businesses are benefiting from those tax cuts. Seniors are benefiting from splitting their pensions. There is no apology on my part, nor on this side of the House, for the steps we have taken to reduce the amount of money the government takes in and the steps we have taken to give that money back to Canadians.

We can never forget that the money the government spends is not the government's money. That is what the Liberals used to think. It is the people's money, and we want to be good stewards of that money. That is why we are giving it back in the form of tax cuts, while at the same time being prudent in administering the finances of the nation.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment.

I would also like to congratulate my colleague with whom I travelled for a few days when we participated in a mission to India related to climate change. We went to the Commonwealth General Assembly in New Delhi, where we discussed climate change and summarized the numerous problems we are currently facing and those we will face in the future.

The Address

I can quite easily imagine that the member is troubled by this situation. However, although he is worried about climate change—having participated in a meeting where many countries were worrying about the future of our planet—the Speech from the Throne still does not mention anything that would lead us to believe that the current government is worried about the situation. In fact, when the government talks about climate change, one gets the impression that it is more of an economic analysis than an environmental analysis.

I would like the member to explain how he can be open minded about climate change and still support a Speech from the Throne like this one.

[*English*]

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I remember very well the trip my colleague refers to. In fact, I am a proud member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Few people understand that Canada has one of the oldest democracies in the world. We have a wealth of knowledge to share with developing nations around the world, and that is what that organization does.

The member spent most of his time talking about climate change. I am sure he has heard it mentioned here more than once, but in case he has forgotten, I want to remind him that as was mentioned in the throne speech, we have a plan, the first plan in Canadian history to address the problem of climate change. The throne speech re-emphasized that we are imposing mandatory reductions on big industries. We have one of the most stringent regulatory regimes in the world. We are committed to reducing Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020.

While we are proceeding with our commitments and our plan, we are also being prudent during this period of fiscal uncertainty. Unlike the members of the Liberal Party, we completely downplayed and dismissed the irresponsible idea of bringing in a carbon tax, which would have destroyed the economy had the Liberals had an opportunity to form a government. Perhaps the member from the Bloc could at least be appreciative that Canada is not facing the kind of crisis it would have faced had the Liberals been elected to government.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member questions about the common securities regulator referred to in the Speech from the Throne.

The hon. member should be aware that this issue has been discussed for over 10 years now with the provinces, and the small provinces just will not go along with this plan. I would like to know why he thinks things are going to be any different in the future in terms of trying to get a national securities regulator.

I would like to also point out to him that the current Ontario Securities Commission got only two convictions in the last year, whereas in the United States there have been hundreds of convictions. The issue is not the regulatory body so much as the enforcement initiatives that the regulatory body takes. What steps does he plan to take to try to convince these bodies to act more aggressively in taking action against white collar crime?

● (1605)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome my colleague to the House of Commons. I know he considers it a privilege to be here for the first time, and I acknowledge that.

He has asked additional questions about the importance of a common securities regulator. I have to emphasize that having a common securities regulator is critical to Canada's economic future.

At present each of the provinces and territories has its own system. In these unprecedented times, it is imperative for Canada to have a common voice on issues related to financing. A mismatch of different regulations across the country simply does not cut it.

The IMF, as I pointed out in my speech, has considered this as a primary responsibility of our government to alleviate the burden on companies and the reporting requirements they have. Now more than ever we need to respond swiftly and efficiently to changing circumstances. Having a common securities regulator would allow us to do that.

My colleague also raised the issue of crime. I also talked about that issue in my speech, and about my being part of a safe streets and healthy communities task force that crisscrossed the country getting feedback from Canadians on what they felt was most important in addressing this problem. As I said, the one message we heard time and time again was that in the area of youth crime, young offenders no longer felt there was any consequence to their actions.

In this throne speech we committed to addressing that issue. We are going to take a look at the Youth Criminal Justice Act. We are going to make sure it becomes more stringent for those people on whom it does not really work.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Hamilton Mountain.

It is an honour to rise in the House of Commons and present my response to the Speech from the Throne.

I would like to begin by thanking the constituents of Churchill. Having been born and raised in Thompson, Manitoba, I am truly honoured to represent my home region of Churchill.

The Churchill riding is one of the largest in Canada. It has tremendous diversity. From Lake Winnipeg to Hudson Bay, from the Saskatchewan border to the Ontario border, the riding stretches from a community that is a drive of one and a half hours from Winnipeg to communities across the east and north of Manitoba that do not have all-weather road access.

There is also immense diversity in terms of people. Our riding is made up of first nations and Métis people, as well as Canadians from all across Canada and Canadians from all over the world. There are over 30 first nations in the Churchill riding. They include Cree, Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Dene.

[*Translation*]

Over the past few years, I have travelled throughout northern Manitoba, and I have had the opportunity to visit and work with many people from regions all around my riding. Travelling and visiting the communities in my region is a priority for me.

The Address

[English]

My commitment overall is to be a strong voice for northern Manitoba and to bring forward our issues and our concerns to Parliament.

At a time when there is significant focus on the economy, it is important to recognize the experiences of people in northern Manitoba when it comes to the economy. In northern Manitoba, communities that depend on the forestry industry were and continue to be affected as a result of the softwood lumber deal. Mining communities as well as future development across the north have been impacted by the economic downturn. There are also communities that have very high rates of unemployment and have seen the destruction of traditional economic activities.

Along with our concern for the economic well-being of Canadians, we also need to look at their fundamental needs that are not being met. Let me turn to the issues for my riding of Churchill.

In terms of health, we need to look at the shortage of doctors and nurses all across northern Manitoba and across the northern and rural regions of Canada. We need a strong national strategy that assists the provinces in providing the health care that all Canadians deserve. We need to recognize the health needs of first nations where there are high rates of conditions and illness, such as diabetes and tuberculosis that reflect the third world conditions many first peoples encounter. This is unacceptable.

In terms of education, we need to see significant funding increases. As a former instructor for the University College of the North, we need to support institutions such as that one. We need to see an increase in post-secondary funding for first nations students. We talk about education being key; let us step up and make sure there is adequate support for it.

We need to look at primary education on first nations and the increase in spending required for aboriginal education, which is far below the provincial average. We need to look at the building of schools, such as in St. Theresa Point where there is a need for a new elementary school, in Nelson House where improvements need to be made to the high school, in Gods Lake Narrows where we need a new high school, and in Gods River where we need a new school, period.

In terms of transportation, we need to look at the needs of communities that have no roads and where all weather roads are melting at a very alarming rate as a result of the impacts of climate change. We need to look at building airports in communities that have no airports. The recent crash in northern Manitoba speaks to the need for improved transportation security. As someone who survived a plane crash, I see the need for the federal government to step up and make sure there is transportation security and sustainable ways of transportation for people in northern Canada.

We also need to see support from the federal government in terms of the bay line and the port of Churchill, important economic centres for our region. We also need to have a very good discussion in terms of the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board, an institution that supports the economy in northern Canada and benefits Canadians all across the country.

In terms of infrastructure, we need to look at more funding for affordable housing. The lack of affordable housing limits the diversification of many communities across my region. There are shameful housing conditions across first nations communities that need to be dealt with on an urgent basis. We also see the need for seniors housing.

We need to support child care. I come from one of the youngest regions in Canada. We need to make sure that there is funding for child care in terms of capital as well as programming in order to support young families in my region.

On the environment, for us northerners we have a close exposure to the impacts of climate change and the destruction of our environment. We see the ice lasting less and we see the change in wildlife patterns all across our region. Northerners are concerned about the preservation of our environment. We need to see action.

I would also like to bring forward the issues facing youth. In the throne speech we heard tough words on gangs and cracking down on youth crime. How about looking at the opportunities of young people and supporting our young people? As I said, I come from one of the youngest regions of Canada. The median age is 26.4 years. We have communities without recreation centres, without programming, without drop-in centres. We need to look at the positive contributions of young people. The Lance Runners Society, the Island Lake Regional Youth Council, and Tori Yetman are excellent examples of the initiatives being taken in our region. We need to look at building and supporting healthy initiatives and programs for our young people.

When we talk about the status of women, we need to address the inequality between women and men being faced in my region and across Canada. As the former chair of the Thompson Crisis Centre, we need to act and support the efforts being done in the area of domestic violence. We also need to support the important work being done in terms of the Stolen Sisters campaign and the need to eliminate violence against aboriginal women.

• (1610)

When it comes to these areas, people in northern Manitoba ask, where is the federal government? We need economic development, development that benefits communities all across our regions. We need to look into partnering in economic development agreements and supporting initiatives that are currently taking place.

However, there is a lack of vision for building a better Canada for all Canadians. There is a failure to deal with the needs and issues that Canadians face. I would like to see Parliament work together toward a vision for Canada that reflects the needs of Canadians all across this country. We need a vision that aims to realize social and economic justice for all.

We also need Canadians to be involved. First, there is a need to have a more civil Parliament, something which is essential. Canadians are not interested in lowbrow aggressive attacks and are looking toward important work getting done on their behalf. It is difficult to engage Canadians when all they see is negativity and a failure to address their important needs. We saw it in this election where there was one of the lowest turnouts ever and incredible amounts of cynicism.

The Address

Second, we need to make our electoral system and our political institutions inclusive and have them truly reflect who we are as a country. For example, the voter ID regulations disenfranchised many people across Canada.

Many of us ask why there are not more young people involved. Let us look at our institutions. Last week I was able to enter the Senate and listen to the throne speech as an MP. Despite the fact that I can be democratically elected to represent Canadians in the House of Commons, I would not, and neither would anybody under the age of the 30, be allowed to become a senator under the proposed reforms.

At the age of 18 one can vote, one can run for office, one can fight and die for one's country, but one cannot become a senator. This is blatant discrimination. The current version of Senate reform is the equivalent of operating on a fossil. This is not 1867; it is 2008. The Senate is an outdated institution that discriminates on the basis of age and should be abolished.

• (1615)

[Translation]

We need more young members in our Parliament. There are very few members under the age of 40. The lack of young female members in this House must also be noted.

[English]

I come here with a message for Parliament from the people of Churchill. Why, in the year 2008, in a country like Canada with so much wealth, can we not achieve social and economic justice for all? To quote the words of a great Manitoban, the founder of a political movement that I am proud to be part of, what we desire for ourselves, we wish for all.

I thank my constituents. Euxaristo Ekosi Meegwetch Masi-Cho.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your recent appointment as Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole. It is richly deserved.

I would like to congratulate my colleague from Churchill on her election and on her maiden speech. She obviously brings to this place a great deal of passion for the issues of concern to her constituents and all Canadians. I congratulate her.

I appreciated in particular her undertaking that we should try to be more focused on positive results for Canadians rather than, as she put it, the negativity that Canadians see. Perhaps she could start to demonstrate that at the beginning of her parliamentary career, which I hope will be an effective one. On occasion, perhaps once in a decade, the government actually does something that is worthy of praise. When I was in opposition, even though it pained me, I always tried to praise the government when it did things I agreed with.

For instance, she represents the north. The government increased substantially the northern residents tax credit. Would she care to comment on whether that has been helpful to her constituents?

Second, with respect to the minimum age in the Senate, she may be aware that is actually in the British North America Act. It is a

constitutional requirement. It is not something that is at the discretion of this government in terms of legislative reform.

Third, in terms of positive things, we actually have the youngest government caucus in history. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages is only 32 years of age and the Deputy Speaker is the youngest member of the House.

Finally, if the Wheat Board as she said is great for all Canadians, then why does it only apply to three provinces?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, people in the north need to deal with the serious issues of social and economic justice that they face.

As I outlined in my speech, there is a serious lack of response in terms of the sheer inequality and, quite frankly, the third world conditions that first nations face in northern Manitoba and all across Canada. We look forward to getting results in terms of realizing the rights and needs of first nations and aboriginal people all across this country.

In terms of age, while it is great to see members of different ages and, as I pointed out, younger members, we need to make sure that our system and our institutions do not discriminate against young people. We need to be looking out for specific legislation that discriminates based on age.

We also need to look at fixing the voter ID regulations which disenfranchise young people all across this country.

I look forward to working with all members in making sure that we have a system in place that truly reflects who we are and which represents our issues.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Churchill on her election and welcome her to the House.

I have a brief comment on her speech as it reflected on the throne speech.

It seems to me that our economy is almost certainly heading for a more conspicuous downturn than anything we have seen in the past. In fact, the throne speech was very much, in my view, an attempt to govern by looking into a rear-view mirror.

The Minister of Finance will tell us everything the government did last year, or the year before, or the year before that. We are looking at a serious economic issue here and some very serious fiscal stimulus needs to be directed into the economy by the government. The throne speech failed utterly to address that. It is imminent, and we will be going into our Christmas break in a couple of weeks.

Would the member care to comment on what I regard as a serious failure in the government's throne speech?

• (1620)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, in response to my colleague's comments, I encourage him and his caucus to vote against the throne speech which fails to deal with the issues that we need to act on for the benefit of Canadians.

We need to look at economic stimulus all across the region. In my speech I mentioned a number of areas, certainly in the area of infrastructure. This would benefit regions all across the country.

The Address

Let us not forget that we also need to look at the issue of social justice for Canadians as well. We cannot separate the two. An immense amount of wealth comes out of the regions where first nations, aboriginal people and northern people live, whether it is through mining, forestry, or whatever it might be. We deserve something back and we deserve it now.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate on the government's Speech from the Throne. I know that the number of members who can speak on this matter is limited and severely curtailed by the rules of the House, so I really am delighted to respond.

I am delighted for two reasons. The first one is, frankly, because I am still here and for that I want to thank the people of Hamilton Mountain who have given me the opportunity to be their champion in the House of Commons for a second term. I am deeply grateful for that.

Second, I am delighted to participate in this debate because it is central to setting this Parliament's agenda for dealing with the unprecedented downturn in the Canadian economy. Families in my riding, like Canadians right across the country, are profoundly worried about their jobs, about their pensions and about their savings. They are counting on the federal government to take bold and strategic steps, and they are looking to their members of Parliament to have courage in the face of adversity. Yet, the throne speech, which sets the agenda for this entire session of Parliament, fails to match the urgency or the depth required to protect working families in this economy.

Let me clear, our number one job is to protect Canadians during this economic crisis. I have heard members speak about the need to stimulate the economy. I have heard others rightly point out that we do not just need to stimulate the economy, but we need to stabilize it. The difference of course is more than mere semantics.

However, the bottom line is that the economy and the market are not some supernatural phenomenon. Neither were they created by divine law. They were man-made constructs and as such they are relationships that are governed by the rules that we created. These rules create a framework for determining winners and losers, and that makes it incumbent upon all of us to recognize that the economy is a moral question.

As Tommy Douglas used to say, the economy is made for man, not man for the economy. Yet we have built economic structures that serve powerful global forces acting in their own interest, presenting profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the guiding norm of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right. The sky was the limit and there seemed to be no concomitant social obligations. We were all led to believe that governments are the problem and that markets are the solution.

If the current economic crisis has proven nothing else, it is that markets cannot do it alone. Yes, markets can bring prosperity, but governments not only have a role to play, they have a responsibility to act. For far too long now our economy has failed to serve the needs and the aspirations of Canadians. In fact, workers in our

country have now paid four times for the economic crisis that we are in.

First, they have lost their jobs. Since 2006, Canada has lost over 151,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone. Unemployment is projected to rise to 7% by next year and our industrial heartland is decaying around us.

Second, workers have paid with their pensions. Workplace pensions and private pensions have all taken a huge hit as a result of the market collapse and those close to retirement are spending tomorrow's savings to make it through today.

Third, workers no longer have adequate access to protection through employment insurance. Nationally only 38% of unemployed workers receive government benefits, down from 75% in the early nineties. Workers paid for this insurance coverage and yet they cannot count on it when they need it most.

Of course, they are now paying for this economic crisis a fourth time as their tax dollars are going to bail out corporations like the banks. It is time to say enough is enough.

It is time to right the balance and work to stabilize the economy in such a way that it will serve Canadians. It is time to be bold and it is time to be strategic. It is time to roll up our sleeves and work together to build an economy that serves the needs and aspirations of our people.

As the very first step, we have to abandon the Conservative government's policies of throwing money away on unconditional corporate tax cuts. Unconditional tax cuts will not provide the stimulus that our economy requires. Quite the opposite. Tax cuts only benefit those corporations that are profitable enough to pay taxes. If a company is in danger of collapse, it does not pay taxes and blanket tax cuts do nothing to help it to survive.

Moreover, we should not be providing tax breaks to companies that outsource or ship jobs overseas. In my hometown of Hamilton people will remember what happened at the John Deere plant just down the road in Welland. John Deere gladly pocketed the tax breaks and then closed its profitable plant and shipped the jobs down to Mexico.

●(1625)

Unconditional corporate tax cuts are not the answer to revitalizing the Canadian economy, yet these corporate tax cuts will cost the government \$7.3 billion in 2009-10 alone. That money would be so much better spent on investing in the inherent productivity that resides in the talent, creativity and energy of Canadians. We need to invest in the real economy.

Let us look again at the four ways, that I mentioned earlier, in which Canada's workers have paid for this economic crisis and let us look for solutions for each.

The Address

First and foremost, we need to develop an economic stimulus package to create jobs. In the short term, that means strategic investments in infrastructure. Let us commit to an ambitious plan to partner with communities to repair our crumbling cities, invest in public transit and build affordable housing. I know that the city of Hamilton, for example, is ready to start construction now on a new sewer and water plant. The planning is done. The engineering is done. With the federal government's support, construction could begin immediately. It is good for workers, good for suppliers, and good for the city of Hamilton.

I know that municipalities in other parts of the country have similar jobs that are virtually shovel ready. Projects related to energy retrofitting homes and buildings, expanding our renewable energy capacity, and improving our communications technology backbone also offer economic stimuli. Of course, we need to support the manufacturing and auto sectors, not by writing blank cheques to perpetuate the status quo, but by providing the kind of financial assistance that will transform the industries and keep jobs in Canada.

Second, we need to protect the pensions of hard-working Canadians. This has to be done in consultation with labour, with business and the provinces, so that we can explore programs like a pension insurance program. In the last Parliament, I introduced Bill C-270, which would have given workers' pensions super priority in cases of commercial bankruptcies. Legislation such as this is still a critical part of the solution in safeguarding Canadians' pensions.

For those Canadians who are over the age of 71, let us at least consider a moratorium on mandatory RRIF withdrawals. I think all Canadian retirees were profoundly disappointed that pensions were not even mentioned in last week's Speech from the Throne.

Similarly, the throne speech was silent on reform to Canada's system of employment insurance. As a result of the rule changes that recent governments have made to the system, unemployed people must now all but exhaust their savings before EI is even available to them. Let us fix EI. It is a critical tool for poverty prevention and the money that unemployed Canadians receive will flow directly back into the local economy, thereby helping to create badly needed jobs and keeping small businesses afloat.

There was a time when EI was a vital part of retraining and skills development assistance. That is no longer the case. In fact, we have no national training strategy at all. Tackling the skills shortage must be part of the solution if we do not want to further compound the length and depth of this economic downturn.

Finally, let us talk about the contribution Canadians have already made to ailing sectors of our economy such as financial institutions. To date, they have contributed \$75 billion just to secure our banks. They need to be assured that there will be strong oversight that tracks where that money is going. Whenever sectoral assistance is provided, taxpayers need a full and transparent accounting, and where appropriate, an equity stake in return.

These are just four areas for concrete action, and yes, they do represent bold steps, but hard-working Canadians deserve no less. They already know that New Democrats are committed to making the economy work for them, and despite the fact that the throne

speech failed to stand up for working families and the middle class, it is not too late to protect their jobs, their pensions and their savings.

In just a couple of days the Minister of Finance will table his economic update. Perhaps that will give Canadians a few more specifics, but if it too remains tepid in its approach to protecting working families in these tough economic times, then we in the NDP will roll up our sleeves and work with our partners in labour, in civil society, and in our own communities to give Canadians the leadership they deserve.

We commit to being constructive and we hope the government will do the same, because as Tommy used to say, it is not too late to build a better world.

● (1630)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to add my congratulations to your recent appointment. It was well deserved.

I just have a very simple question for my hon. colleague and I thank her for her remarks. The NDP plans to vote against the throne speech. That is clear. Does she encourage all members of the opposition parties to vote against the throne speech and thus bring on another federal election?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, but I also understand the cynicism in the question that has been posed.

Right now the job that is before us as a Parliament is to protect Canadians. It is to protect their jobs. It is to protect their pensions. It is to protect their savings. I appreciate the fact that some members on the opposite side of the House have said that they are willing to work together. What I aimed to do in my speech today was to make concrete proposals in which we can work together.

The Minister of Finance has unfortunately said that the economic update is going to offer little for Canadian families, but we do have an opportunity between now and the budget in the spring to really show Canadians that we are willing to make this Parliament work, that it is not about us but it is about them. It is about workers in our communities. It is about their families, and in some instances, it is about the very survival of those communities.

I am prepared to work with the government. I am prepared to work with anyone who has the same interests at heart, and I do think we can make this Parliament work.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will carry on with the line of questioning of the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

First, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain on her re-election.

The Address

I am sure the member for Edmonton Centre would also agree that the leader of the NDP is on the campaign trail constantly. In fact, recently he was on the campaign trail and Canadians rejected his application to be the prime minister, and not only his application to be the prime minister, but to be the second or third party in the House.

On one side we see the Prime Minister as being very irresponsible when he put this country into this deficit situation, but on the other hand, the leader of the NDP is constantly campaigning and wants to bring the government down.

Does the member not agree that the NDP leader is equally irresponsible in this House?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for so eloquently pointing out our leader's consistency in not being afraid to be an advocate and a champion for working and middle class families across Canada.

The hon. member is absolutely right, there are huge differences of opinion on this side of the House and the government. He is also absolutely right in pointing out that sometimes the Liberal Party agrees with the government and sometimes it agrees with us. It is never quite clear who the Liberal Party supports.

I do not make any apologies at all for being firmly on the side of working families in this country who are looking to this Parliament right now for help. Their jobs are at stake. Their pensions are at stake. Their savings are at stake. This is not a time to play politics. This is a time to stand firm, so that they know whose corner we are in. I think they know exactly which corner the NDP is in and we are proud of the commitment that we have made to them.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for her speech and, in particular, for speaking about the survival of workers. Where I live, forestry workers are in a lot of trouble. We have had a number of sawmill closures. We have had secondary industry. I wonder if she could speak specifically to some of the solutions that she can see for the forestry sector.

• (1635)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan is hugely concerned about the future of some of the industries in her community and indeed right across British Columbia. We share a commonality of concern because what is happening to the forestry sector, of course, is also happening to the manufacturing sector in my community.

We will not often find, I do not think, a New Democrat quoting from the Conference Board of Canada in this House, but we actually do agree. One of the things we need to do is to look at ensuring access to credit. That is absolutely critical at this particular time in our economic history. The board states:

Banks are preoccupied with strengthening their balance sheets to withstand a prolonged slowdown. This preoccupation means that many firms are having a harder time accessing the credit they need to stay in business.

What can the government do at this stage? It can help to bridge the current gaps in the financial system by supporting the extension of credit to firms to help them through the economic slowdown. I do not think anybody is suggesting that we do not need to do that with

some kind of accountability. It has to be about more than crisis management. We need to look at business plans for the medium and long term, but we need to explore those solutions because the very future of companies and, therefore, thousands of jobs in this country depend on us being bold and innovative at this particular time.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first occasion to address the 40th Parliament, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the voters of Northumberland—Quinte West for returning me to this august place. It is a tremendous honour and privilege to serve them. It is in that interest that I want to remind everyone that the government made commitments in the last election and that we will keep those commitments.

Some of those commitments were in the Speech from the Throne, to which I will speak. The points I will be talking about this afternoon include support for transfers, support for Ontario infrastructure, small and medium-sized business and how we will cut red tape, support for industry and transitional help for workers. We need a common securities regulator and, in particular and of special interest to Northumberland—Quinte West, support for our farming community.

One of the hallmarks of our federation has been the balance we have created between the so-called have and have-not provinces. As a member of Parliament for Ontario, I am acutely aware that Ontarians have for many years been a significant contributor to attaining that balance. I have heard from the Premier of Ontario, my local member of provincial Parliament as well as constituents who want and quite frankly need to know what our government is doing in regard to Ontario.

It is about fiscal fairness after all, is it not? It should not be about paternalistic arrangements between the federal and provincial governments, but more a partnership. What our government has strove for, and I believe has achieved, is precisely just that balance. It will change from time to time, but it should always be about fairness. What is good for one partner in confederation should be good for all, and that is the standard we constantly strive to attain.

Fiscal fairness is about ensuring Ontario has the funds and support it needs to meet its responsibility under the constitution, which includes vital programs such as health care, child care, post-secondary education and social programs. We know the federal government plays an important role in supporting Ontario and delivering for Ontarians. We also know that Ontario is and will continue to be a leader among the provinces and that it must be treated equitably by the federal government. Ontario should never have to suffer second-class services because of unfair treatment from Ottawa.

We have been in office for a little over two and a half years. We are the longest continuous minority government, and what have we done?

Budget 2007 established a per capita based formula for the Canada health and social transfers. This is the money the federal government gives to support health and social services in the provinces. Per capita based funding is important to Ontario, as Ontario is Canada's most populous province and thus changes will significantly approve the ability of Ontario to deliver for Ontarians.

The Address

On this plan, no province that receives equalization funding will have a higher fiscal capacity than the province that does not receive the funding. These changes were agreed to by all first ministers, including the Premier of Ontario, and they will come into effect when the current agreement expires in 2014-15.

The question then becomes: How can we help Ontario in the time left in the old agreement? To help transition to this new arrangement, we have implemented an automatic 6% annual escalator in health care transfer funding. The health transfer for 2007-08 to Ontario is \$8.5 billion. By 2013-14, this transfer will rise to \$11 billion. That is a 30% increase in health funding in just five years.

We have also increased funding for social programs in Ontario through the social transfer, which has been strengthened to \$3.7 billion. This amount will grow annually by 3% per year until a new agreement comes into effect. Part of the social transfer, some \$411 million, is dedicated to child care spaces and post-secondary education.

• (1640)

However, there is more. The Conservative government also sees that it has an important role in supporting Ontario's municipalities and supporting infrastructure renewal. That is why we have recently signed an agreement with Ontario called "Building Canada". This is a \$6.26 billion agreement to be paid out over the next several years and is dedicated to improvements to infrastructure. The federal government knows that our communities need predictable funding for infrastructure.

At this point, I would like to mention my first meeting with the Northumberland county council in 2006, shortly after that federal election.

When I met with the county councillors, the meeting primarily concerned agriculture. All of the candidates involved in that election attended the meeting. We all renewed our commitment to agriculture. However, during that meeting, several of the councillors, and indeed the warden, indicated to their newly-elected member that they needed some long-term sustainable funding, something that when they were constructing their budgets, they could count on from the federal government. While they appreciated different programs, they needed some long-term sustainable funding.

I heard what they said. Our government heard what they said. I am happy to say that as part of the building Canada agreement, we have made the gas tax refund to our communities permanent. For the county of Northumberland, that means approximately \$2.5 million per year from now on, so when it is doing its budgets, it can count on that amount of money. For the municipality or the city of Quinte West, that is a little over \$2.6 million. It is significant money because it is using that not only to pave streets and fix bridges, but to bring fresh potable water to communities, to renew infrastructure that had been deteriorating.

This means for our municipalities, both large and small, access to \$2.9 billion a year for local roads and other projects.

They also failed to mention some other long-term funding programs that we brought in, and one in particular is the 100% GST rebate to the municipalities. To some that might not seem a lot when we talk about staplers or stationery, but when a small or medium-

sized municipality needs to buy a dump truck or a road grader, that is a significant return.

In addition, we have also agreed to support Ontario with over \$3 billion for infrastructure programs, which includes funding for connectivity.

I need not tell the House or I need not tell any Canadian how important connectivity is. In the Speech from the Throne our Prime Minister indicated that connectivity was very important for this government.

I have to take my hat off to the member for Prince Edward—Hastings in his leadership in eastern Ontario in this area. We have been working with the eastern Ontario wardens caucus. We believe that with its help we will be able to continue to work together. I believe we will be able to secure funding for connectivity for eastern Ontario, let alone all of Canada, as the Prime Minister has indicated.

Therefore, we can see that the government has a proven record to address the issues of fiscal fairness. We have a long-term plan to address this, which the Premier of Ontario supports. It is principles-based and it supports important services, from health care, to social programs, to daycare spaces, to post-secondary education and to infrastructure needs.

While we are talking about infrastructure, I was approached shortly after my election by numerous municipal mayors and councillors. They spoke to me in particular about the former Canada-Ontario infrastructure program and the fact that when this program was brought in, there were significant cost overruns because everybody was doing the same thing at the same time.

• (1645)

There were increases in construction costs. In addition, there were some regulatory changes to freshwater in Ontario. That drove up the cost of these projects and there were overruns. This was a one-third shared costing. The municipalities and the provinces agreed to share in the cost overruns, but the previous government did not.

When the Conservatives took office, the mayors reiterated their desire that the federal government come forward with its one-third of the cost overruns. I am happy to say that this government was able to provide \$50 million of that for the province of Ontario. In Northumberland—Quinte West announcements have been made, totalling some \$3 million to help with those cost overruns.

Also while we are talking about infrastructure, it is important that I remind the residents of Northumberland—Quinte West as well as the greater Quinte area of the tremendous investments that we have been making in the infrastructure at CFB Trenton. We will recall our commitment in 2005-06 to refurbish and rebuild the Canadian Armed Forces which for many years had been neglected.

The Address

Part of that refurbishment was the purchase of strategic and tactical lift aircraft. What does that mean for CFB Trenton, which is Canada's air force hub? It meant the necessity of completely renovating and creating new places to store the new aircraft. If anyone drives by CFB Trenton 8 Wing, it is a hub of activity. Hundreds of millions of dollars over the next several years will be invested in CFB Trenton. That whole base will be transformed, thus creating hundreds of good paying jobs right across Northumberland—Quinte West and the greater Quinte region.

In addition, the government promised and made an announcement that JTF2 would be relocated to CFB Trenton. This will require significant infrastructure changes also. Again, hundreds of new jobs will be coming into the community.

What does that mean? The spinoffs are tremendous. It means we have to create housing for these hundreds of new families. They are going to purchase new cars and the spinoffs are numerous.

We also promised in the Speech from the Throne to cut red tape for small and medium-sized businesses. Our government will cut the red tape faced by private and not-for-profit sectors when doing business with the government. Our government is committed to reforming and streamlining the way it does business and we will pursue innovative reforms to the administration of programs and services. Reducing the administrative and paper burden on Canadian businesses improves Canada's competitiveness and supports small business.

Our government has committed to reduce the paper burden on companies by 20% so all parties can spend less time and money on paperwork. Our government also will deliver on its promise for formalize a process for measuring, reporting on and decreasing the paper burden over the long term.

In May of 2008 our government announced it was on track to meet this commitment through streamlined regulations, the elimination of duplicate or overlapping obligations and fewer filing requirements. For example, we have already eased the tax compliance burden on businesses by reducing record keeping requirements for automobile expense deductions and taxable benefits. With the resumption of Parliament, we will continue to act.

In June 2008 the government introduced the Canada not-for-profit corporations act, which promises to significantly modernize Canada's not-for-profit legislation for the first time since 1917. It would promote accountability, transparency and good corporate governance for the non-profit sector.

• (1650)

I will now talk about helping workers to re-enter the labour force. The government has committed to funding various measures to help displaced workers in Ontario to re-enter the labour force. One of them includes the labour market development agreement under EI, which is part II of the Employment Insurance Act. It would allow Ontario to assume an expanded role in the design and delivery of labour market development programs.

The labour market agreement provides \$1.2 billion over the next several years to Ontario. The agreement stipulates that Ontario will provide programs to labour market participation by assisting individuals to prepare for entry to or return to employment or to

otherwise obtain or keep employment or maintain skills for employment. This means more resources for unemployed individuals not eligible for certain employment insurance programs, especially those with lower level skills or who are working in low skill jobs.

With respect to the community development trust, the Province of Ontario will receive just under \$360 million to improve productivity and competitiveness, support technology development and assist communities and workers affected by changes in agriculture, forestry and manufacturing.

The \$9.2 billion Building Canada announcement made recently will result in the creation of a significant number of infrastructure related 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 as we know. Our government will provide further support for these industries. One example is the accelerated capital cost allowance which permits companies to write down very quickly investments in equipment, buildings, computers, to increase productivity and make them and our country more competitive worldwide.

Through Advantage Canada, our economic plan and recent budgets, we have made significant progress toward creating a business environment aimed at promoting long-term investment, innovation and job creation across all sectors of the Canadian economy.

We recognize the strategic importance of the Canadian manufacturing sector and the challenging financial conditions and global competitiveness it faces.

Our government has already cut taxes to lower costs for business to help them compete and create jobs. By 2012-13, the Government of Canada will have provided more than \$9 billion in tax relief to the manufacturing sector.

We are committed to further strengthening financial oversight in Canada. Our government will work with the provinces for a common securities regulator.

Our government's new integrated approach toward farm support provides producers with comprehensive income protection against various hazards ranging from income variability under AgriStability and AgriInvest, to natural hazards under AgriInsurance and disasters under AgriRecovery, as well as easier access to credit through cash advances under the advance payments program.

The Address

This government is committed to agriculture. We have a suite of programs. This commitment is significant. Since our government took office some few short years ago, over \$4.5 billion has been invested in our agricultural community and we intend to maintain that support to our agricultural community.

• (1655)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I make my comments, I want to congratulate you on your new assignment. I am confident that you will treat us all in a very fair and equitable way. At the same time, I congratulate the member Northumberland—Quinte West on his re-election.

I want to make a few comments or clarifications before I ask my questions. I want, for the benefit of Canadians, to know this. He talked about CFB Trenton, refurbishing of our military and so on.

I remember asking the then Minister of National Defence and the CDS, General Hillier at that time, because they were talking about the \$14 billion in new funding. I asked three times and I finally got their answer to my question, which was: Is that the \$14 billion that the Liberals put in, plus \$14 billion that you guys put in, for \$28 million? For the record, they clarified that it was the \$14 billion that the Liberals put in because they put in no new money. That is just for the record.

Secondly, I want to clarify this. The member said that they gave a 100% GST rebate to the cities. For the record, and the member can look it up, that was done under a Liberal administration.

I come from Scarborough in the city of Toronto. My city is being starved. It is having to look at other ways and means and ways to raise money. For example, every person who drives, seniors or young students, must pay an additional \$60. Garbage now has additional fees. Therefore, the 2% reduction goes some way. We can talk about England. England charged 19% and it has reduced it by 2%. They might have taken off 2% but they are getting it from the other end.

The member said, "What is good for one partner in Confederation is good for all". I agree with him but why are Ontarians being treated with second-class services or, as he said, as second class citizens? They get less for health, less for EI and the list goes on. They pay the same Canadian dollars and in the same country. Why is the government and the Prime Minister treating the city of Toronto in an unfair way? Does the member not like Torontonians?

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his re-election but I find a lot of irony in much of what he says.

He used a big brush in many questions but I will start with Canada's armed forces. No one in this country is under any illusions that this government does not support the armed forces. He is talking about Liberal money and what the Liberals did. It is not Liberal money and it is not Conservative money. It is Canadian taxpayer dollars.

I did not see any orders for any new aircraft under the previous government. The Liberals made a lot of promises for a lot of things but did not deliver. The people in my riding and the people of Canada have seen what we have delivered to the Canadian armed forces: better equipment, more equipment and the kinds of aircraft

that we absolutely need, and not just for some of the jobs we do overseas.

I am talking particularly about the C-17. Instead of having three or four of the older style Hercules that we are still using and flying, which are good aircraft but we need to replace them because they are getting old, it used to take two, three or four of those to transport the group from Kingston who have the water, or even an army hospital. Today one C-17 flight will deliver that. The reason we had trouble delivering our aid throughout the world is that we did not have the aircraft available. We now have them.

When we talk about aid for cities, under this government Toronto has received hundreds of millions of dollars for public transportation. We will continue to work with the province of Ontario, as I mentioned, through the Building Canada fund.

While the member would like to take credit for all the good things we have done, quite frankly, we have delivered. It is not just promises.

• (1700)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member on his re-election to this House.

My question concerns some of his remarks about unemployed workers. The member was in the House, as was I, earlier when we heard some statistics about employment insurance. We heard that only 38% of workers who pay into the employment insurance fund now qualify for benefits. This is down from 75% in the early 1990s. A decline, I might add, that began under the previous Liberal government which did nothing to repair that problem.

We also saw the employment insurance surplus essentially being confiscated by the government, which amounts to taking premiums that were paid by the workers for their own employment insurance needs and taking those funds improperly away from them.

Even if workers qualify for employment insurance, the amount of money they receive, slightly over \$400 a week for a duration, is insufficient. The amount has not been raised in far too many years and it is insufficient to provide the kind of security that workers need.

Employment insurance is just that, it is insurance, but increasingly it is insurance that workers cannot access or collect, notwithstanding that they paid the premiums. Workers are concerned. All economists are saying that there will be increased unemployment over the next year or two. Will the member work with his caucus to address the need to increase employment insurance receipts, to increase the duration of benefits and to ensure more workers qualify?

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to the House. He has my assurance that I will work with him, his party and all members here to make life better for Canadians, which is why Canadians sent us here. Despite our political affiliations and the fact that we all represent sometimes different philosophies, we all have the same interests at heart and that is this country and the health and well-being of its citizens.

The Address

To that end, this government remains committed to helping those who are unemployed. Today we heard during question period the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development answer some questions from the Bloc Québécois with regard to what was happening to older workers in the province of Quebec. We know there are programs that we brought in to help address that.

In addition, in the Speech from the Throne we mentioned the labour market agreement with Ontario, and I think we share those interests. We have invested significant dollars, \$1.2 billion in retraining, skills development and upgrading skills. So, yes, he has not only mine but the government's commitment to keep working with him and his party and all Canadians to help develop and bring in those programs that are needed.

However, what we would like to do is bring in the best program that will create jobs for Canadians, which is why we announced the Building Canada program. The province of Ontario will receive \$9.2 billion for infrastructure in Ontario, for border crossings, highways and water projects right across the country but our province especially, since we share a province, in order to increase employment and help alleviate the unemployment numbers. I do not think any of us are happy with the numbers so we need to work toward decreasing them.

However, as we look to the future, we need to look at what we have done in the past, unprecedented employment numbers. We will work very hard to maintain that kind—

• (1705)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for that very wise decision.

The Conservative member spoke a lot about his government's openness towards opposition suggestions. Incidentally, the Bloc Québécois, through its finance critic, made suggestions this week. We keep hearing that the government is very open, that we must work together in the spirit of cooperation and non-partisanship, and I think that is great.

I would simply like to ask the member to give us a list of some examples of measures in the throne speech that came from the opposition—examples that would illustrate this supposed openness, that come from opposition parties and do not reflect the Conservative government's policies.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, I think today we heard the finance minister thank the leader of the Bloc for his input. I think everybody in the House, over the several days during which we have been speaking about the Speech from the Throne, has been saying that we have to stimulate the economy and we have to invest in our country.

We have already pointed out some of the things which we have done in the past that has helped take the edge off the current crisis that is worldwide, which was not created by Canada but of which we are going to feel the effects. Our promise and our commitment was

to listen, and to incorporate some of those suggestions in our plan as we move forward.

In about 48 hours we are going to know the general direction in which that is occurring. I think Canadians are very happy quite frankly that we are co-operating.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

It is truly an honour to speak in this House for the first time. I will start by sincerely thanking the voters of the riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who showed their trust in me by choosing me as their representative on October 14. I owe this privilege to them, and I am committed to getting started on the job they elected me to do: representing their interests in Parliament, and being there to listen to their concerns.

I must also say that our campaign would not have been so successful without the hard work of my election committee. I warmly thank each and every one of the members of this team who were dedicated and enthusiastic.

My thanks would not be complete if I did not mention my family. Their support, love and assistance were vital to me during this election campaign, and I thank them very much for being there for me.

Today, in this, my first speech I would like to address some issues that were very much in the forefront during my campaign, yet unfortunately do not seem to have been given the importance they deserve in the Speech from the Throne. I therefore wish to speak for the most part about agriculture, forestry and the funding of not-for-profit organizations. These are vital issues for the people in my riding and for the regions of Quebec in general.

First of all, the agri-food industry is responsible for nearly 20% of all the jobs in the lower St. Lawrence region, and agriculture makes up the bulk of that industry. This in large part explains why my concerns focus on development of the agricultural sector. It is also why I, as a member of Parliament, will be calling for the government to pay particular attention to this issue.

What is more, as a dairy farmer myself, I am well placed to speak about the agricultural reality and the difficulties agricultural producers are facing at this time. There are really a great many challenges: we have to adapt to a demand for more diversified products, to international competition, to stricter environmental requirements. With respect to the latter, even though the farmers of the lower St. Lawrence region have long been environmentally aware and involved, there is always a need for more investment in order to keep abreast of current standards. So what the agricultural sector needs, and what is totally missing from the throne speech, is solid agricultural policies such as adequate federal financial support that will offer all the flexibility Quebec farmers have been demanding for years, and allow them to continue their chosen way of life and to continue to feed the community.

The Address

I find that that the Conservative government has a great deal of difficulty understanding that Quebec agriculture is unlike agriculture in the rest of Canada. Quebec has opted for a more people-oriented agriculture, one that is less focused on exports. The Conservative government also does not seem to understand the crucial importance of maintaining supply management for Quebec agriculture. Rather than offering a genuine guarantee that it will defend supply management in international negotiations without making compromises, the government has simply stated that it will defend it. Thus, we are very skeptical about how willing this government really is to protect farmers, especially since some statements by Conservative ministers suggest that they are hoping to reach an agreement at the WTO even if it is to the detriment of supply management.

Thus, agriculture will remain one of the core priorities for me as well as for the Bloc Québécois. We will be vigilant and will not allow the Conservative government's indifference to override the needs of the citizens of Quebec regions.

There is the same disappointment in the forestry sector. There is no substantive assistance program to deal with the crisis. In the throne speech, the government says it wants to continue helping the forestry sector with measures that promote innovation and the sale of goods abroad. In other words, the government is opting for the status quo. It is proposing very modest measures, which had already been announced in the last budget and did not really help the forestry sector get through the crisis.

In my riding, where private producers are in the majority, expectations were much higher. After two troubled years, the forestry producers find themselves in a difficult situation where production costs continue to rise and profits are non-existent.

● (1710)

The very survival of many woodlot-based family businesses is in jeopardy. Business owners and producers in the forestry sector need to be supported in their efforts. Assistance for research and innovation is also needed for the forestry industry, particularly, for secondary and tertiary processing.

It is also important to promote the creation of small businesses through research and development. The government could have used some of the Bloc Québécois' proposals, such as granting loan guarantees to help companies modernize, making the research and development tax credit a refundable credit for existing and new businesses, and enforcing regulations requiring all federal agencies to use forest products in federal building projects. These measures could be very beneficial for the forestry sector, but the Conservative government does not seem to be interested in them.

As a final point, I would like to discuss a third issue my constituents are very concerned about, namely, the funding of not-for-profit organizations of an economic nature. Naturally, I cannot help but mention the cuts announced this year by the former Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, cuts that are already having a serious impact on organizations and research centres in my riding. This shows the Conservative government's completely irresponsible attitude, considering the importance of federal funding in the operational activities of many such organizations. The government should

reverse its decision and ensure that the approved funding is maintained and renewed.

Many organizations and centres in the lower St. Lawrence region benefit from this financial support, including the Centre de recherche sur les biotechnologies marines and the Technopole maritime du Québec, which in turn greatly benefit the region and have made Rimouski a leader in the marine sector. The current Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) should reinstate the financial support and, at the very least, give these organizations an alternative to ensure their long-term survival. It is unthinkable that such organizations could disappear for lack of funding when we know that the federal government has the money. The real problem is the government's policy direction. It is the government's lack of vision and its indifference toward regional development in Quebec.

We must not forget that not-for-profit organizations generate economic spinoffs for the region. They respond to community expectations and use people's expertise. These strengths and abilities would otherwise be lost. The government could get smart and take advantage of all the money the organizations have invested in recent years by involving them in a real economic recovery plan. In the coming months, we will see what the Conservative government does about this issue, but we are already very concerned about the insensitivity the government has shown to date. The government was not willing to negotiate, even after many people in Quebec spoke out and condemned the incomprehensible cuts the Conservative government had made.

For all these and other reasons, the Bloc Québécois cannot support the throne speech.

● (1715)

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate you. I am pleased to see you are back in the chair. You do a very good job of trying to keep order among a bunch of us who sometimes do get a bit out of hand, so I wish you luck with that.

In listening to the comments from the hon. member, clearly jobs are a big issue in the area he represents, and of course, we are all very concerned about the economy and the possible consequences of the economic downturn.

What particular area in his riding will be the most hit in this economic downturn if it ends up to be to the extent that we are hearing? What would he suggest the government should be doing, since we are trying to work in a positive way in coming up with suggestions as Parliamentarians, so that we can all work toward trying to find some solutions?

The Address

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, it should do everything it can to defend supply management, which is very important for the lower Saint Lawrence region, as it is for the rest of Quebec as well; restore funding to not-for-profit organizations, which do excellent work and just want to survive; and, once and for all, look after the forestry sector, which is very important for my region, as it is for the rest of Quebec as well, in order to preserve jobs and to continue to develop these areas of activity, and why not.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the new member for Rimouski.

He has spoken a great deal about the forestry sector. As he is well aware, there has in fact been an alliance between the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Bloc, with a view to advancing the softwood lumber agreement. As he also is well aware, I am sure, the softwood lumber agreement resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs across Canada, thousands in Quebec in regions like Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Mauricie, the Outaouais and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean. As well, it has severely hobbled the Government of Quebec when it comes to anything to do with forestry. Now it cannot act without Washington's approval.

Nevertheless, the Bloc Québécois did support that agreement, and as a result Quebec can no longer act when it comes to forestry.

I am certain that the new member has realized it was a monumental mistake on the part of the Bloc to have supported the Conservative Party in an area in which Quebec has effectively lost its jurisdiction as well as thousands of jobs. Now the Bloc leader is blaming the unions, blaming Guy Chevrette, blaming anybody and everybody, but it must be admitted that some of the responsibility lies here.

Can the hon. member acknowledge that it was a mistake to have supported this agreement, which has had such costly repercussions?

• (1720)

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, it seems that the NDP was the only party that felt that way. There was a consensus in Quebec to make that decision to deal with the softwood lumber crisis.

I repeat: with respect to the situation in my riding and in eastern Quebec, in the Lower St. Lawrence region—the situation facing the owners of private woodlots whom I represent—government policies on research and development have to be refocused on secondary and tertiary processing to get the industry out of this unfortunate ongoing crisis.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Richmond—Arthabaska for a very quick question.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques on his first speech, and especially on his election. His was a brilliant victory that we are very proud of, particularly because he is an agricultural producer, which will certainly make the Bloc Québécois team stronger in that regard. We are indeed present; we now represent all of rural Quebec, which is an extraordinary achievement. I would like to congratulate my colleague on the excellent work he will no doubt do with us.

Everyone expected the throne speech to focus almost exclusively on the economy. When I read the speech, I found mention of young offenders, nuclear development, and increased military spending. It seemed to me that the throne speech was merely a continuation of the Conservatives' election campaign.

My colleague is a dairy producer, so I am sure he understands the issue. The Conservatives made promises about agriculture during the campaign, including a \$50-million promise involving the Colbex-Levinoff slaughterhouse. However, there is nothing about that in the throne speech.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques has just 30 seconds for his response.

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

There is indeed a serious problem right now in Quebec and eastern Canada with respect to slaughterhouses for cull cows. For several years now, the Fédération des producteurs de boeuf du Québec and the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec have been asking Ottawa for a financial commitment to help the Colbex-Levinoff slaughterhouse improve its competitiveness, which was undermined by federal government standards—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

The member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, naturally I would first like to congratulate you on your appointment as well as congratulate all of the members who were elected or re-elected. I would also like to thank the people of the riding I represent, Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, and express my tremendous pride in this region. I am here for my third consecutive mandate, since 2004, to defend the interests of the people from the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, who care about their region and who also care about having a better future. First of all, I would like to say that my region has dreams of sovereignty. That day will come. As our late father of sovereignty, and citizen of the Gaspé, René Lévesque, said: Next time.

Countries are built one day at a time. That is what we see here. A country can also be destroyed one day at a time. Unfortunately, that is what we are seeing here today. The Speech from the Throne is a blatant display of insensitivity towards people in the regions in particular. I would like to speak about the regions. I will let those who live in cities say what they have to say. The Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands and other similar regions were expecting some form of understanding or concern for our situation, especially in terms of our current economic and financial troubles. Unfortunately, we are well aware that a Speech from the Throne is a speech of intentions. It can be as vague as vague can be. But we would be hard-pressed to find one more vague and insensitive than this.

The Address

This speech does not acknowledge in any way that people living in regions such as ours are deeply affected by decisions made here and elsewhere. I will talk about the fisheries. We know very well that this resource is exported. We know the importance of the fisheries in the area I represent. It is dependent on exports of lobster, shrimp, crab or other species. It is also dependent on certain infrastructures and on other elements that make up the famous fishing industry. These could be very well positioned to deal with the current crisis or the perceived crisis. They might even keep our region going very nicely.

I will simply reiterate certain points that I had the opportunity to present during the last election campaign. I will speak about five points. I had the chance to present a plan to better position our region. One of these plans had to do with the economy which, of necessity, requires a discussion of the state of the region, in particular its infrastructures, whether rail, marine, air or communications. The Speech from the Throne does not acknowledge such matters. It does not acknowledge the basic infrastructure needs. Whether we like it or not, regions such as ours need these infrastructures. Not only must they be appropriate but they must also be available. It is fine to have a train. However, in my area, passenger train service is only available three times per week. Thus, it is not really available. It goes by on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. What happens on the other days?

• (1725)

The people in Matapédia have to make do with a train that runs six days a week, every day but Monday. One can imagine the logistical nightmare this creates for people who need to take the train, and God knows they do need to take the train at times.

The situation with regard to federal infrastructure is scandalous and shameful. I am talking about wharves and small craft harbours. I have been here for eight years, nearly five of them as a member of Parliament. Previously, I was an assistant. The Bloc has consistently championed the cause of small craft harbours. At one time, prior to 2000, the budget for small craft harbour maintenance and repairs was \$50 million. Today, it is \$100 million a year. That could give the impression that things have improved, but they have deteriorated. In fact, the department itself admits that more than \$500 million is needed. The figures speak for themselves. If there is \$100 million a year for all the wharves but \$500 million is needed to restore them, it is like a leaky roof that is never repaired. Eventually, the roof will collapse. That is exactly what is happening with our harbours.

Economically, the regions are forgotten, neglected and ultimately cast aside in other ways as well. Federal programs such as those created by the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec have no flexibility. For regions such as ours, if a program is introduced and not adapted to the regional reality it might as well not exist, however attractive it may be in other respects. That is exactly what is happening with the Conservative government at present. Unfortunately, I do not see any indication in the throne speech that the government intends to change things. But our finance and other critics can be counted on to again raise the issue of modifying programs.

The people of my riding are also concerned about the environment. Ours is a maritime region. Changes in climate or sea

level are a matter of life and death for some places, such as the Magdalen Islands for instance. That is why there is such sensitivity about this issue. Unfortunately there is not much in the throne speech, with the possible exception of the intention to protect the economy and to render the environment more economic than sustainable. They are totally missing the boat with that. That kind of thinking is really wide of the mark and once again the Bloc Québécois can be counted on to raise the issue again.

There is another reality, a very localized one, the ZIPs, priority intervention zones. These are found in maritime areas, Gaspé, the Magdalen Islands and in other places in Quebec as well. Things are now at an impasse because any little bit of cooperation there was between Fisheries and Oceans and Environment Canada is a thing of the past.

Other issues were addressed during the election campaign, particularly those relating to social programs, such as employment insurance and the guaranteed income supplement. Here again, people can count on the Bloc Québécois to continue the battle.

The final two subjects I wish to raise relate to government services. Generally, when times are tough and a government talks about examining departmental programs and budgets, the first targets, the first victims, are the so-called outlying regions. The Bloc Québécois will again be present to defend the interests of our people.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of the specific living conditions of those living in those outlying regions. It is a known fact that there is a really strong regional identity that differentiates one region from another. What is important to us is to achieve true cooperation. We will see how things progress as we go along, but unfortunately there is no sign of anything hopeful in the Speech from the Throne.

• (1730)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I have spoken in the current session, I would like to start by thanking the voters of Davenport for having put their confidence in me and re-electing me.

I know that the Bloc Québécois member represents a magnificent region of our country, and I would also like to congratulate him on his election. I would also like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your appointment to the chair of this House.

The Address

I know that the Speech from the Throne is vague, that it is missing a great deal and that it has left some things unclear. I know and am aware, after having spoken with many people, that this speech does not talk about a number of issues that are important to Canadians. These issues include problems in our city, poverty issues in our country, issues related to seniors, etc. However, in good conscience—and I know that my colleague is aware of the situation and that he wants to be responsible in this House—we all have a responsibility and we all must be responsible.

The first vote of confidence will be on the Speech from the Throne. In good conscience, is this the moment to force an election and waste \$300 million—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Speaker, this allows me to answer as follows. We were elected to act scrupulously and responsibly. Acting scrupulously and responsibly means defending the interests of Quebeckers and our constituents with full knowledge of the facts. And, with full knowledge of the facts, when faced with a throne speech or budget situation, all members must consider whether it will improve the lives of our constituents, that is, the people we represent, and act accordingly. That being the case, acting scrupulously and responsibly means being very aware of the significance of a vote, but without justifying the means with an end that we wish to avoid.

This is unfortunately true of the Liberals, as we saw on many occasions. I know for certain that we do not want any part of playing with taxpayers' money and gambling with the possibility of election. We look at every situation very thoroughly and on a case by case basis. This has been true since the Bloc's inception. In fact, calculations were made recently, during the last election. The election was called based on calculations and polls suggesting that a majority government might be elected. But that is certainly not how the Bloc Québécois likes to do things.

• (1735)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, which is, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful parts of the country. I am sure he will be a valuable member of the international trade committee. I hope that we will be able to work well together.

I would like to go back to the forestry industry issue and the impact of the softwood lumber agreement across Quebec: thousands of jobs were lost and the Government of Quebec lost the power to make decisions to protect the industry. The Government of Quebec is in the very same boat as other governments, including that of British Columbia, because it cannot make decisions to save communities hit hard by the economic crisis. Its hands are tied because of the softwood lumber agreement.

Did the Bloc Québécois make a mistake—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine has less than a minute left.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I have a lot of respect for the member who just spoke, and I would also like to congratulate him on being re-elected. However, he sounds a lot like a

broken record these days. Repeating an idea that does not make sense does not make it make sense.

This is pretty simple: we acted scrupulously and responsibly by doing exactly what Quebeckers wanted us to do. People in every region of Quebec, including my own, told us that they had had enough of the softwood lumber conflict. Nobody thought that the agreement would be a panacea. However, doing what the member would have had us do would not have protected Quebeckers' interests.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks, let me offer my congratulations to you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. It is a well-deserved honour. I know that you will work well with all members of this chamber. Again, I congratulate you. A couple of years ago when you were first appointed as Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole, I thought your mom would be very proud of you, and I bet she is even prouder of you now.

Since this is the first opportunity I have had to stand and speak in the chamber since the election, I would like to start off, as many members have done, by thanking a few people who helped me get here today.

First, I would like to thank all the constituents of Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre for re-electing me to this place. I was first elected, as you know, Mr. Speaker, because we arrived here at the same time, in 2004. We were re-elected in 2006 and once again most recently on October 14 this year.

All members agree with me when I say that to be elected as a member of Parliament is not only an honour, but it is also a very humbling experience. I know there is a great deal of trust that constituents put in members when they send them to Ottawa, and we can only hope we do the job and repay that trust to the best of our ability. I can honestly state that I have always tried to do so and I will continue to do so in this latest opportunity.

I also want to thank all of my campaign team and the volunteers who worked so very hard to get me elected. We had hundreds of volunteers. As all members of Parliament know, we cannot get elected without the help of a great many people. Those people on my campaign team and all the volunteers deserve a great deal of credit.

Most important, I want to thank my wife, Diane. In a previous life before I was a member of Parliament, I worked in the political arena, but I actually worked on behalf of a political party. One of my jobs was to interview prospective candidates.

An hon. member: Which party?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, a member opposite asked a very good question. It was the Saskatchewan Party. I am very pleased to say that.

The Address

One of my jobs was to interview prospective candidates. After I went through a long list of qualifications and questions to the candidate, I always asked this final question: "Do you have the 100% support of your family, whether it be your wife, your significant other or your children?" I told them that if they did not have that 100% support, then do not get into this game. It can be a tough game at times. I call it a game which is probably a little disrespectful for the job that we do. However, my point is that unless we have that undying and unyielding support from our families, it is a tough business to be in.

I want to thank my wife, Diane, who always believed that I would be elected. Even when I did not believe it in 2004, she was the one who said I would get elected, even though the odds were against me. Since that time I have been very fortunate to be elected twice more with increasing majorities and an increasing percentage of vote each and every time.

I want to say one other thing before I get into the body of my remarks. I have noticed since being back here in Parliament, a renewed sense of cooperation among all members in this chamber. I am so very happy to see that. We know this is a very partisan business and I do not know how long the spirit of cooperation and goodwill will last, perhaps not as long as we would all like, but it seems now we have a real willingness on behalf of all members in the chamber to work together.

We have some very challenging times ahead of us. Our throne speech identified those challenges. Without question, the single biggest challenge that we parliamentarians and all Canadians face is the economy. Let me be more specific. It is not just the economy, but the unprecedented global economic crisis in which Canadians and citizens throughout the world find themselves.

I would argue to members in this place that we have never seen the type of economic crisis in our lifetime that we are currently facing. Many financial observers are equating this to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Some observers are suggesting that in history, no one has ever seen the type of economic problems and economic crisis we are currently facing. All I can say is I know I have never seen anything like this in my lifetime. I think my father could also say he probably never saw anything as severe as this in his lifetime.

● (1740)

Once again what we need to do is try to identify the root causes of this crisis that we are facing globally. We want to ensure that whatever actions we take as a Parliament—and I say as a Parliament as opposed to as a government, because we all have to work together to find solutions—but whatever solutions we do come up with to rectify the problems we currently face, and we know what caused these problems to begin with, we should try to avoid any solutions that might even border on the same type of situations that placed us in this crisis to begin with.

It has been fairly well documented that only a few short months ago this global economic upside-down crisis started unfolding rapidly. We all know it was unfolding because of what is called the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States where, because of a lot of lax regulatory provisions put in by the government of the United States, there was an absolute meltdown of the mortgage business.

The result is it manifested itself into a credit crunch. It first started in the United States but then rapidly spread worldwide. Why the credit crunch had such a devastating effect on our economy and economies across the world and stock markets both here and abroad was the fact that financial institutions found themselves in a situation where they did not want to lend money to individuals or businesses. There were liquidity problems. There were bailouts. Mortgage companies and financial institutions were going under. This is the root cause of the problems we are facing at this moment.

The other thing I should point out is that it was an unprecedented, at least in my observation, rapid deterioration of the world's economies. This was not something that slowly progressed over a number of months. This was something that progressed over a number of weeks. Now on a daily basis we see the economy getting worse and worse.

The only thing I can suggest is a silver lining in all of this is the fact that here in Canada, even though we are facing very difficult times, we are the best positioned country in the industrialized world. That does not mean we are going to escape this economic crisis unscathed. We are not. There will be some very difficult times in the months ahead and Canadians know it.

Consumer confidence is down to probably an all-time low. Canadians are more than just concerned; I would suggest they are frightened. Canadians are frightened because they feel that they may lose their jobs. They may lose their pensions. They may lose their homes. There are people living off their investment income who have seen the value of their investments reduced by close to 50% within the last six months.

All of us in this place understand that. We fundamentally understand the fear that all Canadians are feeling. We understand their concerns. Canadians are turning to us to come up with some solutions. I would suggest that it is incumbent upon all of us to work together to try to find those solutions.

The Speech from the Throne that was read just a few short days ago dealt primarily with our economy for the reasons I have just mentioned, not to the exclusion of some of the other initiatives that our government wishes to move forward with over the course of the next term of office, but the priority is on the economy and for very good reason. It is our economy and some of the possible solutions to the problems we are facing that I want to deal with in the next few minutes.

● (1745)

We have heard many people say over the course of the last few weeks that an economic stimulus package must be forthcoming and forthcoming shortly. A lot of people have asked me what that exactly means. If a stimulus package is forthcoming at all, what form will it take? What does it mean? Some people suggest, and when I say some people I mean governments across the world, that what it means to them are bailouts to specific and targeted industries and companies.

The Address

We know all too well some of the situations that are happening to the automotive sector both here and south of the border. It is obviously far more severe south of the border because the auto sector in the United States has seen its sales drop precipitously over the course of the last few months. There has been a 15% to 20% reduction in sales. We have seen the big three automakers, General Motors, Chrysler and Ford, collectively go to Washington to talk to legislators and Congress. They have said that they need financial help and they need it now or else they may not make it.

There is an old saying that we have heard time and time again. It was first coined probably close to 80 to 100 years ago, and that is what is good for General Motors is good for the country and what is good for the country is good for General Motors. That is being turned on its head as we speak. There is a real and I think distinct possibility that unless something is done quickly, we may see the unthinkable, General Motors claiming bankruptcy. I think that is absolutely a distinct possibility.

What will it mean if some of our largest automakers in North America go under? I know what the auto sector means in Canada. I believe either directly or indirectly one in seven jobs is tied to the auto sector in Canada. Yet we are still having a debate, and I have certainly heard it from constituents in Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, as to what to do about it.

Make no mistake, many in our country, well-intentioned individuals, intelligent individuals, prudent fiscal conservatives, are telling not only myself but I am sure other parliamentarians that there should be no bailouts to the auto sector. It got itself into this problem because of the fact it did not anticipate the needs of its consumers or it did not anticipate the transformation that was required to keep its industry healthy and therefore the industry should not now come cap in hand to the Canadian taxpayer and ask for a handout.

I know many people have suggested that Parliament should not engage in any financial aid to the auto sector. I suggest at least 50% of parliamentarians have already heard that. They have either received emails or letters or have talked to constituents who have suggested the same thing. However, we need to have a rational debate in this place about that very situation. Would it be appropriate? Is it in the best interest of the Canadian taxpayer to assist the auto sector in our country? Is it in the best interest of the Canadian taxpayers?

Many in different regions of the country are saying that if we help the auto sector, where does the lineup for financial aid end? Do we then turn to the forestry sector or other manufacturers and say, “You are in trouble, we understand that, we will help you?”

How does one answer workers in the forestry industry, who make approximately half the hourly wage of auto workers, when they stand and say that they are opposed to any bailouts to the auto sector because it is not helping them. The auto workers make twice as much as they do on an hourly rate, yet they do not see any financial aid coming to them. How do we deal with that? We need to have intelligent, rational, reasonable debate and discussions about the appropriate course of action.

●(1750)

The Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have said that they are looking for suggestions from members of the opposition and they have received some. I hope we receive more. This is not to say that every suggestion on how to deal with this economic crisis will be received and acted upon, but the government, any government of the day, does not have the exclusive purview on good ideas.

If we are truly and honestly sincere that we want to work together and we want to avoid playing partisan and political games, then we as a government and opposition members, as parliamentarians representing constituents in their ridings, have to come together on this, but we cannot do it in a knee-jerk manner.

Even though aid is required, and I suggest required very quickly, the solutions, or at least the proposed solutions, have to be dealt with in a manner that gives all the due diligence in the world before we make a decision as a Parliament.

What we are trying to do, and I can say this quite openly because it has occurred starting today, is get the standing committees of the House up and running as quickly as possible, particularly those committees that concentrate on economic issues, for example, finance committee and industry committee.

The procedure and House affairs committee met for the first time today. We elected a chair and we went through the routine motions. Our whips are getting together and have probably already discussed committee membership.

We hope by no later than Thursday to have all standing committees struck. Then standing committees can start meeting as early as next week to deal with some of the issues that will come out of this place with respect to the economic crisis and the proposed solutions.

I do not profess to have all of the answers. I do not even know if I have any of the answers. I do know that on Thursday of this week, at 4 p.m., the Minister of Finance will be delivering an economic and fiscal update to all members of this chamber. I sincerely hope all members pay close attention to his words.

At the end of that presentation, we have agreed to let each opposition party have 15 minutes in response. On top of that, we suggest that on Friday of this week we have an open debate on that economic and fiscal update.

I say this because there is an opportunity for all members of this chamber to participate in that debate in an honest, open, non-partisan manner. It will be difficult I am sure for a lot of members, including myself.

I would be the first one to say that from time to time, and perhaps more times than not, I have stood and made presentations that are highly partisan, and I make no apologies for that. The time for partisanship on this issue is long past. In fact, I would suggest if members want to start playing political games on this issue, they do so at their own political peril.

The Address

●(1755)

I recall seeing one of my favourite movies called *Apollo 13*. There was a scene where the *Apollo 13* spacecraft found itself in some very dire circumstances. One of the commanders who was in charge of trying to work out a solution said two things: first, that failure was not an option; and second, that this would not be known as NASA's greatest defeat; that this would be known as their greatest triumph. All of us here have an opportunity on behalf of all Canadians to do the same thing.

Canadians are looking to us to help them, to find a solution to something that we have not seen in our lifetimes. I urge all my colleagues to put aside the partisan feelings and work together. If we do that, it will be Parliament's finest hour.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendment now before the House.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

●(1800)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:02 p.m.)

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