



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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VOLUME 143 • NUMBER 011 • 1st SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, December 2, 2008**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)  
[English]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114 I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of committees of the House.

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[Translation]

### PETITIONS

#### INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is beginning to look like a habit, but the more petitions I present, the more I receive from the public to be presented. This time it is a petition not only from Ottawa—Vanier and from Ottawa, but also from the Gatineau region, in other words, the greater national capital region.

This petition deals with the possible construction of two bridges, in order to have a ring road around the national capital region and thus to get heavy truck traffic out of downtown Ottawa. These people believe it might be preferable to get this heavy traffic a little further from the downtown core of our capital.

The petitioners call upon the government to appeal to the National Capital Commission to carry out an in-depth study of the route that would link the Canotek industrial park to the Gatineau airport, that is option seven of phase one of the environmental study for potential bridges in the national capital region.

•(1005)  
[English]

#### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition from a number of constituents from beautiful Langley.

The petitioners say that there are a number of severe and potentially life threatening conditions which do not qualify for disability programs because they are not necessarily permanent. Residents find themselves losing their homes and livelihoods while trying to fight these severe medical conditions. They are calling on the House of Commons to enact legislation to provide additional medical EI benefits to at least equal, if not better than, maternity EI benefits.

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### 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.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### ECONOMIC AND FISCAL STATEMENT

The House resumed from December 1 consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

**The Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham.

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the economic and fiscal update introduced last week in the House. Before I do, I want to take a moment, as this is my first opportunity to speak in the House, to thank the people of Oak Ridges—Markham for placing their trust in me and for allowing me to be their voice here in Parliament.

*Government Orders*

I would also like to take a moment to thank my campaign manager, Mathew Ellis, and my deputy campaign manager, Marissa Steiner, for their hard work during the campaign. In addition I thank my campaign chair, Gayle Climpson-Kennedy, my CFO Stephen Wilkinson, and the core group of over 200 volunteers who helped me get the message out and helped me win Oak Ridges—Markham. I am truly indebted to them for all their hard work.

Finally, I give the biggest thanks of all to my wife, Melanie, and our two daughters, Natalie and Olivia, whose support has been spectacular. My second daughter was born on October 4 at Markham Stouffville Hospital, during the election campaign. I would also like to thank the doctors, Dr. Arnold at Markham Stouffville Hospital, and the entire staff for the extraordinary care they gave to my family.

My wife has been with me through everything in politics, through thick and thin. She has always been my best friend and my best supporter. I cannot thank her enough.

Oak Ridges—Markham is a huge riding. It is actually the largest riding in Canada in terms of population. Leading up to and during the last election, I spent many months talking to the people of Oak Ridges—Markham. We talked about everything, including health care and the environment, specifically focusing on the economy.

My campaign focused on the economy. I told the people of Oak Ridges—Markham some of the good things that we had done in the economy. They listened to my message and they decided that the government was on the right track, and they elected me. They understood that since taking office, we have given Canada strong government and that we have made substantial changes to our economy that has left Canada in the strongest position of all industrialized nations.

Since 2006 this government has reduced the federal debt by \$37 billion. It has reduced taxes by almost \$200 billion. It has reduced taxes on new businesses. It has and is making massive investments in infrastructure, science and technology, and we have created hundreds of thousands of new jobs. This government is also providing the economy with the essential tools that it needs to remain strong and to grow in the future.

When we were cutting taxes as a government, how were the Liberal opposition members voting? When we cut taxes for people, they voted against it, if they showed up at all. When we invested in infrastructure across Canada, how did they vote? They voted against it and they did not show up. When we invested in the armed forces, the brave men and women of this country who are fighting to preserve Canadian freedoms, who are showcasing Canada abroad, how did they vote? They voted against it.

We invested in the environment, including in my riding. The Prime Minister came to my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham and announced that through partnership with Ducks Unlimited we were going to secure naturally significant lands, including the Happy Valley Forest in King. How did they vote? They did not show up and they voted against it.

While we were telling Canadians that we believed in them, that we were going to cut taxes so that they could invest in their future, in their family's future, and we were cutting taxes so that they could invest in business, the members opposite were telling Canadians that

they could not be trusted to invest in their families. Indeed, the Liberals were saying that if the government cut taxes, Canadians would spend it on pop, beer and chips, that they just could not be trusted to manage their own affairs.

We on this side of the House have much more faith in the people of Canada. We know that Canadians need more money in their pockets so that they can invest in their future. That is what we have been doing since we have been in government.

I am extraordinarily proud to be part of a government that has done that for all Canadians. We have been working long and hard, even before this crisis hit the mainstream media, to make the investments that I mentioned before and to make additional investments that will ensure that our economy remains strong moving forward.

Over the past few months we have met with our G20 partners. We have worked closely with our provincial premiers and consulted with business, both big and small, to chart a course to protect the Canadian economy. We consulted Canadians on October 14.

● (1010)

Canadians overwhelmingly decided that the Prime Minister, the finance minister, and this government were on the right track to make the necessary changes to the economy to ensure that we remained strong and that we would come out of this world economic crisis better than any other country. They opted for stability. They opted for a measured approach that would not lead Canada into devastation in the years ahead but would make us stronger.

We have acted quickly and confidently, and have always put the best interests of our nation first. We are moving to restore a greater liquidity to our banking system to guarantee Canadians access to credit. We are reviewing all government spending so that we can provide the maximum investment back into our economy without falling back into structural deficits. We are providing stable funding to our provincial partners. We are providing historic levels of funding for infrastructure. We are moving to stabilize our pension system and give Canadian seniors the support they need in the years ahead.

Over the next few weeks, we will continue to consult with premiers and our G20 partners to chart the appropriate course to maintain our economy and provide all Canadians with security and peace of mind.

The people of Ontario remember all too well what a Liberal democratic alliance party means to an economy. Ontario remembers the disastrous results between 1985 and 1995; what the people of Ontario refer to as the "lost decade". Ontario taxpayers, unfortunately, remember the highest business taxes. They remember the highest personal income taxes. They remember record business failures and massive levels of debt. It was close to \$50 billion in debt in only four years. They remember a deficit of \$11 billion.

*Government Orders*

In fact, under the Liberal democratic alliance in Ontario, Ontario was spending \$1 million more an hour than it was taking in. Imagine that, \$1 million more an hour than it was taking in, without a plan to get out of a hole. It was cutting health care spending and the number of hospital beds, and there were record levels of unemployment. This is the record of a Liberal democratic alliance party when in power in Ontario. The people of Ontario remember this all to well and the people of Ontario massively rejected that on October 14.

What did the Liberals do when they were in power in the nineties? They shifted the burden onto the provinces. There were over \$25 billion in cuts to the Canada health and social transfer. They did not work with our provincial partners to make sure that they could sustain such massive cuts. They unilaterally cut, forcing the provinces to find savings in health care, to find savings in social assistance. There had to be cuts in health and education. Why? Because the members on that side of the House were not interested in cutting back their entitlements. They were not interested in finding out how government could work better. Their solution was to transfer to another level of government. Canadians again massively rejected that, and installed a government that actually cared about Canadians and understood how finances work in this country.

At a time when the world economy is in crisis and stability is required, what do the opposition members want to do? They want to set aside the results of the last election and install a government led by a prime minister who was massively rejected by the people of this country. They then want to change the government in four months when they have selected yet another leader; again, another leader not elected by the people of Canada. They want to raise taxes. They want to take some of the NDP policies and increase taxes to businesses at a time when they cannot afford to do so. They want to give a blank cheque to the members of the Bloc Québécois to decide the future of this country.

The people of my riding and the people of Canada do not agree with that approach. They overwhelmingly selected a government that was charting the right course. That is what I hear from the people in my riding.

What are the people saying about the proposed new Liberal democratic alliance party? I have been absolutely inundated with emails and telephone calls from people in my riding. I would like to give members a little sample of what the people are saying to me. Dr. John Cocker wrote: "Just to let you know I am outraged by the action of the opposition to grab power. I feel that [the Prime Minister] is on the right track. Everyone I have spoken to feels the same way".

●(1015)

A constituent from Newmarket said:

If the NDP and the Liberal Parties are allowed to force out the Conservatives now, this Canadian among thousands will totally lose faith in the Democratic Process in this country. What's more, an overthrow of the current government in these challenging and troubled times looks like a real recipe for the very fiscal disaster that the Opposition Parties claim [that they want to resolve].

A constituent from Markham said:

All I know is that the possible coalition between the Liberal, NDP and Bloc is completely ridiculous. MPs were voted for so that they would put their locals first

and actually try to look out for us. This is not for the people it is petty politics that does our economy and country absolutely no good.

A constituent from Stouffville said:

How do I voice my opinion strongly to the government of Canada that if I wanted an inept leader like [the leader of the Liberal Party], I would have voted for him!!!!

A constituent from Richmond Hill wrote:

We the judges, THE PEOPLE OF CANADA, voted him [the Prime Minister] in and most importantly did NOT vote [the leader of the Liberal Party] in.

Is this how democracy works? No, it is not.

Another constituent from Markham wrote:

I am writing to express my concern over the undemocratic backroom dealings that are being done in parliament. With the economy the way it is and the global environment, [this] high tension, global recession, we need a government to run the country, NOT a bunch of backroom dealings of people who believe they know better than the results of the election—

A resident in Schomberg wrote to me:

You are my MP and I am begging you and [the Prime Minister] not to leave us in the hands of [the leader of the Liberal Party] and [the leader of the New Democratic Party].

Another constituent from Markham wrote:

I believe such a coalition would be unproductive, distract from the country's real problems and nothing more than political posturing by the Liberals, NDP and any other party choosing to join.

A constituent from Nobleton wrote:

I don't want the NDP to look after my finances. I don't want the Bloc making decisions for Canada. I don't want the Liberals with their leadership fiasco and infighting to govern Canada. None of them are ready collectively or separately. AGAIN, NONE OF THEM WERE ELECTED.

That is what the people of my riding are saying. That is just a small sampling of the over 500 emails and telephone calls that I have received since the signing of that document yesterday. What else are people saying about this?

I will refer to some of the previous debates by the member for Markham—Unionville:

The fundamental point about the NDP is that those members do not understand economics. They never understood economics and they never will understand economics. In effect, the NDP is mired in a time warp in the 1960s.... It is mired in the 1960s. It has no vision of wealth creation and no clue how to go about it should that be its desire, which is why that party will remain a marginal protest party.

He went on to say:

At the latest NDP convention, a motion was put forward by the leader's riding association that Canada should get out of NAFTA and out of the WTO. Those members also want Canada to get out of Norad, by the way. The NDP's official policy since 1997 has been that Canada should get out of NAFTA. That was delusional, clueless, irresponsible policy and it is still characterized as the Neanderthal economic thinking of the New Democratic Party.... The NDP members would have constructed a wall around Canada to keep everything out, a wall so high that it would be reminiscent of the wall then prevailing in communist Albania.

That was said by the member for Markham—Unionville about his new coalition friends. What else did he say? He stated:

—to the federal NDP, which has never been a government and never will be a government, and whose basic problem is that it may have a heart, as it knows how to redistribute income, but it does not have a brain.

Imagine, the member for Markham—Unionville is now prepared to sit in alliance—

*Government Orders*

•(1020)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I just wanted to give the member opposite an opportunity to see the dynamics and the ebb and flow in the House. Some of us are listening to what he is saying. We started by having a discussion on the economic update. From the moment that we started talking about the economic update this has turned into a discussion about the internal politics of some of the parties in the House. So far, we are not there yet, so we want to talk about the economic update and the government's reaction to the economic crisis.

Is it within the parameters of the House, and perhaps the Chair, to ask the member to focus on the crisis that is at hand, the crisis which the Prime Minister indicated is where we should be focusing our attention? We should be discussing the measures the Government of Canada is going to take to address the financial, fiscal and economic troubles facing the nation, not whether the NDP is a coherent political party.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I would argue that the views of the member for Markham—Unionville on the economic and financial incompetence of the New Democratic Party is fully relevant to this debate.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham is talking about the fiscal update, the motion that is before the House. He is doing it in such a way that he is talking about what other parties may have said or relate to it, so I do find his comments relevant. However, I would remind all members that when they make remarks to stay as close as possible to the subject material of the motion.

The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham has four and a half minutes left.

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, it is only a Liberal who would believe that entering into a coalition agreement with people who apparently have no brains and do not understand the economy is not an important thing to the people of Canada.

Perhaps the member does not remember what happened in Ontario the last time the Liberals and the NDP were in power. Perhaps he has forgotten the devastation that coalition did to the province of Ontario. Perhaps he has forgotten the \$11 billion deficit. Perhaps he has forgotten the \$50 billion in debt. Perhaps he has forgotten the record levels of unemployment. Perhaps he has forgotten the massive amounts of cuts to health care spending, the hospital beds that were closing and how provinces had to deal with massive budget cuts by the government led by his party.

The people of Ontario do not forget, and if the member does not think that it is relevant in this debate today—

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. Is the hon. member for Shefford rising on a point of order?

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the same point. We are still debating the economic statement. If the party in power wishes to talk about the economic statement and what it intends to do in coming days, we are totally prepared to listen. However, saying that the opposition parties will not have any

economic statement, and to descend into petty politics about that, is quite another thing. Let the government party deal with the policy in their economic statement and then we will be able to talk about what the other parties will be able to do. It is not, however, the time and the place here in this House today for us to state what needs doing and how it will be done. Let them focus on what they need to do, and we will listen.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, of course the opposition parties are colluding right now to put together a coalition in response to the economic statement that would include, I guess, their three point plan for the economy: a massive carbon tax, a massive increase in corporate taxes, and of course, breaking up the country. I think any discussion of these points is completely relevant in the context of the debate that we are having today.

•(1025)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the speech by the hon. member across the way. He needs to understand that he is not here to analyze the coalition's economic statement but rather the economic statement from the party in power. So let him not change the focus to the other side; his party's statement is the one we are looking at, not the others'. Let him start with his own.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** If the hon. parliamentary secretary is rising on the same point, I do not want to get into a large debate about this because I have already ruled on this.

[*Translation*]

I have already ruled on this. What is now before the House is a matter of considerable scope.

[*English*]

I will stick to my earlier ruling. Members are free to talk about the motion before the House and some of the related issues about who is and who is not supporting it.

The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham has three minutes left and then we will move on to questions and comments.

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. I am here to speak on behalf of the people of Oak Ridges—Markham, the 136,000 electors, and over 200,000 people who live in my riding who sent me here. I am speaking for them. I am not speaking for the Bloc. I am not speaking for the NDP. I am not speaking for the Liberals. I am speaking for the people of Oak Ridges—Markham who sent me here as the first Conservative to represent that riding.

My riding is the largest in Canada in terms of population. After the throne speech, which by the way the opposition supported and passed, I heard about democratic reform. I come from a riding that represents more people than the population of the entire province of Prince Edward Island, the people of Oak Ridges—Markham were certainly concerned that the proposal regarding democratic reform would also be lost if a new Liberal-New Democratic alliance party were to take over next week.

*Government Orders*

Ultimately, we have a government that was elected by Canadians. It was supported by more Canadians than any other party. It is time to return our focus to the economy. It is not a time to play petty politics. I want to assure the people of Oak Ridges—Markham that I will continue to represent their voice in Parliament. I will continue to represent their interests here. I will fight every single day for them to make sure that each of their votes is respected and actually counted in the last election.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member spent a considerable amount of time talking about a supposed elected mandate of the Conservative minority government and that the Prime Minister received a specific mandate from the people on October 14. Notwithstanding the fact that 62% of all Canadians voted anything but Conservative in the last election campaign, I would like to examine a little bit further this supposed mandate.

I am asking the member, on what specific page in the Conservative Party platform during the last election campaign did it say that a Conservative government would cut \$2 billion in federal government programs and spending? On what particular page of that document did the Conservative Party say it would end the collective bargaining rights of federal government employees? I do not seem to remember anywhere during the election campaign those particular statements being made as part of the current Conservative government mandate.

On what particular page or in what speech did the Prime Minister of Canada, then running in an election campaign seeking a very specific mandate from the people of Canada, outline that \$10 billion would have to be collected from the sale of federal government assets in order to stem the tide of deficits? In order to collect \$10 billion in a downward market, he probably would have to sell \$40 billion of federal government assets—

• (1030)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I will have to cut off the hon. member there to allow the hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham a chance to respond.

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member could tell me on what page the Liberals, NDP and Bloc decided they were going to form a coalition government. On what page did the Liberals decide to give a blank cheque to the separatists in this country? On what page did they decide to increase business taxes by \$50 billion at a time when the economy is struggling?

That is what we are talking about right now. We are talking about the economy. We are talking about a Liberal Party that is so obsessed with its entitlements. The Liberals see that the entitlement fairy is going to start coming around. Forget about Santa Claus. This is all about their entitlements. I was in the House yesterday listening to member after member talk about their entitlements. Not once did they mention that this would be good for Canada. It is only about what the Liberals are going to put under the pillow for the entitlement fairy to come around and sprinkle them with great things. On what page did you decide to hand over the rule of this country to the separatist party?

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would remind the hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham to address his comments through the Chair and not directly to other members.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the member asked on what page the opposition stated its intention to form a coalition government. I will tell him: on the same page as the one where the Conservatives delivered their economic statement.

The Conservatives say that they were elected on October 14 with a clear mandate to address the economic crisis. What have they done about it? They delivered an economic statement that includes absolutely nothing to help the economy.

The member asked, on which page did we talk about a coalition? On the page where they did nothing, the page where other political parties felt obliged to condemn certain things and talk about other things that could be done, and done well. It looks to me like the thing they do best is sit on their hands. They are welcome to keep doing that, and I hope they do so for a long time.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, since taking office in 2006, the government has done more to stimulate and protect the economy than any other government in Canada's history.

We reduced federal debt by \$37 billion. We cut taxes by almost \$200 billion. We reduced taxes on businesses so they could thrive. We are making massive investments in infrastructure. We created hundreds of thousands of new jobs. We cut the GST so Canadians could invest in themselves. What a novel concept: believing that Canadians deserve to have more money in their pockets so they can invest in their future and their children's future, and they can invest in their businesses.

That is our record of achievement and we will not apologize for that extraordinary record of achievement. We will not sit back and let the opposition hand over the keys to a party that wants to break up Canada, to another party that wants to increase business taxes by \$50 billion and to another party that is just so desperate for its entitlements it will do anything to get back in power.

The people of Canada deserve better than that.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to the previous Liberal member's question, I would point out that the Liberal Party did not receive the support of about 75% of the Canadian population and now it is proposing to lead a coalition. He talked about the campaign document that we had during the campaign. I would point out that the centrepiece of the Liberal campaign was a massive new carbon tax. The centrepiece of the New Democratic Party campaign was a massive increase in corporate taxes. The centrepiece of the Bloc and the entire reason the Bloc exists is to destroy the country.

I would ask the hon. member to comment on the impact that three part strategy of the new coalition would have on the economics of this country.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, we know what the record will be. We saw it in Ontario when the new liberal democratic alliance party took power between 1985 and 1995. Ontario had record levels of unemployment, massive debt and massive deficits. Its members were spending \$1 million more an hour than they were taking in.

One can imagine what increasing business taxes will do to the already tough climate that businesses find themselves in right now. One can imagine \$50 billion in new taxes.

The businesses in my riding have told me quite clearly, and I have received many emails from business leaders, that they do not want this to happen. They are begging us to do something to stop the new liberal democratic alliance party from taking power. They like what we have done. They like cuts to taxes. They like the cut in the GST because it has helped bring people back into their stores and it has helped stimulate the economy. They like that we have focused on reducing our debt, that we have cut \$200 billion in taxes and we will be doing more.

• (1035)

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from my remembrance, the member won by about 400 votes. I think that nearly 60% of the people in his riding voted against him.

I would like to know whether the member feels, now that he is the member, that he has a responsibility to at least articulate some of the concerns of those in his constituency who did not support him, who are more than voted for him. I wonder, having been armed with that, if he might be a little more charitable in his criticism of those who are attempting to represent a wider spectrum of interest within the country that would mirror the people and the groups who are in his own constituency.

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, I hope I do not need to remind the hon. member that only 26% of Canadians actually supported that party and they never gave it a mandate to run the country.

I am not afraid to go back to the people of Oak Ridges—Markham again and ask for another mandate as their representative. Why is that side of the House so afraid to go back to the people of Canada? They are terrified of it.

I am confident that the over 32,000 people who voted for me would do so again. I have hundreds of emails and telephone calls that will attest to that. I am not afraid to go back to the people. Maybe you should not be either.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would again remind members not to address comments directly at other members.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on October 14, the people of Quebec unequivocally said no to the Conservative Party's policies. Need I point out that this is a minority government?

I have received an avalanche of emails and phone calls in support of the Bloc Québécois' actions, and I think it is important to say so.

As the member opposite just said, it is important, during this period of economic turmoil, to do something to help workers and businesses. So why have they not considered the Bloc Québécois' proposals?

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, I find it somewhat ironic that after coming to this House, and still being in this House, the separatist people, who want to tear apart the country, have now decided that they want to work within a government led by a Liberal Party under a Constitution that they are desperate to get out of.

We have made massive investments in the economy since first being elected in 2006. We have cut the GST, which has helped the people of Quebec and Quebec businesses. We have reduced taxes by \$200 billion. We are doing everything in our power to ensure—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this House to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. I would like to begin by thanking the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for once again entrusting me with the task of representing them here in the House of Commons, with a majority of just over 15,000 votes. I extend my warmest thanks to them.

Obviously, I believe I am entitled to speak on their behalf, like any member of any party in this House. Even though ours is a sovereigntist party, it has always respected democracy and our position within Parliament. We have always respected the way Parliament works and the Constitution that still binds us to Canada and will continue to bind us until we have our own country, something we will achieve legally and democratically.

Today, we are talking about an economic statement that is part of the democratic process in Canada. There was a Speech from the Throne, and the Minister of Finance had the job of giving this economic statement. The government had to make choices. In an economic statement, the government can simply describe the economic situation, or it can announce new programs and new investments. The Conservative government made a choice. In the midst of an economic crisis, it chose not to take the bull by the horns and not to attack the economic crisis directly.

*Government Orders*

That is why the Bloc Québécois is the only party that proposed an investment plan—worth \$23 billion—and it has never hidden that fact. We made these proposals in light of what was happening with the global economy. The European Union tabled a \$200 billion development and investment plan. The United States tabled an \$800 billion development and investment plan. The Bloc Québécois proposed a \$23 billion plan, which the Government of Canada can afford. We never hid that fact. This plan was meant to help the poorest members of our society, people who have lost their jobs, seniors, women, people in need, as well as businesses. I will describe this plan during my speech.

Our goal was to deal with the crisis, which the Prime Minister had referred to when he called the election. Why did he go against his own fixed election date legislation, which would have had us going to the polls in October 2009? Because there was a global economic crisis.

The problem, as we saw during the election campaign, is that the Conservative ideology will always be there. There has been no solution to the problem of the forestry and manufacturing crisis, which started well before the monetary crisis we are seeing today. The free market was given free rein. That is what the economic statement is proposing once again: laissez-faire, once more. The economic statement plans to deregulate investments. One of the measures in this economic statement would allow foreign companies to buy Canadian businesses. They want to give the market free rein, and they say it will regulate itself. Well that will not happen, and that is the tragedy.

The other countries in the world have understood this, and that is why Europe has invested \$200 billion, and the Americans have invested \$800 billion. Those are the facts of the matter. Right-wing Conservative ideology has seen its day.

That is why the Bloc Québécois cannot support a government that does not understand the problems people are experiencing. Bloc Québécois MPs are there on the ground. The men and women who are my colleagues, who were elected in the last election campaign, know this, because every day and every weekend they are there talking to the people. We know the tragedy that is happening in the forestry and manufacturing regions. We keep on top of the current economic crisis that is preventing our constituents from buying what they would like to buy for Christmas. We understand this. We are therefore in a better position than a lot of others are to say in this House that we have to invest in concrete measures. The reason the Bloc Québécois cannot support the statement is quite simply because the Conservative government has presented an ideological right-wing statement. We are considering the best interests of the Quebec nation. What that nation wants right now is for the economic crisis to be resolved the way the other countries in the world are doing.

• (1040)

That is quite simply it. That is why yesterday you surely saw, as we did, that three opposition parties signed an agreement to deny this government any further legitimacy. The Canadian federalist system is governed by English law. When the government no longer has the confidence of the House, it cannot continue to govern. Those are the facts. The Conservatives can rant on in this House until they are blue in the face, but their economic statement was not up to the task, and

yesterday, with the stroke of a pen, the opposition parties decided to try to form a coalition government, as the Canadian constitution allows them to do. In my opinion, it will be much more effective at tackling the economic crisis than the present government.

So the facts of the matter are simple. The Governor General will have to settle it, because as of yesterday this Conservative government no longer has a legitimate claim to govern. It is as simple as that, and that is how it is. That is how democracy, how British parliamentaryism, says it is. That is why the sovereignists in the Bloc Québécois, in the best interests of the Quebec nation, have allied with the Liberal and New Democratic federalists. The Conservative Party can call us all the names it likes, but the fact remains that they are still federalists. The Conservatives decided to do what suited them, flying in the face of the entire British parliamentary system.

The Prime Minister should ask the Governor General today to turn the government over to the coalition formed yesterday. That is the reality. The Conservatives will go to any lengths over the next few days to keep trying to persuade us that they are right. They should have tabled an economic statement that was respectful of the public will. The Bloc Québécois had extended its hand. We submitted a program proposing \$23 billion in investments. The finance minister congratulated us on it and thanked us, but there was no sign of it in the economic statement.

We worked hard, therefore, to try to deal with the situation, to extend our hand with a plan for \$23 billion in investments to counter the economic crisis, as they are doing in Europe and the United States. But the Conservative Party decided to ignore these desires. That was its choice, but now it should respect the democratic choice, and very simply, under the British parliamentary system, a government that no longer enjoys the confidence of the House cannot continue in office. That is the reality. It does not have anything to do with the popular vote. The popular vote elects representatives to sit in this House, and these representatives must have confidence in the government. As of yesterday, they no longer have that confidence.

Why? Because the economic statement we are discussing today does not reflect what the majority of the people represented by us, the members of this House in all the political parties. We want to resolve the economic crisis quickly. We just want to deal with it. The right-wing Conservative ideology is laissez-faire—just let the economy take its course and clean up the mess afterwards. That is not a solution, and it is not the approach that other countries in the world have taken to deal with this unprecedented crisis. We have not seen anything like it since the Great Depression of the 1920s. That is the reality.

*Government Orders*

We are facing a new situation. No two economic crises are ever the same. This is a new approach and it is the one that the governments of the world have decided to take in order to tackle this crisis. They are going to inject cash into their economies to try to get through the recession. If we had done the same for the forestry sector, we would not be talking about a crisis there today. It would have been taken care of. The Conservatives decided not to deal with the crisis in forestry, and it is just piled up now on top of the banking crisis, the credit crisis, and so forth. We are going from crisis to crisis. We are making the problem bigger and nothing will get done under this government. It is finished.

The Conservatives should realize this and give the opposition a chance. It is not easy to tackle an economic crisis and decide as a party to form a coalition in the House of Commons with other parties in order to get through the crisis and try to deal with the fate of the weakest and most deprived members of our society. That is not easy. The Conservatives decided to do nothing, and that is their prerogative. But let them stand aside and allow the coalition to do it because we believe that in a wealthy country like Canada we will be able to overcome this crisis and help the weakest, most vulnerable members of our society.

• (1045)

That ideological choice was not just laissez-faire economics. The Conservatives also decided to attack workers' rights by suspending the right to strike and to pay equity. They used the economic crisis to deal with some ideological issues that are dear to activists' hearts.

Conservative members will no doubt have plenty of letters and emails to show us. Naturally. There is a right-wing economics movement that wants to suspend workers' rights, send women back home, suspend women's rights in the workplace, and so on. That is an ideological choice, but it is not the choice that the majority of Canadians made. The Conservative members have to accept that. We believe that we have every right to rise in this House, because Quebec pays its share of sales and income taxes to the federal government.

My background is in municipal affairs. I was president of the Union des municipalités du Québec from 1997 to 2000, and I was a mayor for 17 years. In our geopolitical context, there are three levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal.

I always feel disillusioned when I see that the federal government—which has the most money because it gets over 50% of all income and sales taxes collected in Canada—does not do anything about health care because the provinces are responsible for health care. It does nothing about education because the provinces are responsible for education. It does nothing about transportation. It looks after a few bridges, but does nothing about the roads because, for the most part, structures and infrastructure are under provincial or municipal jurisdiction.

One might expect the federal government to implement this program because it collects most of the sales and income taxes. One might also expect the federal government to transfer money into a major program to help maintain infrastructure managed by other levels of government. But seeing how the Department of Canadian Heritage maintains its own heritage buildings, it is clear that the government cannot even look after its own buildings.

One might expect the federal government to participate in the management of buildings administered by the provinces, because it collects most of the taxes. That is the kind of thing the Bloc Québécois is calling for. The Bloc is calling for investments in infrastructure to be accelerated and for gas tax transfers for infrastructure to be increased from 3¢ to 5¢ right away, rather than in 2010. Most economists support this kind of one-off assistance. Investment in infrastructure is one way to help address the economic crisis. It would give people jobs, upgrade buildings and get our workers back to work in order to help the economy.

The Bloc Québécois also proposed eliminating the two week waiting period in the employment insurance program, a program that has been paid for entirely by employers and employees since 1996. The federal government does not contribute a single cent. Once again, while this economic crisis is causing people to lose their jobs, the people affected need their money right away, especially since the holiday season is just around the corner. Yet they continue to be penalized by the two week waiting period. The minister rose in this House to tell us that it was standard practice, since private insurance also has a waiting period. But when you think about it, employment insurance is paid for entirely by employers and employees.

Furthermore, if employers and employees were asked if they would like to see the waiting period eliminated, they would immediately agree. Even employers that must shut down parts of their businesses could not oppose the idea of their employees receiving their benefits immediately, instead of having to face two weeks with no income. Losing one's job can cause family problems. This is a minor request that would not cost the government very much, but it was denied.

The same goes for a program for older worker adjustment, which would provide workers aged 55 and older who lose their jobs with a basic income until they receive their pension. It would also bridge the salary gap for workers who find work that does not pay as well, until they reach the age of 65. This measure would cost \$45 million, but was rejected by the Conservative government. The Bloc Québécois has been proposing many things to help the least fortunate in our society, but these suggestions have all been rejected by the Conservative Party with its right-wing ideology.

The Conservatives are attacking workers' rights at a time when the unemployment rate in Alberta is 3%. That amounts to full employment and there is even a shortage of workers. In Alberta, employers are forced to offer higher wages if they hope to find employees. That may be normal there but it is not the case in the rest of Canada. The navel-gazing must stop. The Conservative Party must stop viewing Alberta as the centre of the universe. They have to be able to see what is happening throughout Canada. The Bloc Québécois has always been open-minded in its work in Parliament.

*Government Orders*

•(1050)

We are sensitive to the fate of men and women who have paid and continue to pay taxes, to those who are losing their jobs and need assistance, to the manufacturing and forestry sectors that are in trouble and need help getting through the crisis. Over the past five years, the mining sector also went through tough times, but it recovered. The economy is cyclical. We all know that. The way to help a sector is to support it in times of crisis until the economy recovers. Then we can help another sector. That is how it is. That is why governments are elected.

The Conservative government came to power. It is a minority government and it knows very well that to have the confidence of the House it must at least have the support of a majority of members. It must therefore obtain the support of another political party and propose measures acceptable to the opponents it faced in the last election. That is the fact of the matter.

If the Conservatives do not accept it, that is a political choice. They are, moreover, dealing today with the result: the agreement signed yesterday by the opposition parties. The specific purpose of that agreement is to have a new government, one that will be far more open—a left-of-centre government—in compensation for the recent years of right-of-centre economics that have prevailed in Canada. Incidentally, that is not the approach that has been adopted by other countries in the world. Europe has decided to be left of centre, as have the Americans. It is a choice.

An unprecedented crisis is looming all over the world. We need a government that listens to the public, and listens to business, in order to try to solve the problems. We must not just wait for them to solve themselves. That is the reality. This is a democratic choice that must be respected by the Conservative members of this House. The British parliamentary system requires the Governor General to be the one to settle this, and in my opinion, the sooner, the better.

I have been saying this right from the start. Since yesterday, since the very moment that the three opposition parties signed the agreement for a coalition government, that party has no more legitimacy in this House. It must go to the Governor General. Doing anything else would just be an attempt to buy some time and stay in power. According to the rules of the British parliamentary system, for a government to govern it must have the confidence of this House. When that historic agreement was signed, that confidence was lost.

That leads me back to the economic statement. The entire situation has arisen out of the fact that the Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance lacked judgment. The main conclusion history will reach from this is that we had a Prime Minister and a Minister of Finance who, for purely partisan reasons, and because they believed that the Liberals were not just on their knees but totally down and out, decided to just steamroller over them.

They found out that the Liberal Party still had a backbone. They are also well aware that the Bloc Québécois has always had a backbone. In fact, that is why we are so strong here. Quebeckers elected a majority of members from the Bloc Québécois, because this party stands tall. We will never be afraid of anyone, anywhere, anytime. We will defend the rights of Quebeckers in this Parliament

as long as we pay taxes to Ottawa. We are not afraid to do so, and we never will be. We have always respected democracy in this Parliament, and we will continue to do so as long as we are here.

Obviously, we will support this coalition government until June 2010. We are in the midst of an economic crisis, and it is in the best interests of the Quebec nation that we take action to deal with this economic crisis for the sake of the men and women who have lost their jobs, who could lose their jobs or who could have financial problems. We must do what all the other countries of the world are doing. The European Union has invested \$200 billion, and the United States, \$800 billion. The Bloc Québécois proposed injecting \$23 billion into the economy. That is what is needed. This is no time to be dogmatic and embrace a right-wing ideology. Yet the Conservatives are doing just that and are determined to take a laissez-faire approach to this crisis. That did not work for the forestry crisis, which still exists. Now, the automotive industry is in an unprecedented crisis caused by a credit crunch. I hope the Conservatives will realize that it is time they respected democracy.

•(1055)

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about the coalition. Under that coalition, with the way the numbers work out, 100% of confidence measures passed in the House would need the support of the Bloc.

My question for the member is a straightforward yes or no question. If there were a Speech from the Throne, which is a confidence measure, that strongly articulated support for a united Canada, including Quebec, would the hon. member support that?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Bloc Québécois signed the agreement with the other parties, there were some major statements in it.

The hon. member is quite right. A Speech from the Throne deserves a vote of confidence. He could take the time to read the agreement signed yesterday. There is a lot in it that could go into a Speech from the Throne delivered by a coalition government and providing for a permanent consultation process among all the parties. We will support it therefore, as we have done sometimes for other throne speeches. We did not, however, support the last Conservative speech. We will study the situation, but we did not throw ourselves into it blindly, with our heads down, as the Conservatives often do with their right-wing policies that have been blinding them since they arrived here. We are capable of being open, simply because we put the superior interests of the Quebec nation ahead of our own personal interests. That is why Quebeckers have always placed their confidence in a majority of Bloc members in the House.

*Government Orders*

• (1100)

[English]

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member well knows that the Conservatives did not even have an election platform until the last week of the campaign and even then it did not include many of the things that we have seen in the throne speech and in the economic update. I would cite issues such as women's pay equity, workers' right to strike, democratic funding and public service salaries. None of those things will help address the real issues facing Canada with regard to the economic crisis.

I would remind the member as well about the ideological bent of the government in the past. It cut literacy programs, the court challenges program, the Status of Women project and did not reform the immigration system. How many times have I heard some members ask why the government was letting criminals into the country? The Conservatives' attitude toward immigration and new Canadians is just appalling.

Does the member believe that the current government should have an opportunity to rewrite its position on things such as a significant stimulus package, skills training, EI revisions, pensions, bankruptcy provisions, older workers' transition, immigration reform and regional development? I could go on but the list is too long. It appears to me that none of those items fit within the ideological views of the Conservatives. If they are not going to deliver, maybe we should have this coalition.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right, especially if we remember that the Conservative platform was not released until very late in the election campaign. The Conservatives would have liked to get through the campaign without a platform. There was one thing though. We caught a glimpse of their ideology when they attacked artists. That is a good example. In addition to the cuts, they directly attacked artists. That was a choice they made.

This can be seen in the economic statement. They attack working people by attacking their right to strike. They attack women on the pay equity issue. That is their Conservative ideology that will always emerge. That is why the time of the Conservatives is over. Nobody believes in it any more, except themselves and their activists. If they have a chance, they should take a look at the polls in Quebec. They will see that the vast majority of Quebecers do not believe in it. They will see why Quebecers are always way ahead of them.

That is the reality. There is nothing worse than a government that has decided, in the middle of an economic crisis to settle its score with artists, working people and women. There is nothing worse than that. We sure were lucky once again that the Bloc was there to prevent them from getting a majority.

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech. I would like to say, in this House, that the Conservative government can only blame itself for the situation in which it finds itself today. Clearly, the economic statement, which was more of an ideological statement, could not have passed easily in these times of serious economic crisis. We cannot let things go. I was very disappointed that this economic statement ignored all the demands we have been making for years

with respect to the crisis in the forestry and manufacturing sector, among others.

René Roy, secretary general of the FTQ had this to say about the coalition formed by the opposition party:

By presenting a statement devoid of any measures to stimulate the economy, the Conservatives have lost all credibility. With the economic crisis looming, it is important to have a government that will take immediate and vigorous action. The need to act with urgency must come before partisan considerations. Therefore, we are very satisfied with the unfolding of events.

Therefore, partisan considerations must be set aside for the common good. What does my colleague think about that?

• (1105)

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the fine member from Trois-Rivières for her question. My colleague was quite right to say that the Conservatives only have themselves to blame. Before the economic statement, we had made proposals worth about \$23 billion, a decent assistance plan.

I would like to remind members that, according to the UN, economic recovery will require new expenditures equivalent to approximately 2% of GDP, gross domestic product. That was roughly what the Bloc Québécois was asking for, within a few hundred million dollars. The U.S. put together a \$800 billion plan, the European Union, \$200 billion. We were asking for \$23.6 billion and that was within Canada's capacity to pay in the context of the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression.

We extended our hand to the Conservative Party. But the Minister of Finance thanked the Bloc Québécois very much for forwarding its suggestions and used none of them. We may be very open-minded but we are not with the Conservatives. We stand up for our convictions.

[English]

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of State (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sitting in the House and what is happening is absolutely disgraceful.

Canadians right across Canada are disgusted with all of us, every member. They are disgusted with what is happening here. The Bloc has been on a mission to bust up this country. What is happening here will bring irreparable damage to this institution and to our country. The other parties should be ashamed of themselves. They use words like respect. There is no respect in this House. We have barely been back for a few weeks and look at what is going on.

I have talked to people from different parts and they are in disbelief. It is a pox on all our houses, every one of us. If they think that somehow we will come out of this looking okay, it is craziness. It is madness. People need to get a grip and know there will be—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Mr. Speaker, one party has been very respectful of the British parliamentary system, and that party is the Bloc Québécois. We have played by the rules of Canadian democracy since becoming part of this Parliament.

I can see that my colleague has a problem. I can see that there is some tension in the Conservative ranks. I read in an article in today's *La Presse* that the Minister of the Environment now has his very own fan club. "There is an English-language site called '[The name of the Minister of the Environment] for Conservative Party of Canada Leader and Prime Minister'."

People are already trying to replace the Prime Minister with the Minister of the Environment. I can understand that—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you and the House that it is a privilege and an honour to participate in the debate on the government's fiscal update. However, it comes with a sincere amount of disappointment when we see the events that are starting to unfold and have unfolded over the last few days. We learn now that this coup was likely developing during the election. It is unbelievable what is happening in Canada.

Today is the first time I have stood in the House since I was elected on October 14. I want to thank the constituents of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex in the great province of Ontario for re-electing me to represent them in this wonderful place, this inspiring House.

It is my second term serving in Parliament, which does not just happen by chance. It happens with a lot of support. It certainly comes from the support of all the people who went to the ballot box on October 14. I want to thank them for the incredible support they gave me, with a stronger mandate than the first time. I want to thank the constituents for all the things they did throughout the last three years to guide me in helping me serve them. That is what the people in the House are here to do.

I certainly want to thank my family. We do a lot of things in this place and we sometimes think it is just us but that is never the case. I am thankful for the support of my family, particularly my wife, Barb, for all the love and support she has given me during the last three years.

One thing I am always aware of is that not everybody voted for me. However, I am continually aware, in my journey down the political road, whether it is municipal or otherwise, that I am here to represent all constituents regardless of what party they represent. I believe each of us in the House is responsible to do that and I know most members take that seriously. As a result, I will continue, to the best of my ability, to represent the constituents in my riding who elected me to his honourable position.

My riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is in the southwestern part of Ontario. It is a little bigger than Prince Edward Island. It is an incredibly diverse riding made up of small businesses, corporations,

agriculture and family businesses. Many are doing well but some are not. In fact, some are not doing well at all.

We never have the right words, at least I do not, when I come across an individual who has just received a pink slip or lost a job on an assembly line or an administrator who has just been let go from a company after being part of the building of that company for a number of years. Even with my agriculture background, I do not have the right words for farm families who, when they go under, lose everything. They do not just lose their business, their house or their car, they lose their business and their house. I do not have the right words for those who go through that or are forced to shut down.

• (1110)

We are in a global crisis. According to the hundreds and hundreds of emails and phone calls that have come into my office and my constituency, Canadians are glad they are Canadians and that they live in Canada. They are glad they have had a Conservative government that some 16 months ago understood, beginning in 2006, started to recognize we had to take some initiatives to stimulate an economy in Canada. They are so thankful we started that and that we have come into this global crisis much stronger than any other country. They also believe we will come out of it sooner and stronger because of that.

We started a stimulus package with the banks to reinforce the fact that we had the soundest financial system in the world. A few months ago the papers were full of talk about how strong Canada was, that we were the envy of the world because we had taken strong steps to ensure we had a secure banking system that would be there for Canadians and businesses in the present and the future.

We will not underpin or bail out the banks with billions of taxpayer dollars. We do not have to do that. Other countries around the world are putting billions of dollars into their banking systems. Ordinary men and women, who get up every day to go to work, are questioning why they are now paying funds to help people who put themselves in trouble, who helped put their countries in the situation in which they find themselves.

The Conservative Party took that initiative. We cut taxes for all Canadians, for families, for businesses, family businesses and small businesses, corporations and seniors, which is unprecedented. We did that because we wanted Canadians to stimulate the economy.

People stimulate the economy. Governments do not. Our belief is if we put this money back into the hands of Canadians, they will stimulate the economy and they are.

The opposition parties have a view that they will tax Canadians, take the money from them and let the bureaucracy take its percentage out and distribute it. They will make the decision on what is good for Canadians.

We do not believe that. When Canadians get money in their pockets, they will stimulate the economy. Why and how? We paid down the debt by \$37 billion in just under three years. Unbelievably, we still have a surplus though it may be small. We have lowered taxes, as I mentioned, for all Canadians. We have balanced our budgets.

*Government Orders*

When I talked about paying down taxes of \$200 billion, no other G7 country can speak of that. In fact, many G20 countries do not have that same circumstance. We have become the envy of the world in a world-wide crisis. Why? Because our Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance had the vision and the foresight beyond what other countries could see. They did that at least 16 months ago when we started this process.

Everyone on that side of the House, if they came to vote, voted against it. We do not believe in taxing companies, which we want to be successful, when they are struggling.

• (1115)

We have given hope to Canadians and businesses in this critical time. Every initiative that we have taken to help Canadians, Canadian families and businesses, the people across the way have voted against.

They signed this great coalition paper yesterday. The coalition will be led by a leader who did not have the respect of his own people, as members of Parliament, to show up to vote in the last Parliament. It is unbelievable.

We put into place expenditure management. If one talks to businesses, one knows that is what to do. When times get a little tighter, it is not always about the revenue; it is about the expenditures. This government understands businesses. We understand what families go through with their home budgets when they have to trim. Not only do they look at revenues, they look at what can be cut. We brought in an expenditure management tool. All those spendthrift people on the other side voted against that.

We wanted to help manufacturing and industry. How did we do that? We went to them through committees and as individuals. They told us what they needed to be competitive. They told us, we did not tell them. They told us they needed to be competitive in the tax structure. They told us they needed to be competitive in the writedown of their large equipment. They told us they needed to get rid of the paper burden. They told us we needed to reinvest. They told us we needed to invest more in innovation, research and technology. We did that, at their request.

The people on the other side of the House, after agreeing to it in committee, voted against it. They voted against industry, against manufacturing, against lower taxes and against research and development. It is unbelievable.

We committed to rebuild our military. When we came into government in 2006, our military was in a shambles because the Liberal Party had decimated it. The Liberals made a commitment to send our men and women in harm's way, without investing in proper equipment and training, without giving them the moral support that a government should. We had to reinvest, and we did that. The parties across the way voted against that.

In the last number of years before I came here, I was in municipal politics. I had the great honour of being the mayor of our municipality of Middlesex Centre. At that time, the funding for projects continually evaporated as the federal government downloaded onto the provincial governments, which forced them to download onto their municipal governments. To stimulate our

economy, we need to reinvest back into the infrastructure of our country. We need to reinvest in our municipalities and provinces.

We have just put \$33 billion into infrastructure. We have done that to help build the strength of the country, to get the construction industry fired up again. In fact, in this coming year, the committed dollars will be doubled. We have given the full rebate of 5¢ a litre of gas, which will come into effect in 2009. We have given back the full GST that municipalities wanted.

• (1120)

I can hear it now. The Liberals will be saying that this is exactly what they were going to do. They are always going to do it and they never get it done.

The Conservative government had to come in and ensure that assets and moneys flowed back to our municipalities, for which they are grateful.

We talk about agriculture. My background is in agriculture. One of the things we are so blessed with is a strong agriculture industry. We are blessed with some of the greatest land. We can feed our nation and other countries. We are blessed with individuals and farm families, all devoting their time and energy without ever looking at a clock to see when the day starts and ends. They run on margins of high investment and low margins. It is not only a way of life, which it used to be, but they have a love for the industry. They are incredibly fine businessmen and women or, in some cases, they would not be successful.

The government doubled the agriculture budget, which had been sliced by the last government. What did the opposition parties do? They voted against agriculture, against farm families and against the sovereignty that is so important to our country. They also voted against giving our agriculture industry the underpinning and the safety net protection it needed.

The government put systems in place for our seniors. We have done an unprecedented amount more for seniors than any other government. We have accelerated the programs under VIP and the bill of rights for veterans. For our seniors who built this country, we have done more to help them live a good successful life.

We talked in our economic update about the RRIFs and pension income splitting for seniors. We dealt with the guaranteed income supplements in our budget. Everyone on that side of the House voted against it. They voted against seniors. They voted against those people who helped build the country so all Canadians could enjoy our freedoms and blessings.

The government introduced an economic stimulus. The opposition unanimously agreed with the throne speech. About two days later, the government presented an economic update, which is not a budget. I do not think the opposition has figured out the difference between an economic update and a budget as of yet.

A couple of days later the opposition said that it would vote down the economic statement, before a budget came into place, and would form a ludicrous undemocratic coalition, a coup for the Canadian people to accept.

*Government Orders*

The coalition, interestingly, is made up of socialists and separatists, who want to break the country apart. They will have the veto on every vote and all legislation. The coalition will also be run by a leader who has not been accepted by anybody, not the Canadian people or the party he represents. He will be there for a few months. Then he will be kicked him out and somebody new will take over in May. This coalition will represent Canada on the international stage. It is unbelievable.

• (1125)

I will wrap up by saying that I hope Canadians get to see the value of our economic statement, I hope they get to see the value of our economic update, and I hope they get to judge a Conservative budget on January 27. Why? Because that is democracy and that is what Canadians deserve.

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I deeply respect my friend's former involvement in municipal politics. As a former mayor, I know that he also knows grassroots politics at that level. He should therefore know that 36% is not a majority. In my riding, 32% is not what it took to win. We are all members of Parliament who were elected with different percentages by the electors in our ridings.

The Conservative Party did not get a majority of the seats, yet they rule as though they did. As the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley said, the leader over there does not understand people. He does not understand that people can only be pushed around for so long. What is worse is that he has not acted on the important parts of the economic policy for Canadians.

People from car dealerships and distributorships in my riding are writing to tell me they are worried about the future. They know, as the government ought to have known, that in September and October there was need for action. During the campaign, the Conservatives denied there was any need for action. Shortly after the campaign, they said they would act, but the real action will only come, if the government survives, in January.

The government has made the good people in my riding who are depending on economic stimulus wait from September to January. It is unfair. Why did the Conservatives not act sooner?

• (1130)

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Speaker, the interesting part of the question from my friend across the floor is that he talks about democracy and a majority of votes.

Opposition members are now talking about putting a coalition together to run this country, a coalition made up of the socialists and the separatists, who have never been given the opportunity to lead. That applies not only to their party; they have also never been told by the Canadian people to lead anything in this country.

Now we are to have the leader of this coalition from the Liberal Party, the leader who never gave the authority to any of his members to stand up and vote for the people they represented in the last Parliament. We had confidence votes, and they would sit. Why? It was because they did not represent their people. That is what democracy is. It is not about—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Drummond.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, from the remarks of my colleague and the member on the other side of the House who spoke before him, it is clear that some people in this House are still demonizing the Bloc Québécois. We are evil separatists; indeed, some have even used the word “devils”.

I would like to point out that we have been demonized in this House since we first came here. I was here in 1993, and the first thing published in the local papers, in the *Ottawa Citizen*, was that 54 boneheads had been elected to Parliament. We were new to the House, but the Bloc Québécois members were not quite like all of the other boneheads. That was when things started. In the week that followed, a Mr. Aaron from Toronto sued us for \$500 billion. That was when everything started. I told the people at Guinness World Records about it because I thought it was so amazing, but they refused to publish it because they said it was too crazy to be for real.

When we went to the Supreme Court of Canada to settle the matter—I am pleased to say that the Liberals did it—we were simply told that—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Drummond.

The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Speaker, this will be great. I hope you heard what he said: “It was the Liberals who took us to court”. Is this the work-together, lovemaking group that will run Canada?

Phone calls and messages are coming to my offices from people who are not frustrated, but angry. We have just talked about the situation and what has happened. A separatist government that wants to break up Canada will have the power of veto on every piece of legislation that comes forward. Legislation will be driven by the socialists, who will have the handle on the economy of our country. They will be led by the leader of the Liberal Party, who quite honestly is wanted by nobody, including the Liberal Party.

I do not understand it. The Canadian people do not understand it, and they are angry.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we hear the member talk a lot about Canadians as though they were some big amorphous group. The reality is that Canadians represent a diverse range of groups, groups that are not represented in this fiscal update, and they are the reason we need to look at alternatives in terms of governing this country.

I would ask the member to tell us what this fiscal update is doing for women. We are seeing the rollback of rights. We are seeing the rollback of workers' rights that also affect women. What is it doing for workers across Canada who have lost their jobs in the forestry industry, such as those in my riding?

*Government Orders*

What is it doing for young people? Where is the significant funding in terms of research and development? It is there that we need to support our young people, instead of talking about just throwing them into jail. Where is the funding we need for aboriginal people, Canada's first peoples, who are entirely neglected in this fiscal update?

Where is the priority of the government to represent Canadians all across this country?

• (1135)

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Speaker, my earlier comments that I do not think the people on the other side realize the difference between an economic update and a budget have just been reinforced.

However, I do want to talk about diversity. I have a riding that is about as diverse as it can get. What have we done for women, for families and for small businesses? In fact, we have 200,000-plus employment. That is not a negative; we have not lost 200,000. We have a net 200,000 jobs in Canada. We are the envy of the world, where net jobs are being lost. In the United States it is half a million to a million jobs.

The member opposite is new, but in response to our budgets in the past, her party voted against every stimulus for women, every stimulus for families, and every stimulus for businesses and small businesses. They all stood up and voted against our seniors, our military and our families.

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments made by Liberal, Bloc and NDP members as they tried to defend the coalition they have formed. We are in a period of global economic uncertainty, and now is not the time for some huge new deficits as proposed by these opposition parties.

We are in very difficult times, but I have had calls from my constituency in rural Saskatchewan, and people are gravely concerned about what is going to happen if this coalition is able to illegitimately seize power and the purse strings of this country. They feel that rural Canada will be hung out to dry. The things that we have accomplished, the things that have been established, and the infrastructure that we are putting in place will now be at risk, and these people are very concerned.

I would like the member to comment as to how he sees these people who are not representative of rural Canada actually doing something that would be helpful to the west.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Speaker, it needs to be reinforced that the point we need to be concerned about is that without a doubt this coalition appears to be set up to divide Canada. It is a coalition centralized around the GTA and Montreal.

Our rural communities in Canada, particularly mine in Saskatchewan and those in other parts of the country, will be devastated by the results of this coalition. Parts of the country outside those large urban areas are not going to be—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Brampton West.

**Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking some people.

I thank my wife Susan and my two young boys, Drew and James, who are six and four, for allowing me to be here and to try to do some good on behalf of the residents of Brampton West and for all Canadians.

I also thank and give special recognition to my parents. My father is an immigrant from Poland. He came here in his mid-20s with nothing in his pocket and without knowing the language. He worked in a factory during the day and attended school at night. My mother's family came to Canada as refugees after the war. It was a very proud day when they saw their first-born sworn in as a member of Parliament, and I want to recognize them for their contributions.

I thank the residents of Brampton West. It was a difficult election. For those of you who do not know, we had a nomination meeting one week into the election campaign. We were 10 days behind. The Conservative candidate had been knocking on doors since April 2007, yet the residents of Brampton West still trusted me and elected me. I am very appreciative to them for that and I thank them.

Why am I here? Like many of the members, I am here and should be here to try to do some good. In this period of time, that really means trying to cooperate as much as possible. At events during my first few days here, I spoke to some of my Conservative colleagues on the other side. Some of those colleagues are here. I essentially said that we need to try to cooperate. We are here in an economic crisis. We need to try to work together and get through this for the benefit of Canadians.

There is good news and bad news in that regard. The good news is that we have received some cooperation from the NDP and the Bloc. The bad news is that we have received none from the Conservatives.

Let us look at what happened with the Conservatives. Rather than try to put forward any stimulus package whatsoever to attempt to help the economy, as has been occurring in all G20 countries, the Conservatives gave us political ideology, period. I am going to go into some of those details, but you have all heard them. It takes something special to see the opposition parties giving each other standing ovations in the face of a document such as the Conservatives' economic update. It is unbelievable. The Conservatives attacked democracy, unions and women. There was absolutely no stimulus for the economy. Why? We still do not know. It was certainly not for the benefit of Canadians.

We need to review where we were before dealing with the economic update and what needs to be done now. We need to review where we were before the economic crisis, because Canadians need to always remember where this de facto Reform Party government put them before the economic crisis took place. It was essentially fiscal mismanagement. It took just three years, which is a very short period of time.

*Government Orders*

Everybody remembers the good old Liberal days when we had a great economy, lots of jobs and budget surpluses. It was a wonderful period of time. Heckling does not change the fact that the Conservatives have put us into a fiscal nightmare. In just three years, they increased federal spending by \$40 billion. They squandered a \$13 billion surplus. It would sound good to have that surplus now, would it not? Do they not wish they had it? Canadians certainly do.

The Conservatives entirely eliminated the \$3 billion contingency reserve fund for rainy days. Well, we have a rainy day. There is no money, at least not without going into serious deficit, which is where the Conservatives have put us. They also had a misguided tax policy, despite the fact that virtually all non-right-wing economists were saying not to do it and that all these various changes were misguided. They did it anyway, and we are left in this economic mess.

Look at all these pre-crisis indicators. These are objective statistics, not party positions.

• (1140)

In 2007, before the crisis, exports fell by 1.4% and are projected to fall further again this year.

The Bank of Canada and private sector forecasts are continually downgrading Canada's economic growth and are projecting it to keep falling.

Statistics Canada objectively indicated that Canada has gone from the best economy in the G7 to the worst. That was before this crisis. We had already slipped behind the U.S. economy before this crisis in terms of productivity. It had nothing to do with this crisis. This is what the Conservatives did.

A Statistics Canada survey of the labour force shows that the Canadian economy lost 55,000 jobs just in July. That is approaching 300,000 jobs since the Prime Minister became leader of the country. Let us think about that. That happened before this crisis.

The Conservatives were so desperate to pretend this was not true that during the election campaign, to make it look as though things were rosy, they actually said that approximately 12,000 jobs had been created in September. However, they refused to tell everyone that those 12,000 jobs were all directly related to the election campaign, an election they had called after breaking their own law about not having an election, and an election which cost \$300 million. I congratulate them for creating 12,000 jobs in September, all because of their broken promise, and on spending \$300 million. Those jobs are now gone.

Inflation rose to 3.1% before the crisis.

A June 2000 report released by the Conference Board of Canada showed that Canada's economic standing was slipping in the world. That too was before the crisis. Again, before the crisis, in the international rankings, Canada's economic standing fell to 11th among the 17 most advanced economies, 15th in terms of productivity performance, and 13th in terms of innovation.

The Conservative government implemented ineffective tax cuts before the crisis.

On spending, the Conservatives like to criticize and pretend that it is the Liberals who spend. I remind members that the Liberals are the ones who balanced the budget. When the Liberal Party was in power, Canada had economic growth. Tory times are tough times.

In 2005-06 federal expenses were \$175.2 billion. The Conservatives increased that to \$218.3 billion, a 24.6% increase from when they took office. What is there to show for it? A great economy? Of course not.

And now for some objective information, Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, provided a report on November 20, 2008. This refers to before the crisis. He clearly indicated that Conservative fiscal policy decisions are largely to blame for what is occurring. He said, "The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous"—having nothing to do with this crisis—"policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions, since nominal GDP is higher than expected in budget 2008". According to this objective person, all of these problems and the deficit are the result of Conservative policies not having anything to do with this crisis. In short, it is a made in Canada deficit, full stop.

We all need to remember that during the recent election campaign the Prime Minister promised he would never run a deficit. According to the tapes of the English language debate, he said never, no matter what. He said on CTV on October 12, 2008, "We are not running a deficit. We have planned a realistic scenario. We have got conservative budget estimates. We are not going into deficit". He did not say that he was lacking information. Those comments were not accurate.

We are now in a circumstance where Canada's not so new Conservative government is creating Canada's absolutely brand new deficit and recession.

• (1145)

The Conservatives caused this mess. They will try to blame it on the worldwide economic crisis but we have to look at all these statistics, and Canadians will have to always remember that we got here first because of the Conservatives. It had nothing to do with the worldwide crisis. The fact that the Conservatives put us in this mess first limits their ability to fix the crisis, which is why they are not providing quick stimulus. We need to wonder when Mr. Page might fear for his job, just as Linda Keene did when she crossed them. But, maybe that will not happen now.

Our offices are being flooded by pleas for help from Canadians. They want us to do something now. I have picked one letter, which is from Noel Dimech, a resident in my riding. He is an employee of John Logan Chevrolet. He talked about the automotive sector. Everybody has to remember that there are 600,000 direct jobs in Canada which are dependent upon the automotive sector, and then there are all the spinoffs that can be imagined from direct jobs. He said:

I need to stress that inaction is not an option. The automotive industry represents 1 in 7 jobs in this country - a higher per cent than in the U.S. The choice is between supporting the auto sector with repayable loans so it can lead Canada out of this recession or denying support which could result in a severe depression impacting hundreds of thousands of jobs and communities in this country.

### *Government Orders*

I say to Noel and to Canadians in general that help is coming. It is really only days away now, as soon as the government is defeated.

In comparison, let us look around the world in terms of what is happening. Everybody talks about stimulus packages. The G20 agreed upon it. The Prime Minister, when he was at the conference, said he would do it. That was the right thing for him to say, but he did not follow through in the economic update.

These are the very statistics as to the commitments that have been made around the world: the United States, \$1,859 billion; China, \$726 billion; the U.K., \$518 billion; Japan, \$341 billion; Germany, \$264 billion; and France, \$93 billion. These are all economic stimulus packages to assist in this worldwide crisis. Canada in the economic statement was at minus \$4.3 billion. It is not exactly the best stimulus package when we are cutting.

What was needed is common sense. In the update we needed two things. We needed a package to stimulate the economy in a significant amount and fast. We should look at the lessons learned from the Depression. Economists who studied it essentially said that the mistakes made were the raising of protectionist barriers, the increasing of taxes to keep balanced budgets, and there was no stimulus for the economy and if there was, it was not done in significant amounts. What we need is a significant stimulus package and we need it fast. We have not seen anything from the government on that. The second thing that was needed in the update was an assistance package for the workers who are about to lose or have already lost their jobs, to make sure that they do not suffer through this. Reducing the EI wait times is one example. We have heard nothing from the government about how it would help people. What we did hear is how it would not allow unions to strike, how it would attack pay equity, how it would attack democracy and that is it.

If we were to wait for the budget, then what? Should companies continue to go bankrupt and out of business? Is that what we are waiting for? Do we want to make it even worse and then the government will do something? We need to do it now.

● (1150)

Six hundred thousand Canadians work in the auto sector. What are we waiting for, one of the big three to go bankrupt and then we will do something? Seriously, if that is what the government members want, they should go on the record and say that.

Let us look at this economic update. What can we call it? Meanspirited? Yes. Irresponsible? Absolutely. What did it do? It cut spending. It has the fiction of no deficit through asset sales which have not been booked, which if they do take place at all, it will be in a coarse seller's market. Is the government going to get top dollar these days for all the assets it wants to sell? Of course not. It is the worst time to sell these assets and they are not even on the books.

In essence, what we have in Canada for the next few days is the last bastion of right-wing Conservative ideology for economic policy, frankly, in the western world. We have a de facto Reform Party government for a few more days.

Rather than party politics, let us look at the comments of objective people.

Doug Porter, deputy chief economist at BMO Nesbitt Burns stated, "The fiscal update...will suck \$6 billion out of the economy next year". That is not a stimulus package. He said, "Under the current circumstances, it's unusual, to say the least, given that almost every other major country in the world is moving to stimulate the economy."

Let us turn to Steve Murphy, an economist at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. His detailed forecast was actually central to the government's forecasts in terms of these numbers. His actual quote in terms of the numbers that the government used to put in its fiscal update is as follows, and remember that he is somebody the Conservatives relied upon. He said, in referring to this de facto Reform Party government, "My cynicism has reached new heights. What else can I say?"

Don Martin said, "There's a thin line between a government putting on its best face to stare down a gloomy situation and practising fiscal delusion. With the fiscal update, [the] Finance Minister...crossed the line".

We have this mess. The government's solution is to pretend it is going to sell assets, to continue with the fiction of a balanced budget, and to cut money from the economy, to offer no stimulus and to attack the vulnerable. Well, the government's days are numbered.

There is a \$3 billion building Canada fund for infrastructure. Why is it not being used? The government says to wait until the budget in January. What about infrastructure? Why can something not be done about that now? Most municipalities have various projects on the books. All they need is to hear that yes, the government is paying, and they will start. That is immediate economic stimulus. What are the Conservatives waiting for? They do not need to study that. Everybody has known about the infrastructure deficit for a long time. That infrastructure work could be happening right now. There is no need to wait until the end of January.

As for employment insurance, the government could help people who have become unemployed through no fault of their own by eliminating the two-week waiting time. This would also stimulate the economy. The government should do that. There is nothing in the update for the forestry and auto sectors.

Essentially, we have a mess that was created by the Conservative government before this economic crisis occurred. We have an economic crisis that has come on top of that and the government is not in a position to do anything about it because it had already overspent and mismanaged the economy. It is not prepared to do it because of its own ideology. That is it; enough of that.

An article in the *Toronto Star* stated:

Unfortunately, addressing the global economic crisis seems to have been the last thing on the Conservatives' mind. Yesterday's statement contained some symbolic cuts in the perks and expenses of ministers and mandarins, and limits to the pay of MPs and public servants....

But there were no significant new stimulative measures to counter the economic slowdown. We are told that these will come later in the annual budget, two months or more from now.

*Government Orders*

Members are taunting across the aisle and saying to wait, but—

• (1155)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member's time has expired for his speech. We will move on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

• (1200)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after over a decade of darkness under the Liberal government, the military was rusted out and hollowed out. Upon winning government, the Conservatives set immediately to work getting our soldiers the proper equipment to carry out the missions they are tasked with. The socialists and separatists in the coalition of greed do not think Canada needs a military. What life-protecting equipment purchases would be cancelled first?

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the question that she read from the chief of staff for the Prime Minister. What we should all remember is that this is a historic period of time. We will all read about this in the history books. We have the political parties representing 70% of Canadians saying enough to this de facto reform party government. Enough. We will help Canadians through this crisis. They will get the stimulus that they need. Just wait.

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite just do not get it. They were elected to a minority government and they are not providing Canadians with what they want from a minority government. The members opposite, during their speeches, talked about their plan for the auto sector. Their plan is for it to go bankrupt and they said that is a good idea. I would like to know from the member, if one of the auto companies were to go bankrupt, as recommended by the members opposite, how would it impact his riding?

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, I must say as a Canadian I was appalled to hear members on the other side when they actually said, yes, it was good for someone to go bankrupt. I frankly could not believe that. It just shows the irresponsible nature of the government. The people of Brampton West and Canadians in general deserve much better than to hear from the soon to be opposition ranks that companies should go bankrupt in Canada.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know the member is a new member here and I want to welcome him.

However, I hear fantastic rhetoric from the members saying that they are about to form the government. We can see them gloating on the other side in the unholy alliance they have made with the separatists. This from a party of Mackenzie King and Trudeau who fought for this country. These people are now sitting with that separatist party just because they want to be in power. Talk about shame.

We have just come from an election. That party received 28% and now its members sit there and think it is their right, the Liberals' entitlement, to do anything they want, and that it is their right to run the country. That is wrong.

Talking about stimulus, I will be making a speech on this, but I want to ask this new member this. Does he not feel ashamed that he

is sitting with the separatists to run this country for which his predecessors fought for? Does he not feel ashamed that he lied to Canadians?

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin with another quote—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. I would ask hon. members who are witnessing this debate today to listen carefully to the questions and the answers. The hon. member for Brampton West has the floor.

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin with another quote from Chantal Hébert:

The fiscal update and the attending measures brought forward by [the] federal finance minister yesterday are a triumph of cutthroat politics over meaningful policy...the Conservatives are as eager to take steps to insulate themselves from the political damage of the economic crisis [which they caused] as they are reluctant to sketch out ways to insulate Canadians from its impact.

I want to address my friend's question. These are historic times. I listened to Mr. Duceppe and Mr. Duceppe spoke on behalf of Quebecers and Canadians—

• (1205)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member should refrain from referencing members by name.

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, he spoke on behalf of Quebecers and Canadians, and said as much.

We should think about the serious, economic mess that has been caused by this de facto reform party government that has led to this side having to stand up and say that 70% of Canadians represented by this side have had enough.

My hon. colleague across the way talked about who will assist whom. A couple of years ago the Prime Minister suggested something like this with no reason, just a power grab. This time there is an economic crisis.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday during the three amigos' press conference, this question was asked:

My question is for [the leader of the NDP] and [the leader of the Liberal Party]. Today the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States said that the recession there began in December 2007, a year ago. StatsCan figures have come out today showing the Canadian economy still growing, showing we have not had a net job loss and our banks are still solvent. How do the three of you justify the moral authority to take down a government based on its economic record?

That was the question asked of the three amigos. I would note that the member's leader basically said to the leader of the New Democratic Party, if I remember correctly, "You take this", because he did not have an answer himself.

I am curious. Maybe the new member might want to answer that question on behalf of his leader.

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, first, what my hon. friends need to remember is this. In a parliamentary democracy, the Prime Minister and the government, that team, have to command the confidence of the House of Commons. Any one of us, in theory, could be that person.

*Government Orders*

If the Prime Minister at present does not have the confidence of the House of Commons, which he obviously does not, he should do the honourable thing and resign, and not drag this out for a week while we could be putting forward a stimulus package to help the Canadian economy and to stop the bankruptcy of industries that the Conservatives say are okay.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the economic record of the government is to drive the economy from a \$13 billion surplus to a \$6 billion deficit. It is quite a record.

I want to ask the hon. member a question about the infrastructure stimulation, which was proposed by the Liberal Party at least a year ago, possibly more, and the commitment on our part was to take anything beyond the \$3 billion contingency fund and apply it to infrastructure. It was applauded literally across the country as an appropriate stimulus package, and had it been applied to this year's budget, ending March 2008, we would have had \$7 billion in the economy, as we speak, already stimulating infrastructure.

For his troubles, the Leader of the Opposition was ridiculed from coast to coast and literally millions of dollars were spent by the Conservative government to basically destroy the reputation of the leader of the Liberal Party.

**Mr. Andrew Kania:** Mr. Speaker, the \$7 billion infrastructure package that we had proposed during the election campaign was essentially applauded by various mayors in municipalities across the country. My own mayor, quite a wonderful mayor, Mayor Susan Fennell, thought it was a great idea. Hazel McCallion thought it was a great idea. The mayor of Toronto, Mr. Miller, thought it was a great idea. We would already have \$7 billion stimulating the economy if that plan had been put in place, in addition to moneys beyond the \$3 billion contingency reserve that the Conservatives eliminated, which of course we do need now for a rainy but they eliminated it in an irresponsible fiscal measure. I would let my friend know and let Canadians know that very soon help is on the way.

• (1210)

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is once more a pleasure to rise in the House and talk about what is happening in Canada. This is a historical week. Political games have reached such a height that Canadians are just shaking their heads, wondering what in the hell is going on here, wondering whether those guys over there have lost their senses.

The unholy alliance made by those three parties is just unbelievable. Just look at the economic records they are trying to bring forward. One of the parties wanted the carbon tax. Only two months ago, it went out there and said it was going to raise the GST. The leader of one party said that another party's economic platform was a disaster for Canada. So what happened? Only two months ago it was saying this to the Canadian public when its members were on the campaign trail. Did that party lie to the Canadian public? Did it mislead the Canadian public?

If the members of this unholy alliance really think they have a plan, they should go to the Canadian public to get their approval and see if the Canadian public will accept this unholy alliance sitting

there. They should be doing that, not making backroom deals to which Canadians are saying no.

As they continue along this path, the Canadian public will speak out because, at the end of the day, it is the Canadian public who has been taken to the cleaners by this unholy alliance of the three parties. It is unbelievable what they have been saying.

Yesterday, on television screens across Canada, we saw the leader of this party, who will be resigning in May; we saw the leader of a separatist party who got up and said this is a great day for the separatist movement in Canada; and we saw the leader of a party, who at the end of the day would never have been in government if he were running on his own, cooking up deals to come in here with an economic policy that, according to one of the other leader's, was a disaster for Canada.

Now, let us talk about what is happening in Canada.

There is a global recession. This government has acted even before there was talk of stimulus packages. We cut the GST. We cut business taxes, which the opposition did not agree with, to stimulate the economy, and it is ongoing. The Prime Minister went to the G20. He was told Canada was sound financially. We are working on that.

When the Prime Minister of Canada came back from the G20, he held a conference with the premiers and told them what he was doing and the premiers agreed.

As a matter of fact, the Minister of Industry is talking now with the Liberal government in Toronto to work with the auto industry. Individuals are speaking about bringing forward a stimulus package. We want to know what the auto industry is doing today. The auto industry presented its plans in the U.S. Congress.

The U.S. asked the auto industry to present a recovery plan, which it has done today. The same thing should apply here in Canada. There should be a recovery plan. We cannot act unilaterally. This is an integrated economy. What the U.S. will do, we will help. The Minister of Industry went to the U.S. to see how we could save those jobs. We all understand that. But at the end of the day, the big three have to come forward and say what are they going to do with the money they are going to receive, what their plan is to come out of this thing. That is a responsible way to run this country.

In the fiscal statement, the Minister of Finance talked about helping seniors. What have we done for seniors? That was in the economic plan. We came up with income splitting. There has been a tremendous amount of activity by this government.

The issue is that this government was addressing these issues before. This unholy alliance wants to do it now. Those members want to come up with a stimulus package. Where were they during the election campaign?

• (1215)

A stimulus package from members of a separatist party whose only interest is to break up the country?

*Government Orders*

The Liberals want to make a deal with those guys so their leader can go down in the history books as the only leader who got defeated but who became the prime minister. Even though they only received 26% of the popular vote, they want to stand and say that they have the right to rule and their leader has the right to be the prime minister of this country.

What happened to the voice of the people of Canada? If the opposition parties really want to form this unholy coalition, they should go to the voters. If they have the guts, they should go to the voters, not cook up backroom deals and talk nonsense that there is no stimulus. We created a stimulus package that will be permanent.

I want to tell Canadians that this unholy alliance will raise business taxes and raise the GST. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition will even get his carbon tax put back on, which all Canadians rejected.

Have those members thought about this? As far as the Liberal members are concerned, they were left out in the cold and now they are slowly realizing what is going on. The winner in this will be the separatist party. It is unbelievable. I have been here for 10 years and I have seen the separatists fight. They were going down but now they will be the biggest winners, thanks to the Liberal Party. The Bloc would never have formed the government and will never form the government but it is now coming through the back door. We should ask the Canadian people about that.

He ran a campaign as an NDP candidate. What did the NDP get? It did not get in. It was shunned. It is shrinking and yet it wants to form a government of the unholy alliance with the separatist party. What are the opposition members talking about? Canadians will teach them a lesson because they lied to Canadians during the last election.

Do the opposition members have an economic plan? Let them go to Canadians with their carbon tax. They should not try to bring something through the back door to Canadians. They should not try to bring the carbon tax to Canadians. They should not bring that economic stimulus that will be a disaster for this country. If Canadians had wanted that unholy alliance, they would have elected them and given them more seats.

I am sorry that I am a little agitated about this whole thing but this is unprecedented. It is a coup and it is undemocratic. They do not have any moral authority. They are only playing with the procedure in this House to try to grab power. They should be ashamed of themselves. They do not represent their own parties. They represent the people of Canada. They were elected here by the people of Canada and right now they have displayed the most unholy game with the people of Canada. They can be in power if they want but it will be short-term. History already shows that. When the people of Canada are lied to, they will come back. They will not listen to the games the opposition has been playing behind the scenes.

During the last 10 years, the leader of the Liberal Party was on intergovernmental affairs. He brought forward the clarity bill and fought those guys sitting over there to bring it in. Those guys are no friends to them. The only agenda they have is to break up this country. Since when did they become friends? Do the Liberals not realize that the Bloc members have only one agenda and that is to

break up the country and yet they will be sitting over there until 2011? That is unbelievable.

The Liberals will need to run and seek cover because at the end of the day the people of Canada, the provincial governments and everybody will speak when they hear what has come from this unholy alliance. This is the scariest thing that has ever happened in Canada.

● (1220)

I go around the world teaching democracy and other things and there are military coups in other countries. However, on a procedural basis, the opposition parties did not listen to the voices of the people of Canada and that will come back to haunt them.

I wish them good luck but we and the people of Canada will speak.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about a coup and said that we should be ashamed because this was unprecedented. He referred many times to an unholy alliance. Given what he said, I have a simple question for him.

On September 9, 2004, his leader, the present Prime Minister, along with the other two parties, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, said, "We respectfully point out that the opposition parties, who together constitute a majority in the House, have been in close consultation. We believe that should a request for dissolution arise this should give you cause, as constitutional practice has determined, to consult the opposition leaders and consider all of your options before exercising your constitutional authority."

That was a letter sent to the then governor general, Adrienne Clarkson. Why was that not considered a coup? That member should be ashamed of himself, not us.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, two months ago, we were in an election and the people of Canada made their choice. Those parties laid out their economic platforms and are now trying to form this unholy alliance. Only two months ago, the people of Canada rejected whatever they were saying.

The important point is that those members do not recognize the fact that they have made an unholy alliance. They have ignored what the Canadian people told them just two months ago. That will not get them any votes.

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of State (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member who just asked a question talked about disgrace and about being ashamed, and then he turned around to his own members and asked whether that was all right.

Canadians in every corner of this country are ashamed with what is going down here. They are disgusted with all of us. They cannot believe this is happening after being back here for only two weeks.

What is happening here has the potential to cause irreparable damage to this institution and to our country. The Bloc is gleeful. Its mandate is to bust up the country. It failed to get Quebec out of Canada so now it is going after the rest with the support of the NDP and the Liberals. That is the truth. There is no respect. There is no respect for the good of this country. I ask members to think about what they are doing.

*Government Orders*

The member is from Alberta. I know he is listening to his constituents. Canadians are concerned and worried. They are asking themselves what the heck we are doing. They believe there is madness down here. What is the member hearing from Albertans about this madness?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, that party sitting over there only thinks about Quebec and about breaking up the country. This party sitting here thinks about the whole country.

I am from Alberta. We have British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. Canada is a wide country and our party thinks about everyone, including Quebec. That party over there has elected to make a deal with one province only, which means that the Bloc can pull the plug anytime on that unholy alliance.

What are the people of not only Alberta but the people of Canada thinking? They are scared and cannot believe what is going on here. If Canadians wanted to give those parties power, they would have chosen them two months ago in the election but they did not. The people of Canada are scared of what is going on in this Parliament.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that a parliamentary secretary could rise in this House, and rant and rave about all the other parties. Yet the Conservatives are the architects of their own misfortunes. Who decided to make the vote on the economic statement a vote of confidence? It was them, not us. From that point on, they reap what they have sown. This is what they have sown, and here we are.

During the previous Parliament, we heard the Conservatives question the relevance of the Bloc Québécois every day. Now they understand why the Bloc Québécois is here in this House. I will give three good reasons. First of all, the Conservatives did not win a majority in this House because the Bloc was here. Second, the only political party to present a plan to stimulate the economy was again the Bloc Québécois. And third, as he was saying, yes, the Bloc Québécois supported the coalition, because we believe that we will be poorly served by a Conservative government.

[*English*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, I will concede that the Bloc did give us a plan and we listened to that plan. We asked the other parties to give us a plan but they did not. We asked them to work with us but they would not. Why? It is because they wanted to play this power grab game.

What the leader of that party said to his caucus was that the plan was in the offing long before the stimulus issue came out. The Canadian people should not be fooled. The plan was on the table and it was hatched by that party long before the economic update. Those members should not lie to the Canadian people.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of anger coming from members on the other side of the House. They should redirect that anger toward their leader and his chief of staff for bringing in an economic plan that hurts working Canadians, especially women, and removes the right to strike. If they had brought in an economic plan to help Canadians, we would not be in this situation right now.

We, the members opposite, have lost confidence in the Conservative government and it should resign right now.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, those are games that those parties play. The member's leader told his own caucus that he had already talked to the separatists long before this. I do not know what the member is talking about.

I will tell the member that the government believes in the tax cuts it has implemented. We have already reduced the GST by 2% and we have created pension income. We have addressed the issues the seniors brought to us. We have been addressing the issues. We have been working with the auto industry and with the Liberal government in Ontario to come up with solutions.

The government has been proactive, which is the problem that party was having and the reason it came up with a plan.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to give the member another opportunity to answer the first question asked about the actions of his own leader back in September 2004 when he was meeting with members of the Bloc Québécois and members of the New Democratic Party. He had meetings and he had agreements. They all signed a letter addressed and delivered to the Governor General asking her to consider other options.

I sat through that period of time, as did the member across, and I do not recall any anger in his speeches about the actions of his own leader. I do not recall him getting up in the House and vigorously objecting to what his own leader did. At the time, he sat there and said nothing day after day.

Why did the member not say anything back in September 2004?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple. At that given time we did not make a deal with the Bloc. We said, "Look at the options".

The point is that the opposition parties made the deal immediately after having an election, and Canadians thought about it. That is the question. We came back with an increased mandate from the Canadian people. At that given time that party was going downhill.

• (1230)

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to be respectful to all members because there has been chatter over the document from which I quoted the Prime Minister. I would be glad to table the document.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate you. I already did so personally yesterday. I congratulate you on your appointment as Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole. I know that it is a great honour and a great responsibility, and I congratulate you. I would also like to say that I hope you will continue trying, as you have already started doing, to maintain a minimum of decorum in this House. God knows we need it.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Laval—Les Îles who have elected me for the fifth time. And I would like to congratulate the other members of this House on their victories, whatever their party, whether they be in opposition on this side of the House or on the government side opposite.

Today I would like to talk about the economic statement delivered by the Minister of Finance last Thursday. Two things in that statement really shocked me. First, the Minister of Finance refused to accept that there was already a recession in Canada. Second, the Minister of Finance did not see fit to present a solution from the government in his economic statement, despite the number of companies, be they small, medium or large, that were starting to go bankrupt or were at risk of bankruptcy and were laying off their employees, who are now jobless.

It shocked me and it shocked the people in my riding, as it did the entire population of Quebec. I organized an event in my riding, Laval—Les Îles, last Sunday afternoon. Obviously we discussed politics, and people asked me how it could be that the government, as represented by the Minister of Finance, had not brought forward any solution to the problem that exists not only in Laval and in Quebec but everywhere in Canada.

In Laval—Les Îles, a lot of people come from other countries and have recently arrived in Canada. Many of those people have kept ties with their country of origin and do a lot of work in importing and exporting. Those people are afraid that their businesses will go bankrupt. The Minister of Finance was silent about this.

In terms of the economy, we have had no response. The Conservatives tell us there is no problem in Canada and our institutions are very safe. I hope so, but we always have to be prepared. When we, the Liberals, were in government, we got rid of the deficit and tried to set a little aside as a cushion, precisely to be prepared for this kind of disaster. When the Conservatives came to power, the cushion virtually completely disappeared, and the help we had prepared precisely to protect us against this kind of disaster is almost nonexistent now. What we are seeing here is a Conservative government that has both wasted the public funds that could have protected Canadian industries and failed to present any solution to try to help people who are without jobs, not because they did not want to go out and work, but because their businesses are no longer viable. The owners of those businesses, whether in the forestry industry or in the auto industry, can no longer sustain their budgets.

A long time ago, people used to say, "What is good for General Motors is good for the country." That applied to the United States. Now, though, General Motors is almost completely bankrupt, and that may have a very serious impact on us here in Canada. From an

economic standpoint, the statement is shocking and does not meet the needs of Canadians.

I was also extremely disappointed by another social measure, and that is the elimination of the right to strike.

● (1235)

The right to strike has been a fundamental right in our society for decades. It is not socialist or communist, it is simply Canadian. Men and women in Canada fought hard for such protection before, during and especially after the 1920s and 1930s, and they won it. Last Thursday evening, the Conservative government intended to eliminate federal public servants' right to strike.

The Conservatives may reverse their decision, as the President of the Treasury Board said yesterday during question period. They are going back on their decision, but the damage is done. Clearly, if the Conservative government had been elected with a majority, not a minority, in the House of Commons, federal public servants would have lost the right to strike. The Conservatives were forced to back down when all the members of the opposition fought back and said they could not let that happen. Because the Conservative government was afraid of losing the battle, it decided to back down and say it was giving public servants back the right to strike. I am very happy about this, but we need to look at what happened and realize that if the opposition had not reacted so strongly and so quickly, the Conservatives would have taken away federal public servants' right to strike.

Next, I will speak about the issue of women and employment equity. Let us not forget that employment equity is not only employment equity for women, it is for society as a whole. This means that it is for all kinds of minorities, be they people with a physical disability, visible minorities, or Canada's first nations people, who have an important role to play in our Canadian society.

The Conservative government decided, in its economic statement, that these minorities would no longer have the right to take their grievances before the courts. Once again they are being deprived of a right that has been fought for, not just by minorities, but by all Canadians. This right is in the process of being taken away from them. All of the opposition, not just the official opposition, rose up in arms over this. My colleagues in the other two parties spoke about this. The President of the Treasury Board has backed down and says he wants to respect employment equity and will revisit the decision. I am very pleased by that, but what would have happened if there had not been a hue and cry? We would be back with what the Conservatives first presented. This is another warning to be on our guard, because we see what would have happened if the Conservatives had a majority.

*Government Orders*

This descent toward anti-democracy did not just start last Thursday evening. I have seen it coming for a long time, two and half years at least—nearly three—or in other words ever since the Conservatives have been the government. I will give a little anecdote here if I may.

Two years ago, I was the official languages critic for the official opposition and therefore a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We were discussing the Conservative government's abolition of the court challenges program. For those who may not know exactly what this is, the court challenges program provided funds to language or other minorities so that they might defend their rights before the courts, possibly even against the Government of Canada. Minorities were given the tools to do so. The Conservative government came along and abolished the program entirely. This was at the official languages committee.

• (1240)

We soon found out by calling witnesses that the francophone minorities in Canada were stunned because they realized they had lost the financial muscle to protect their linguistic rights in Canada. It was not just francophones outside Quebec but the anglophone minority in Quebec too.

We fought hard in committee. What happened, then, to finish the story? On the day when we were supposed to put the finishing touches on the report, in which the three opposition parties asked, suggested and recommended that the minister reverse his decision on the court challenges program, what did we find when we arrived at 9 o'clock in the morning? The doors were locked. In other words, the chair of this House committee prevented the committee members from meeting. He slammed the door in our faces.

That was an insult, I think, not just to the members of Parliament but to the people of Canada who elected us. The chair did not have the right to do that. He did not have the right to decide to lock the doors. Why did he do it? I think it was simply because that meant we could no longer table a document in the House recommending that the minister change his mind about the court challenges program.

Why am I telling this story? Simply to explain to the House that the attack on democracy started a long time ago. The governing party across the aisle has long been doing everything it could, cutting here, cutting there. Rather than saying openly what it is doing, it often tries to hide it. There is always a way, though, to review things and find out what is going on.

I want to tell the House, therefore, that the finance minister's presentation last Thursday night was totally unacceptable. It disappointed not only the opposition members, of course, but the people we represent as well. As I said earlier, I met more than 200 of them on Sunday, and they sure had a lot to say.

We believe that it is important and even absolutely essential to offer the people of Canada another possible kind of government. Why? It is not because we want to make a grab for power but because we think we have solutions to the economic crisis. We also have solutions to the anti-democratic practices of the governing Conservatives.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, earlier today I had a chance to ask a question of one of the Bloc members regarding the alliance. We know that 100% of the confidence measures proposed by the coalition government would need the support of the Bloc.

I asked if there were a throne speech that used strongly articulated support for a united Canada, which would include Quebec, would the Bloc support that. The answer was that it did not have to worry about it. As part of the agreement, the Leader of the Opposition would have to consult with the Bloc, so obviously there would not be any articulation of a united Canada in any kind of throne speech or government communication.

What are the member's thoughts on not being able to articulate the use of, or the censorship of, united Canada type language in any kind of government communication?

• (1245)

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** That question is in bad faith, Mr. Speaker. The leader of my party does not even have to state it. For his whole life, he has worked for a united Canada. When he was a member of a former Liberal government, he showed how important a united Canada, with Quebec in it, was to him. We know a united Canada with Quebec is important to our party.

Therefore, the question is really a false question.

[Translation]

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, my congratulations on your new responsibilities. Far be it from me to comment on how long you will be in the Chair, but as long as you are there, I am sure you will give of your best.

I believe that there is a question that must be asked of our colleague for Laval—Les Îles. She is right to remind us of just what a disappointment the Minister of Finance's economic statement was. A disappointment, because a consensus could have been reached here in the House on a number of proposals made by the opposition parties. It is incredible to witness the angry and offended tones assumed by the government members in reaction to the events we are witnessing which, truth to tell, are making history. Must we not admit that the primary responsibility of a minority government is to make sure, in all circumstances, that it has the confidence of the House? What we have been treated to instead is a stubborn, arrogant, obtuse and disdainful government and Prime Minister wanting only to thumb their noses at the opposition.

I would like my colleague from Laval—Les Îles to describe, in parliamentary terms, which I have never known her to deviate from anyway, the attitude of the Prime Minister toward the energy and good faith shown by the opposition since the session began.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure what to add to the statements made by my hon. colleague. I completely agree with what he said.

*Government Orders*

I would like to add that the Prime Minister and the entire Conservative caucus have shown a general lack of respect for this House. I mentioned one anecdote that demonstrates this point very well. They have shown a lack of respect for this House. By that very fact, they have also shown a lack of respect for our citizens and for democracy. For my colleagues and me, this is a fundamental issue. We are here in this House because our constituents elected us to say what we have to say. The members across the floor, and particularly the Prime Minister, since he is the one who is ultimately responsible, give us the impression that they do not fully appreciate and respect the fact that an opposition exists to have its ideas heard.

[*English*]

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on that very theme, in this morning's *Globe and Mail*, Margaret Wenté writes:

[The Prime Minister] was supposed to be the steady hand at the helm. But now, even his long-time loyalists whisper that he's lost it. They are right. You can put up with a bully. You can even put up with a paranoid, controlling bully. But a paranoid, controlling bully with catastrophic judgment is another matter.

Their leader is a brilliant brain—

Although I would dispute that. She goes on to say:

—with the emotional intelligence of a 13-year-old. The magnanimity of victory eludes him. He can't seem to shake the simmering resentments of the outsider who knows he's the smartest guy in the room but still can't get respect. Only a man with his unique mix of gifts could deliver his country into the arms of such a bizarre [situation].

I would be interested in the hon. member's comments on that.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I have not read the article mentioned by the member. I do not make a habit of hurling insults at anyone. I said what I have to say about democracy. It is important to me. In my opinion, the Prime Minister should definitely reconsider his way of doing things within his own caucus, but that is his business. What does concern us in the opposition is what this Conservative government does for Canadian society as a whole and particularly for the Canadian economy.

• (1250)

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member across the way about the thousands of voters in Quebec who voted for the Liberals to support federalism, and particularly not voting for the separatists. What does she feel now about those thousands of voters who feel betrayed by this unconscionable alliance with the separatists, virtually turning the keys to Ottawa over to the separatists?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I find the language of my colleague opposite to be a gross exaggeration. I am surprised because that is not like him.

That being said, I met with hundreds of citizens in my riding this past weekend, as I already mentioned. No one, not one person, felt that we had handed over the keys, that we had sold out Canada or anything like that. The only ones who believe that are those who sit opposite us here in Parliament.

I would like to repeat that we have a leader who believes in Canada. Not only does he believe, but he has proven it I do not know how many hundreds of times. When the members opposite say that we have sold out Canada, I take it as a personal insult.

[*English*]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am a little amused at some of the comments from across the way. The members do not make slanderous comments so they say, but they are quite willing to quote someone like Margaret Wenté.

However, I would like to go back to something a little more serious, and that is the serious comments made by Don Drummond of TD Bank. When he spoke this morning, and I think it was on CBC, he spoke about the \$30 billion structural deficit that the coalition's economic recovery plan would bring to Canada and how it would plan to get us out of that in the years down the road. That is as much as the coalition has announced so far.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I do not understand my colleague's question. The leader of the opposition said yesterday in his press conference that things have not progressed that far. At this time, the three opposition parties have decided to work together. The relationship between these three parties was explained and the leaders of the three opposition parties were very clear about the fact that absolutely nothing more had been done and that no more could be done as long as things were like this in the House of Commons.

So, where is this Mr. Drummond getting that \$30 billion? It is a figment of his imagination. That certainly did not come from any opposition member.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, speaking on the G8 in July, an article in the London *Telegraph* lamented the lack of leadership in the world in this global situation. One thing it did single out was our Prime Minister, saying that if the rest of the world had comported itself with similar modesty and prudence, we might not be in this mess.

How can the party of the hon. member, along with the other two parties, justify bringing down the government?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. As I explained in my speech, when the Liberals were in power, they got rid of the deficit and set money aside—I called it a “little cushion”—but now that money has all but disappeared. So when they talk about prudence, I have to wonder what, exactly, they are talking about.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I have had a chance to rise in this Parliament, I want to take this opportunity to thank my lovely wife and two daughters for their continued support over five elections. I also thank the 91,000 constituents in the country's number one riding, Sackville—Eastern Shore for their undying support of the work they have asked me to do.

*Government Orders*

The people have entrusted me once again, for the fifth time since 1997, to represent the issues of the riding and of Nova Scotia in Ottawa. They have asked me to bring their concerns to Ottawa and not necessarily Ottawa's concerns to Nova Scotia. I also thank the many people on our campaign team who volunteered and assisted us in the last federal election.

Politics is made up of human beings, whether they are right wing, left wing, in the centre, Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Green or whatever they may be. However, there is one person in the House of Commons who in many ways rises above all the partisanship games we now play.

There is a wonderful article, on page 28 of today's *Hill Times*, about the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia. At three o'clock, a book about his life will be released. Every time I see the hon. member from the Winnipeg area, I am inspired by his enthusiasm, tenacity and desire to overcome hurdles that befell him at such a young age. For a quadriplegic man to rise as a parliamentary secretary in the House of Commons, regardless of the party he represents, is a testimony to not only he and his family, but to his heart, his love and his faith in God. I congratulate him and everyone else who has suffered through adversity and overcome it in order to become a great Canadian citizen. I congratulate and salute the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

Getting back to why we are here, On Thursday, we had the economic statement or so-called fiscal update. To call it an economic statement or fiscal update was stretching the boundaries of what I would call the truth. In fact, if truth were an island, it would be uninhabited right now. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance had many options on what they could have done and what they should have done.

I personally believe the time for statesmanship and leadership was at hand. One does not get many opportunities in life to stand in the House of Commons and take a bipartisan approach to address a very serious problem, our economy. In many ways, the situation was not caused by our own doing, although the Parliamentary Budget Officer did say, independently of any political party, that many of the concerns we faced now were brought on by political decisions of the previous mandate of 2006-08.

We asked repeated questions in the House of Commons on the economy and were told to wait until Thursday to get our answers. We were told to wait until Thursday and we would be told what the government would do to help. We were led to believe that if we waited until Thursday, the sun would shine once again. Thursday came along and what did we get? We did get some good things such as the change to the RRIFs to help seniors with their pension availability and their investments, a very good thing for which I applaud the government. However, one or two items out of a speech of that size is not good enough. The Conservatives attacked women and public servants for absolutely no reason whatsoever.

During the campaign, I did not hear from any side that public servants were the problem of our economic situation. I did not hear that to take away the right to strike would solve our economic problems. It was a rather bizarre moment for me to sit in seat 308, one of my favourite seats in the House, wondering where the government was going with the statement. The day of that

announcement, we had layoffs in southern Ontario. We had layoffs on Sunday in northern Vancouver Island. We had layoffs in Nova Scotia. Across the country, people are hurting. Instead of addressing that issue, the Minister of Finance addressed the public servants and the issue on political party funding.

• (1255)

To be completely honest, on a personal level and not from a party point of view, I do not really care about the public funding we get. If the government wants to scrap it, it can scrap it. The reality is that the economic statement was not the place to make that announcement. An all-party committee could have discussed it and moved it forward, as was done when it was brought in initially.

It was brought in so that we could stop the big money influence that directs us. If somebody donates \$50,000 to a person's campaign and someone else donates zero dollars and the two of them phone that person, we know which one the person would respond to first. It is only understandable that the person would respond first to the person who donated \$50,000, because money talks. The purpose of that legislation was to get rid of that influence from big corporations and big unions.

We had that debate in 2004, but if it was the wish of the government of the day to remove that funding, there were many other opportunities for it to do so. It was an ideological and political statement, not an economic statement. That is why we are here today discussing this very serious issue.

The Prime Minister and the finance minister could have and should have recognized the seriousness of the situation and said very openly, as president-elect Obama has done, that they would reach across the aisle to meet with the leaders of the other parties and their economic advisers and that they would meet with economic advisers throughout the country, including labour, the provinces, and the municipalities, to set up a summit to deal with this issue internally as quickly as possible.

We did not get that type of leadership. If the government had said it within that framework, we would not be talking about this today.

We have a serious situation. Regardless of who forms the government, some tough choices have to be made. Leadership and statesmanship come only so often, and unfortunately the current Prime Minister dropped the ball severely on this one.

I am not the only one saying this. The chambers of commerce of Canada, representing 175,000 businesses, were "disappointed" with the so-called economic statement. I just had a meeting with the Atlantic Provinces Chambers of Commerce. They were disappointed with what was going on. They were looking for leadership and did not get it.

Only the Prime Minister and the small group of people around him can actually explain why they did what they did. I have a lot of good friends on the other side, not only in the NDP but also among my Conservative colleagues. I understand that they want to know what is going on, what is happening and why this is all going on.

*Government Orders*

They do not have to look farther than the front bench to know exactly what happened. Because of the style of the Prime Minister, he has decided, for whatever reasons, to approach politics in that particular manner. It is most unfortunate. All of us who have been here a little while know this is not how it should be, regardless of whether it is under the former Liberal government or the current Conservative government. The reality is that we could have done much better.

On my desk here, in my office on the Hill and in my office in Nova Scotia I have stacks of emails, faxes and letters. I will respond to each one in my riding personally and explain why we have come to this point. Most of the letters, even the ones I get from across the country, are saying there should be a pox upon all of us.

What are we doing now? We are standing up in the House of Commons, the people's place, and talking about ourselves, not about the issues facing this country. That is a missed opportunity. How many times, Mr. Speaker, have you been here and ended up listening to conversations between elected officials just about themselves?

I cannot say how disappointed I am personally in the whole process through which it happened. It did not have to happen this way.

I can assure everyone that the comments made on Thursday by my friend the Minister of National Defence, whose riding is next door to mine, were completely and utterly irresponsible for a cabinet minister of any government. He said after the statement that when the opposition acts like chickens, they start to look like chickens. What was the defence minister thinking when he said that?

• (1300)

What did he expect the reaction from the opposition would be? Did he think the opposition would just lie down and take it? Did he expect thanks for his wise counsel and for advising us on the proper language and protocol of parliamentary democracy?

We have had enough of that defence minister and his wisecrack comments. We have had enough of the Prime Minister and his dictatorial ways. We have offered the olive branch on many occasions, only to have it cut away.

Members of the opposition, regardless of whether they are Liberal, Bloc or NDP, have said enough is enough. We understand the anxiety of the Canadian people throughout the country who wonder what is going on, what is it going to lead to and what it will mean in the future.

To be honest, I do not have all the answers yet. I do not think the current government has all the answers either, but collectively we could have done it. Collectively the House could have stood for something much greater. Collectively we could have shown the spirit of the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia. Collectively we could have had the chutzpah of the great Bill Blaikie of Winnipeg, the knowledge of a Stanley Knowles, the foresight of a Tommy Douglas or even the compassion of a Joe Clark.

However, we lost it. Now we are going to have to work doubly hard to get all that back. I can give the assurance that no matter what happens here in the future, on a personal level I and many other MPs

are going to try to repair the damage caused by the Prime Minister and his finance minister.

The reality is that we have people in the country who have been laid off. We have Canada Post workers on strike to prevent Canada Post from using EI as a sick leave payment. We have fishermen in southwest Nova Scotia who are getting only \$3 a pound for lobster. I hope you are a fan of seafood, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is that fishermen cannot make a living catching lobsters at \$3 a pound. We should be talking in the House about how to deal with that specific issue.

Last year, Air Canada gave \$43 million to one man, Robert Milton. This year, what did it do? It shut down the flight attendant bases in Winnipeg and Halifax. That resulted in 200 jobs being taken out of Nova Scotia because Air Canada said it was in a tight fiscal situation.

What are those workers and their families expected to do? They voted for us to come here and deal with that issue. What do we end up doing? We end up talking about ourselves.

The reality is that our health care systems in this country are nowhere near what they should be. Our first nations are in desperate straits and require serious infrastructure, and they need it now.

My colleague from northern Ontario has said repeatedly that they need a school in one of his northern ridings. He has asked for it repeatedly and he keeps getting "No" as the answer. Why do they have to keep begging for what we in the south already have? It is simply unacceptable. Those are the issues we should be working on.

The environment was not even mentioned during Thursday's debate. The one issue that links us all together is the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. Because of selfish interests, that issue is now being completely disregarded. Those are the issues we should be talking about.

What about jobs? What about retraining for young people, unemployment insurance for those who are laid off, and bridging pensions to allow older workers in the forestry sector to retire with some dignity, not just in Quebec but across the country?

There should be a proper buyout by the Government of Canada if it wishes to reduce the number of fishermen in the country. If it buys into the idea that there are too many fishermen and not enough fish, why not offer a proper buyout and let them leave with dignity?

Everybody knows that we recently attended a Remembrance Day ceremony on November 11 for veterans and for those who died to give us the democracy we have today. Is our democracy perfect? Absolutely not, but it is the one we have to live with, and there are certain rules by which we all need to abide. If those rules need to change, we can look at them in the future, but 117,000 veterans buried in 72 countries around the world never got a chance to wear their medals, and they sacrificed and died so that we can sit in the House of Commons and debate these issues.

*Government Orders*

Veterans and their widows need support programs and systems. They should not be put through a Cirque du Soleil act to get the benefits they require. Those are some of the issues the House should be tackling and dealing with, and I know that in a cooperative manner we could do that.

● (1305)

There are many other issues, from education to infrastructure to water and sewer systems and beyond. For example, what happens to the men and women of our military when they come back from the mission in Afghanistan? Will they receive the immediate help they and their families require? These are some of the important issues we need to speak about.

Why is it that over 4,000 men and women medically released from the military have their disability payments clawed back from their pensions? That is a debate we should have in this House of Commons.

Why is it that Agent Orange victims, Chalk River victims and others have to go to court to seek redress from not just this government, but any government? These veterans served us so proudly, and now in their hour of need we let them down.

Those are the issues we should be talking about, but again the economic statement, if we can call it that, mostly goes after the women of the public service in terms of their pay equity battles. Again I am completely flabbergasted, after eleven and a half years here, as to where that came from. I have absolutely no idea.

As well, why would the Prime Minister provoke, and literally attack, the official opposition party, when it was already in dire straits in terms of the election?

Now we see the members of the Liberal Party saying they are not going to accept it. We in the NDP and the Bloc are not going to accept that type of attitude.

This country has many problems. Collectively, we on this side are going to solve those problems. If the Conservatives' unwillingness or inability or ineptitude does not allow them to see the problem and to deal with the issues, then we on this side will do just that, because that is what Canadians have asked us to do. That is what workers and their families have asked us to do. That is what small businesses have asked us to do.

Recently credit card companies have been jacking up the rates they charge restaurants and small businesses when credit cards are used for those services. Why are they jacking up those rates? Why is it that a person who is going through difficult times and misses a credit card payment has his or her credit card rate jacked up by an additional five per cent as a penalty for missing the payment? Why would they do that to people?

These are some of the issues we should be dealing with and fixing, but again I go back to the fact that we end up talking about ourselves. The Canadian people, regardless of which side of the fence they stand on, are going to look seriously at all of us.

We wanted to know why voting was down to 59%. It was because the Conservatives started the last election on a broken promise. They had a promise of a fixed election date. Nobody brought the

government down. There was no confidence vote in this House of Commons, yet the Prime Minister went to see the Governor General and had, I assume, a nice cup of tea. Then he said, "This is it. We are shutting it down". There was no reason at all. They just shut it down and went into a \$300 million election. True, they came back with a few more seats, but they did not get a majority and they did not get the popular vote.

That should have told them very clearly that they had to work with the opposition leaders and the opposition parties to move the situations of this country forward. We offered the olive branch, and it was cut off. My question to them is, why? Why did they do this?

Only one man, or maybe two, can answer that question. I do not think anyone here right now could answer it. The Prime Minister should really tell the Canadian people why they did what they did last Thursday.

If we collectively work together, we can solve the problems of this country. I have been on the committees for fisheries and oceans and for veterans affairs for a long time. Those committees work very well together, regardless of the committee members' party affiliations. That is how this House should work, but leadership is required. We were looking for leadership on Thursday, but it did not materialize, and that is most unfortunate.

● (1310)

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. All this business going on today is a result, apparently, of the financial statement made by the Minister of Finance.

My question is on how to answer a question from a constituent in my riding. It is typical of questions that are asked. The person said, "We just had an election. It was fairly recently that this election took place—"

**An hon. member:** It was just weeks.

**Mr. David Tilson:** The member says "weeks", and it was weeks.

This lady wondered how the opposition can just say all of a sudden that they are going to be in charge, when the public of Canada voted Conservatives an increased number of members in this House and gave us a vote percentage in the 30s, a clear mandate.

I do not have an answer for that. I wonder if the member could help me with that question.

● (1315)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, they say in the House to never lead with your chin because it could be batted out of the park.

I appreciate the question. I advise the hon. member to walk down to the Library of Parliament and understand parliamentary procedure in Canada.

I remind him that he should tell his constituent why there was an election in the first place. I also remind the hon. member that he did not get a mandate. The Prime Minister was not elected as the prime minister, he was elected as the head of the Conservative Party and because the Conservatives got the majority of the seats, they get to govern.

*Government Orders*

The prime minister and cabinet must at all times have the confidence of the House of Commons. When they lose that confidence, two things happen. There is either a replacement of government from opposition, or we have an election. That is the parliamentary rule. It is Parliament 101.

If the hon. member would like to walk down to the library and get a further explanation, I am sure there are some wonderful learned people there who could walk him through the process.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have heard my colleague's long-overdue lecture on the British parliamentary system. I am dumbfounded by the fact that we have to give our colleagues across the way a political science primer, *Politics 101: the British parliamentary system*.

The first thing a minority government has to do is get the consent of enough opposition members to pass its bills and retain the confidence of the House. If it fails to do so, it cannot fulfill its duty and, according to our system, must automatically be removed from its role as the governing party.

The problem we are dealing with today is not the opposition's fault. It is the fault of an inept Prime Minister of Canada. That is the problem.

I would like to know what my colleague has to say about that.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, I think the premise of his question was the fact that we were looking for and seeking leadership from the Prime Minister of Canada and his finance minister on Thursday. It simply was not there. They did not deliver the goods. In their words, they did not get the job done.

What that means is this week we end up talking about ourselves and not the issues. My hon. colleague knows that many forestry workers are out of work. He probably knows many people who would love to work in construction but the money has not flowed for infrastructure programs. He probably knows many young people who are looking for retraining to get skilled jobs. He probably knows many immigrants looking to get that initial foot in the door.

Those are some of the issues the House should be talking about. I would love to be standing in the House talking about my first motion on veterans, which was passed in the House but ignored by the government. It is those issues that the House should be collectively talking about, not about ourselves.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it was said in the House today that we need to listen to Canadians. We need to articulate what Canadians have been sharing with us, what each of us has been hearing. Right across the country, Canadians have said loudly and clearly they do not like what is happening with this illegitimate coalition. Here are some of their statements, "I strongly oppose a coalition government. The Canadian people voted for this Prime Minister, for this government just six weeks ago. We gave the Conservatives a chance. The Liberals and NDP are just on a power trip. They are not interested in Canadian people. Imagine needing the help of the Bloc. They don't even want to be part of Canada. The fact is the Bloc's agenda is to break up Canada, nothing furthers a

separatist agenda more than economic chaos and a federal government that does not work. All they need to fulfill their goals is naive partners lusting for power. Behold the Bloc, NDP and the Liberals".

Does the member support this illegitimate lust for power?

● (1320)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, Langley is a great city. I have visited Fort Langley many times. Congratulations to the member.

Let me remind the hon. members of that party what David Orchard, once a leadership candidate for the PC Party, said when a certain defence minister or a certain person at that time wrote on the back of napkin a deal between the PC Party and the Reform Party or Alliance Party. He said that party was conceived in deception and born in betrayal. That is the last party to talk about ethics in this House of Commons.

The reality is, and the member knows it, we are all on committees and Bloc members of the committees have worked many times with us on fisheries issues, on immigration issues, on all kinds of issues. I have travelled with Bloc members across this country, ask my colleagues of the Conservative Party, and I can honestly say that every Bloc member I have worked with, be it fisheries, environment, veterans, defence, whatever, has had the true interests of the issue at hand. And the Conservatives know that as well because *Hansard* is full of compliments of the individual members of the Bloc who have worked very diligently on issues of unemployment insurance, job training and the environment.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member has raised some very interesting points.

It is kind of interesting to note that there is a criticism of the illegitimacy of a coalition when, back in 2004, the current Prime Minister entered into discussions for a coalition with the Bloc and the NDP in, to use their words, a grasp for power.

That is not what this is all about, though. What it is about is that the government has failed to deliver to Canadians an economic outlook and statement, and commitment to address the economic crisis, the financial crisis. It has failed to deal with the issues of how we are going to mitigate job loss in those areas where it is clear it is coming, to create jobs through infrastructure funding, and to help those people who find themselves in a position where they will not be able to find work early enough and may be too old and may not be able to get the kind of employment they are going to need to pay their bills.

I ask the member whether or not the Conservatives in fact have not got it right, they did not get the job done, they should have addressed the economic crisis in Canada first, and put the people first, political interests last?

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, a long-time member of the House of Commons, understands it extremely well. They had the opportunity. It does not come by very often. However, they told us for a week leading up to Thursday, with all the questions we asked, “We’re not going to answer them. Hold off until Thursday. Everything will be answered on Thursday”.

We did not think to ask on pay equity for women in the public service because we did not think that was an issue. Obviously, somebody over there thought it was, somebody thought that the economic crisis of this country is because of women and pay equity in the public service. Nobody raised the issue of the funding for our parties in the House before then because nobody thought it was an issue; not even the Conservatives. All of a sudden, it came up.

What will that do to create any jobs in this country? What will that do for retraining or to protect the environment or any of those issues? Instead of talking about the issues, we ended up talking about ourselves. That shows what the Conservatives lack. They either do not know or do not care how to fix the problems of our country. This side is going to do it.

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, like many members I too would like to congratulate the re-elected members and also the newly-elected members. When they entered this House, I am sure many of them probably did not expect the first order of business would be to deal with these issues.

I also want to thank the people of Brandon—Souris who for the third time have returned me to office. I often say to people that Brandon—Souris is the heart of Canada in my mind. We look in all directions to the rest of Canada. In Brandon—Souris we have a bit of an affinity with the rest of the country in the way we look at things and the way we do things, and I think we do it with respect on all sides.

I do want to talk about a few things, but I will start with the fiscal update.

It is important for Canadians to recognize that the finance minister said very clearly from the start that this would not be a budget. He said it would be a fiscal update. He said it would be a where we are at this point in time in Canada. He said it would outline what the future may hold and what we are prepared to do in the future should those situations occur.

Everything I have heard from members opposite in this debate is talk about the fiscal update. We talk about strengthening our financial institutions. We talk about how not only this government but previous governments have taken steps to strengthen those institutions in order to make them able to withstand the pressures that we are now under in a world economic downturn.

We have talked about taxes. We have talked about other countries that have reduced taxes for their individuals and for their corporations. Why? Because the individuals are the wage earners and the corporations are the job creators.

We need individuals and corporations to be in a position where at the end of the day they can continue to make decisions that move our country forward, create the opportunities that we all hope and wish for every constituent we represent, but also move the country

forward on the financial side so we can strengthen our economy at the same time.

We made a commitment as a government to the G7, G8 and G20 nations that we would not do anything radical, financially or economically. We made an agreement with them because we did not want countries acting independently of each other thereby creating themselves another crisis.

We only have to look to the south of us where should the American government decide to make substantial changes without consultation or discussion with us, those changes could jeopardize us and put us in a terrible position immediately, not down the road. We know the issues facing the people in America. We know the challenges they are going through. I believe we are starting to see and feel that impact.

Many of the steps that this government has taken have put us in a position where we can still stand today and say that Canada is a leading nation in the world economic situation.

Many top financial people suggest that Canada is going into this economic situation last and is going to come out of it first. Why? Because we have solid principles in place that guide our lending institutions, that guide our monetary situation, and protect Canadians from the downtown that we are now experiencing.

What I would like to acknowledge is the fact that the fiscal update addressed some of the issues that Canadians were talking to us about the most. I refer to one example and that is the seniors' issues.

People in my constituency have told me they are in a tough situation. They have a challenge facing them because they have to make a decision with their future and their investments. They believe that right now is not a good time to be looking at cashing in some RRIFs.

This government addressed that. Did we address it completely or satisfactorily for every Canadian? I suspect not. A government looking after a national population has to make decisions that impact all Canadians, not just specific organizations or specific groups that have an issue they want the government to take up.

We have done that. We did it with modicum. We did it with the idea that more may be needed.

● (1325)

Members opposite talk about stimulus. We have all seen what stimulus can do if it is done wrong. The money flows, people seem satisfied for a short period of time, but when the money dries up, we face the same realities that we are facing today. We have to come forward with a financial plan that addresses the specific needs.

Many of my colleagues and many of my friends are involved in the automotive industry. I was involved in the automotive industry. I understand what people in that industry are going through, but for a government to simply step up to the plate and say that we are going to throw billions of dollars at a problem without a plan, without an outcome that can be measured at the end of the day, what would we be telling Canadian taxpayers? We would be telling them that the only solution to any of our problems would be to throw more money at it to try to make it go away.

*Government Orders*

We could do that for political expediency if we so chose to do, but that is not the objective of a sound government. It is not something that I will encourage or ask my government to do. I just will not let it do that.

We have to look forward. Over time in the next few months we are going to see some changes in the world economic situation and we will be able to address them directly as opposed to throwing money at the wall and hoping that some of it sticks and some of the benefits take place.

I have listened to the other members. I have read their documents. I have looked at the agreements they have made. All they are doing is echoing the same thing we said in our fiscal update. We need to spend more money on infrastructure. We have addressed that.

It was clearly outlined by the finance minister that we would double the spending on infrastructure in the next fiscal year. That creates more opportunity and more jobs. It actually enhances our ability to move goods and services not only across Canada but around the world, which again creates the opportunity for us to benefit, to grow and to continue to fight the economic downturn that we are now facing.

People join political parties for various reasons. There are political parties on the right and political parties on the left. There are environmental parties. Canada is a complete mixture of thoughts and ideas, but when we make the decision as individuals to join a political party, we make that decision based on what that political party is saying to us and how it impacts our lives and how it fits in with our thinking in the world, in the political system and in our governments of today.

I freely admit I have been a Conservative for a long time. I grew up in a Conservative family and I believe I have the Conservative values that I think are necessary not only to make my community, my province and my country move forward but to also position us as a country in the world where we can show responsibility and accountability to the people. I suspect when members joined the Liberal Party, when members joined the New Democratic Party and when members joined the Bloc party, they all agreed with specific parts of that respective party.

When we get into the dialogue in this chamber, those commitments and dedication to the party principle become even stronger and are echoed across the country. It must be so difficult today for some members to forfeit that belief, not everything, but to forfeit the belief that they have stood for.

I talked about joining a political party. The next step is when one becomes active in that political party, when one takes a role in that party, the governance role or being part of the executive that manages all of the campaigns. We all count on those people. However, when one makes that next step one is saying, "I really believe in what these people are saying. I really believe in what my party believes in and I am prepared to make the sacrifices to make that work".

The one step further relates to everyone sitting in the chamber as elected members of Parliament. We have made a decision not only to believe in a party and to be active in it, but to let our names stand. For me, the proudest moment I have ever experienced in my life is

the honour that has been bestowed upon me not only to serve federally, but also to have served provincially and municipally. I have had the great fortune to represent people having been elected by the people based on what I stood for and what I presented to them as their representative and what I promised I would do as their representative.

● (1330)

I suspect today there is a lot of anguish on all sides in regard to what we see taking place in the public sphere. I suspect there are a lot of people who have made commitments to all political parties. I am not excluding the Conservative Party from this. I think for many people who have supported a party financially, or with their time, with their effort, with their volunteerism, everything they have done to support that political party has come into question over these last few days.

I am disappointed. I certainly think Canadians are tremendously disappointed in us. Collectively we have to take a deep breath and recognize in what we are doing and the commitments we are making today how the people we represent and who support us, sometimes blindly, must feel.

I am receiving numerous emails, phone calls and letters. Sometimes in this business we tend to exaggerate, but I have heard from over 100 and less than 1,000 people, and I suspect the number will continue to grow. People are disappointed in all of us. They are frustrated with the way we are carrying on. They are frustrated with what is happening to democracy in Canada. I fear greatly that we will all suffer the consequences of what we are doing and what is happening today in Canada, particularly in this Parliament.

Everyone agrees that the economic downturn will impact Canada. No one will deny that. We have been fortunate as a country to stay above that fray for a while, but it is obvious that in the next several months we will have some tough decisions to make as a country and we will have some tough decisions to make as a government. However, we need to do it for one reason, and that is to benefit Canadians, not ourselves nor our families.

When a person is elected, particularly in Manitoba and not so much at the federal level, they are elected without fear or without favour. That means they are able to make the decisions they believe are best for Canadians without fear of repercussion or without expectation of favour. If we all stepped back and took a look at ourselves and listened to those words, things might change in the House, and I desperately hope they do. Things might change for Canadians when they see us actually working on their behalf instead of the self-serving righteousness that we all offer.

Members opposite spoke clearly about the rules of Parliament, how governments can change and how people can move in and out of government without elections. I grant that; I know that is the rule and I fully understand it. I want to relate a story going back to when I was a young boy.

*Government Orders*

We were playing ball, 12 and under ball. We were small-town kids who needed everybody to make the team. We always liked beating those teams from the bigger towns. If we could do that, we were satisfied. We did beat a bigger town team. We beat that team three games out of four, but lost the series on a rule. Did that bitterness ever go away? I could go back to my small community and raise that issue with people today and they will remember the precise moment in time and history when we felt, as small-town folks, that we were being taken over and dictated to by the guys from the big town. It was all within the rules. It was all clear. The rules allowed for it, but it did not make it settle any better with my community.

I do not think Canadians will be satisfied with this. We can say that the rules are the rules and we are strictly following the rules, but again, I would ask us to look deep into our souls and ask whether this is how we want to do it. At the end of the day, is this where we want to be? Are we willing and able to stand in front of our communities and say, "Yes, today we are the government and this is how we did it".

We have to take a hard look at that. Canadians cannot afford the upheaval that we are presenting to them as members of Parliament. We are the people who are supposed to be making the laws of this country and creating the opportunities. Instead, we are seen collectively as self-serving and nothing more.

● (1335)

It is a challenging time for Canada. Everyone has issues to deal with. I listened to the members opposite. We all have specific concerns in our communities that we are trying to address.

I represent a large agricultural base which has suffered in the last several years from drought, from rain, from just about anything, just as people in our forestry sector and people in the automotive sector are suffering. We have to find solutions, but we have to find solutions that work, not solutions that continue the status quo, which is not working. If we do not look beyond that, we are in for serious challenges and we are going to create a deeper challenge for us in the future.

I have sat in the chamber for four years. I have been in opposition and in government. As I said earlier in the House, I have seen the bitterness that has evolved. Again, I will not point a finger at one or two individuals. As a group we have to acknowledge that we have all contributed to that situation. As politicians, we had better take a sharp look at ourselves and where we want to go in the future.

We are talking about a fiscal update. We are talking about a budget that will come out in the last week of January. It gives the government and people time to digest all of the situations impacting us. It gives us the ability to listen to whatever input the opposition members may have, but we have to do it constructively. We have to listen in the same breath.

The state of our economy is not as dire as we are saying it is today. The potential is there. We all acknowledge that. Our challenge is to manage the situation as we see it today and what we see in the future.

I look back and question some of things our government did, but when I look at the results today, I have a comfort zone that people smarter than I had ideas and solutions to some of the economic situations we were facing. We are prepared to put those ideas out

there for debate and for the government to move on them. I think we did a lot of the right things.

This morning I had a call from a gentleman I have known for years. I have great respect for him. He is disappointed in us all. I will end with his comment to me. He said, "I see bitterness on all sides. I see anger and hatred expressed publicly that I never thought I would see in my lifetime. My advice is to never let your hate of someone or something deny your love for Canada".

● (1340)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech and I would like to take this opportunity to pick his brain. Since he is on the other side of the House in the Conservative caucus, he might be able to shed some light on the actions of the last few days.

What was the Prime Minister thinking when he decided to present this economic statement or misstatement, which has been called by none other than Don Martin, a delusional document?

What was the Prime Minister thinking when he decided he was going to use this document to take away the right of public servants to strike? Did he think that any of the three parties on this side of the House would agree with that position?

What was the Prime Minister thinking when he decided he was going to attack pay equity for women? Did he think that none of the parties on this side of the House would object to it?

What are the answers to these questions?

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Mr. Speaker, while I will not speak for the Prime Minister, I can say how I interpreted it. I interpreted it as the government saying to Canadians that we are prepared to share in some of the cost and some of the hurt that people are going through, ergo, the removal of the vote subsidy. I think he was saying that Canadians want to provide the stability we are all asking for right now. Was that the right way to go? No, perhaps not, but that has been taken off the table. I would say that Canadians are looking for this government to show examples where it is prepared to take leadership roles in this area too.

At the end of the day, if that was the issue that provoked what we are seeing on the other side, then I would say that the provocation has been removed.

● (1345)

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, since this is the first time I have stood in the House since the election, I want to begin by thanking my constituents of Hamilton Centre for returning me and giving me the honour of being here again for a third term.

When I was listening to the member I was struck by the member's respectful tone, tenor and approach as he tried to avoid being offensive. He conveyed a partisan message in an effective way without being personal or making things any worse here. I applaud him and thank him for that tone.

*Government Orders*

I have not had a chance to work with the member that much but we have many similarities. We both came here in 2004 and we both served municipally, provincially and federally. We also have both been inside cabinet in government and in opposition. I understand very much where the member is coming from.

My question is similar to the one that the previous member just asked. The member said in his earlier remarks that the intent of the economic update was not to prescribe details but rather to talk about broad strokes and generalities and yet part of that statement was an outright attack on the rights of women and labour. I would like to know how he can square the intent of a generalized statement in which the government did not provide the details we needed for stimulus but did provide details on attacks of other citizens.

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the government presented an update on the financial situation in Canada. It talked about the strengths and the opportunities in our economy and it talked about what may lie ahead.

With regard to the two issues the member brought forward, the government has recognized that perhaps it was not the right time to do it and it has taken them off the table. I think the opposition's message has been made loud and clear.

The fact is that we as members of Parliament and as elected politicians must show the Canadian public that we, too, are prepared to make hard financial decisions that impact our lives and, regrettably, we tried to do that. I would ask the member opposite if that is what has provoked the coalition that we are hearing about.

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for Brandon—Souris on being re-elected by his constituents for a third term. I also thank my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country for electing me for a second term. I will continue to work hard, and I am humbled and honoured to have this opportunity.

Nineteen percent of my constituents are 65 years of age or older, the highest census metropolitan area in Canada. A big issue of concern was the stock market and the fluctuation in their portfolio values. Retired individuals across the country are very concerned with the RRSP requirements and the RRIF withdrawals.

Would my hon. colleague indicate how the fiscal economic update addressed this specific issue, an issue of concern to all Canadians?

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Mr. Speaker, if I remember correctly, and I remember hearing from members opposite, this was an issue that concerned us all. If we have people in our constituency who are retiring, the time of their retirement will be impacted dramatically by the economic downturn.

I spoke directly to the Minister of Finance, as I am sure many did, and the advice was that whatever we can do we must do. We must send a message to them. We have reduced the amount they must withdraw at that particular time by 25%. It is a good first step. As I said earlier, the budget may contain more things that will address those particular issues.

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my friend from Brandon—Souris just talked about the fact that members are receiving a lot of emails. All my colleagues on this side are also

receiving those emails and we can see that a lot of people are angry and dissatisfied with the whole situation.

The words being used tell us that most Canadians believe in three assumptions concerning Quebec and the Bloc Québécois: First, that we are a bunch of troublemakers who are never happy with what we get; second, that we receive much more money from Canada than we put in; and, third, that we are the source of a lot of problems.

The finance minister said this morning that we in the House were dealing with the devil.

If all those assumptions are true, the sovereignty of Quebec should appear to all my colleagues as a good way to solve a problem once and for all, while making a lot of money out of it. Why is it that my colleagues are making so much effort to keep us in the system?

• (1350)

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Mr. Speaker, I will just state very clearly that I believe in a Canada that includes Quebec and I will do everything I can to ensure that happens.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot of talk about supporting people with RRIFs. I wonder if the members opposite could tell us why people who are on old age supplements could not be helped. We were told the other day that \$100 a month for seniors on the old age supplement would eliminate about 80% to 85% of the poverty among seniors in the country.

Why did we not hear that from the government in its economic update and not just about people who have retirement savings?

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** Mr. Speaker, as a government we have done many things that address the retirement age group of people. The splitting of an income has created better opportunities. We have increased the level at which they can become tax free, and that continues to go up. We have actually increased seniors' ability to withdraw their RRIFs from 69 to 71, which was necessary at the time to help address some of the issues.

Not everyone has an answer in a day but what we have proposed to Canadians is very positive. I think that when they see our budget in January, Canadians will understand what we are trying to do and will support it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, first, may I say that I will be sharing my time with...

**An hon. member:** Stéphane Dion?

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** I will be sharing my time with the member for Terrebonne—Blainville, and certainly not with the stranger across.

We have just come from an election; it was only 48 days ago. An election represents not only an opportunity but also a responsibility for members and candidates to go into their ridings; to talk with the people, to meet with social and economic groups, and all the different institutions. It is necessary to find out the real needs of the people; to learn about their hopes, but, above all, we must be able to identify solutions and take action to apply those solutions.

*Statements by Members*

Of course, considering the election results; in the light of the government's Speech from the Throne, and also the economic statement, it is obvious that the necessary and indeed essential work of talking to the people has not been done. I should allow for a caveat. If the work was done, the Conservatives did not listen. If, in fact, they did pay attention to the needs of their residents; if they did actually listen, their leader probably spoke louder than their own voters. If none of these things happened and they came forward with solutions other than the solutions proposed by the Bloc Québécois, it must be because they do not have any ridings like those in Quebec. Those are ridings that have Teflon protection, so that they are not affected by reality. However, I am sure the financial, economic and social problems affecting Quebec must also affect all of Canada.

Why then are they acting this way? Clearly, what they have presented to us is not an economic statement. It is really an ideological statement. It is an ideology that finds its roots in the tar sands. One can imagine what would grow there, what would come out of it and what the Conservatives are feeding on. That must really fog up their glasses, because we must recognize that the vision of this government is very, very short.

We have gone from one minority government to another. It is true that during the last election the Conservatives insisted it was their intention to elect a majority government. That was the reason they called the election. Now, having been denied that result, and frustrated at the fact that the great majority of voters said no to them—however, I should not exaggerate; there are limits to everything—they bring forward an economic statement that clearly shows how blind the government is to the need for urgent action. While all the governments in the world are taking action against the crisis, this Conservative Reform government—or Reform Conservative government, whatever you call it, it is the same thing—does exactly the opposite.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Let us talk about that, since I heard an echo from the distant prairies, by way of Quebec. Take the example of the person who did not go to talk to the people, or if he did go, did not listen to them. He is not aware of the needs of the people in his riding. He only repeats the policies of the Conservative reformers that he has been spreading throughout Quebec and he never stops hitting the people of Quebec over the head.

Instead of tabling a plan for economic recovery, rather than providing oxygen, the Prime Minister has chosen to suffocate the economy.

• (1355)

The Conservative leader decided to ignore businesses, regions and people. We cannot accept that. Instead of tackling the economic crisis, the Reform-Conservative government decided to provoke a democratic crisis for strictly partisan reasons by eliminating political party funding. The Prime Minister also decided to attack workers by suspending their right to strike, and to attack women by making the right to pay equity negotiable. It is easy to conclude that, in an attempt to more easily impose his ideology, the Prime Minister wants to suppress political parties, unions, women and all forms of opposition, including, primarily, the voice of the people.

See you later, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** After question period, the hon. member will have four minutes to complete his remarks. Moving on to members' statements. The hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### TED ROGERS

**Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to a great Canadian icon who passed away today, Ted Rogers, founder and CEO of Rogers Communications.

Ted Rogers was one of a kind, a communications visionary, a business icon, an entrepreneur without equal, a philanthropist and a proud Canadian who was respected near and far.

Our nation's geography presents natural barriers to us as a people. The work of Ted Rogers in radio, cable and wireless helped bring us closer together. We must also remember his commitment to his community and to future generations, as exemplified by the School of Management at Ryerson University.

Ted Rogers was also a devoted family man. On behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada, we send our deepest condolences to his wife, Loretta, and his children, Edward, Lisa, Melinda and Martha.

At a difficult time such as this, it is especially important to remember Ted's enduring rallying call, "The best is yet to come".

\* \* \*

• (1400)

### CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are witness to the spectacle of a Conservative Party doing everything it can to cling to power.

The Conservatives introduced an economic statement last Thursday. Since then, they have scrambled, panicked and raced away from it, with one cabinet minister topping the next in their rush to disavow, drop and abandon the proposals they claimed were vital to the interests of our country.

Canadians see the Conservative Party laid bare in its desperate quest to cling to power, so desperate that it has resorted to secretly taping the meetings of other parties. To the Conservatives, no policy is so important, no principle so sacrosanct, no law so unbreakable that it cannot be tossed on the trash heap as the Prime Minister digs his fingernails into the door frames of 24 Sussex Drive, trying to hold on when it is clear he can no longer govern.

When he was opposition leader, he used to claim that a government had to be able to face the House of Commons on a vote every day. Will the Conservatives face the House today?

*Statements by Members*

[Translation]

**MANUFACTURING SECTOR**

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in light of the recent economic statement, we are forced to admit that the Conservative government remains totally indifferent to the demands of the Bloc Québécois, which is calling for concrete actions to be taken to help the manufacturing sector.

The automotive industry is one of the hardest hit by the economic crisis. A number of companies will have no choice but to close down, and this is the case for a company in my riding. Dana, a car parts manufacturer in Magog, and one of the few still operating in Quebec, will have to cease operations and lay off 130 workers.

The government steadfastly refuses to do anything to help the workers who have fallen victim to the crisis in manufacturing. It ought to have broadened access to employment insurance and done away with the waiting period. As for assistance to companies, it ought, most definitely, to have offered incentives to purchase equipment, for example.

This House and the public have every reason to have lost confidence in this government.

\* \* \*

[English]

**OPPOSITION COALITION PROPOSAL**

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on October 14, Canadians spoke with their votes. This government under this Prime Minister was re-elected with a clear and stronger mandate to address the global economic crisis.

Canadians rejected the Liberals, handing them their worst share of the vote since Confederation. Canadians rejected the NDP and its job-killing economics. Both the NDP and the Liberals rejected a coalition on the campaign trail.

Now they want to connive, aided and abetted by the separatist Bloc, to overturn the results of an election held only seven weeks ago. They want to impose a prime minister rejected by the people four to one and a coalition for which nobody voted. Worse still, the Liberals and the NDP will give the Bloc a separatist veto on all spending and national decisions.

We will use every legal means possible to keep the separatists out of power and keep Canada moving forward. This Conservative government is standing up for Canada.

\* \* \*

**ROBERT JONES**

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, November 9, beloved Windsor Constable Robert Jones passed away after a difficult battle with liver disease.

A police officer for more than 20 years, he was best known for his work as a community service officer. He ran the force's VIP program, which brings officers to local schools to speak to grade six students and to organize police weeks. He was very popular with teachers and students throughout the city.

Under his leadership and initiative, the program was expanded beyond traditional public and separate schools to other private institutions for the first time. His involvement in the community included coaching basketball at the South West Francophone Basketball Association and L'Essor High School, where his son Xavier is on the team. His daughter, Bienka, attends Royal Military College on a basketball scholarship.

He will be missed by his wife, Nathalie, his children, siblings and the entire community. He was a true leader and police officer that inspired many children and guided others to more hopeful choices, a significant loss to all of us, but an example we shall always remember and aspire to be.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

[Translation]

**CONSERVATIVE PARTY**

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are witnessing the spectacle of the Conservative Party's efforts to keep power within its grasp.

The government has had its chance. All parties in the House have promised to work together for the good of the Canadian economy. The Prime Minister had the opportunity, a unique opportunity in the history of this country, to proceed with measures that would have had the support of every party in this House. Instead, the Prime Minister has used the economic crisis as a pretext to impose right-wing policies, policies he did not have the courage to present during the last election campaign.

Everywhere in the country workers are losing their jobs, particularly in manufacturing and forestry. Yet the Prime Minister's main concern has been to wonder how he could use the situation to the advantage of the Conservative Party and its ideology. That was his main concern.

The country needed someone to deal with the economy, but the Prime Minister is preoccupied with politics. That is why he has lost the moral authority to govern, and that is also why he has lost the confidence of Canadians.

\* \* \*

[English]

**OPPOSITION COALITION PROPOSAL**

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on September 9, 2004, the three opposition leaders wrote to Her Excellency, stating that if the House failed to support the government, she should consult the opposition before dissolving the House. However, that is where the parallel with today's situation ends.

The September 9 letter was issued almost a month prior to the recall of the House and served to successfully pressure Paul Martin to amend the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne rather than to lose office to a coalition. All talk of coalition vanished from the moment the Address in Reply had been approved.

*Statements by Members*

At the start of 2005, when the opposition again threatened to bring down the government, everyone understood that the only possible result would have been a dissolution.

The timeline in 2004-05 was only marginally longer than the one facing us today. Thus, as yesterday, I submit that if the House votes no confidence in the government, it will be against precedent for the opposition coalition to take power and, thus, new elections will be the only constitutionally permissible outcome.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**SOPHIE BARAT SECONDARY SCHOOL**

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, 150 years ago, in Ahuntsic, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart founded an important academic institution that is now called the Sophie Barat Secondary School. Our thanks go out to all the women who, in 1858, inspired by Madeleine Sophie Barat, created this place of learning, which is still thriving today. I wish to thank all the nuns who have worked there over the years for their extraordinary dedication.

What began as a girls' school has become co-ed, public and secular. As a proud testament to Quebec's progress, and with its team of teachers, administrators, students and parents who volunteer, it is a source of pride and a jewel in Montreal's public education system.

I urge this remarkable Quebec institution to continue to adapt to the needs of the times, in service to our most precious resource: our children.

Long live public education for everyone, and long live Sophie Barat Secondary School.

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[*English*]

**OPPOSITION COALITION PROPOSAL**

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the people of North Vancouver for exercising their democratic right and trusting me to represent them.

This week Canadians are witnessing an unprecedented attack on our democratic institutions. The most basic principle of our democracy has been assaulted, the principle that voters choose the government.

October 14 was election day. Across the country, people went to work, drove to the polls, had dinner with their families and then turned on the television to hear the news. That is how democracy works.

The results were clear. The Leader of the Opposition was rejected with his party's lowest vote percentage since confederation. He did not just lose the confidence of the public, he also lost the confidence of his own party and he resigned. Then he found two new parties. All it took was a few secret meetings, and now he thinks he should be prime minister, with the help of the separatists and the socialists.

This is not democracy. It is time for the people to speak.

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has seen job losses in manufacturing and forestry during the Conservatives' time in office. The job losses are real and they are expected to continue.

With every major industrialized country in the world taking action to invest in their economies, their infrastructure and their workers, Canadians expected action from the Conservatives. Instead, they got politics. Instead of helping working families, the Prime Minister attacked pay equity, attacked labour rights and figured out how to best help the Conservative Party.

The funny thing is suddenly the Conservatives have the time and the interest to organize rallies and petitions to fight for their jobs. Where were they during the weeks between the election and the economic update, when they should have been putting that kind of energy and enthusiasm into protecting the jobs of Canadians?

The Conservatives now realize the economic statement was a mistake. Unfortunately, when they are running a \$1.5 trillion economy, they do not get any do-overs.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**OPPOSITION COALITION PROPOSAL**

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today to thank the voters of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar for democratically electing me as their member of Parliament.

We all know elections matter. During a campaign, the leaders and the parties draft platforms, debate ideas and seek a real mandate from the public.

Just a few short weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition campaigned on a platform that was rejected by the Canadian people. While campaigning, he rejected the idea of a coalition government. In fact, he said that the NDP would damage the economy. Now, as the price of power, he is inviting that party to do just that.

Back then he was fighting the separatists. Today he wants to give the Bloc a veto over all federal legislation.

He simply must not impose a radical government without the people's consent. This cannot happen. Not in the middle of a global crisis. Not any time. Only the people can decide. Only—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

\* \* \*

**ANDREW GRENON**

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today to pay tribute to the extraordinary sacrifice and uncommon valour of my late constituent, Corporal Andrew Grenon, who was killed on September 3 of this year while serving our country in Afghanistan.

Corporal Grenon grew up in Windsor—Tecumseh and joined the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry five years ago. By all accounts, he loved serving in the forces and believed strongly in the missions that he was tasked to perform.

The dedication Andrew, or “Drew” as his fellow soldiers called him, showed in volunteering again after being injured in combat is truly inspirational. His death came less than two weeks after receiving a field commendation for saving the lives of two of his comrades.

Those who served with him say that he was an outstanding soldier who demonstrated tremendous leadership and bravery and inspired those around him with his courage, dedication and great sense of humour.

His contribution to his unit, to the Canadian armed forces and to Canada will be greatly missed.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### LEADER OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, do you think Quebec will be given more money? The Bloc suggested to the Parti québécois that the Liberal leader will give Quebec a billion dollars. Parti québécois leader, Pauline Marois, said it so well, “Have they suffered a memory loss?” Have they already forgotten that the Liberal government cut provincial transfers, that it was the Liberals who were at the heart of the sponsorship scandal, that the Liberal leader was a minister in the government that scorned Quebecers the most? How could a sovereigntist leader sign a pact with the centralizing Liberals?

If the leader of the Bloc wants to be in power, he should put in for the job in Quebec. But I forgot: the PQ does not even want him. The Liberals and the NDP want him, but at what price and for what purpose? The leaders of the NDP and the Liberals do not have the interests of Quebecers at heart. They want a strong central government, but not a strong Quebec. What has happened to the independence of the Bloc leader?

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#### LOUISE ARBOUR

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Louise Arbour has just been awarded the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2008.

This prize is only awarded every five years and recognizes outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt and Martin Luther King are former recipients.

Born and educated in Montreal, Ms. Arbour was a distinguished judge at the Superior Court and the Ontario Court of Appeal as well as the Supreme Court of Canada. Her remarkable intelligence and balanced rulings earned her the distinction of being one of Canada's greatest jurist.

As chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights she demonstrated courage, determination and compassion in the service

#### Statements by Members

of justice. This prize is a tremendous honour for Quebec and for Canada.

Our deepest congratulations, Ms. Arbour.

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● (1415)

[English]

#### PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative response to the economic crisis is a perfect example of the type of leadership of the Prime Minister. His is a “My way or the highway” approach to leading his government and his party. The Prime Minister will not tolerate dissent.

We just need to ask the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, a lifelong and loyal Progressive Conservative, who was kicked out of that party when he dared to tell the Prime Minister to live up to his word. Conservatives know and they will state that the Prime Minister has no one to blame but himself.

It is the present Prime Minister who chose to attack women and public servants instead of dealing with the economic crisis and who refuses to act like other responsible world leaders who are putting their people first.

Not too long ago, the Conservatives asked Canadians to stand up for Canada but the Prime Minister has failed to do that.

Canadians want a government that will stand up for them, particularly in difficult times, and put Canadians first. It is not that government and it is not that Prime Minister.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have witnessed an alliance between the leader of the Bloc and the Liberal leader. The Bloc leader has handed over his party to the Liberal leader. Who would ever have imagined that the father of the Clarity Act, sworn enemy of sovereigntists, would be the new leader of bloc members in Ottawa?

The Bloc leader has betrayed his party members by allying himself with the enemy who, I would like to refresh his memory, always wanted to put Quebec in its place. In the past, the Bloc leader said the following about the Liberal leader: “Our visions for the future of Quebec are totally different”. Well no longer, and Quebecers should know that.

Or is it a trick to advance the separatist cause that neither the Liberals or the New Democrats can see, blinded as they are by their lust for power?

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA**

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will read the following statement:

The whole principle of our democracy is the government is supposed to be able to face the House of Commons any day on a vote.

This government now has a deliberate policy of avoiding a vote....

The statement goes on to say that it is a violation of the fundamental constitutional principles of our democracy.

Could the Prime Minister inform the House who said those words?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the highest principle of Canadian democracy is that if one wants to be prime minister one gets one's mandate from the Canadian people and not from Quebec separatists.

The deal that the leader of the Liberal Party has made with the separatists is a betrayal of the voters of this country, a betrayal of the best interests of our economy and a betrayal of the best interests of our country, and we will fight it with every means that we have.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not answer my question. I will help him. He himself spoke those words on May 3, 2005, when he was the Leader of the Opposition.

*[Translation]*

Let me repeat what the Prime Minister said: "This government now has the deliberate policy of avoiding a vote. This is a violation of the fundamental constitutional principles of our democracy."

Does the Prime Minister agree with himself?

● (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have just said, if one wants to be Prime Minister one gets one's mandate from the Canadian people and not from Quebec separatists.

*[English]*

From Macdonald and Laurier to Diefenbaker and Trudeau, Liberals and Conservatives have often disagreed but there is one thing we should never disagree on and the leader of the Liberal Party is betraying the best interests in the best traditions of his own party if he thinks he can make a deal to govern.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every member of the House has received a mandate from the Canadian people to deliver a government that will face the economic crisis. The Prime Minister has failed. The Prime Minister does not have the support of the House any more. Will he allow a

vote to test if he has the confidence of the House, as it must be in a parliamentary democracy?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, not a single member of the House, not even a member of the Bloc, received a mandate to have a government in which the separatists would be part of the coalition.

If the Leader of the Opposition thinks he has support for this, he should have the confidence to take this to the people of Canada who will reject it.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is too bad that the noise the Conservatives make is a whole lot more than the voting power they command in the House.

*[Translation]*

Yesterday, the parliamentary budget officer shot down the Conservative argument that they were doing everything possible to stimulate the economy. This gentleman, who was appointed by the Prime Minister, says the impact of past tax cuts is all used up.

Why has the government not presented a recovery plan to protect Canadian jobs?

*[English]*

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** We have acted, Mr. Speaker, and we are acting. We have before the House the RRIF amendment for seniors. We have the proposal with respect to pensioners, very important for pensioners this year if Parliament chooses to act on this. We have the proposal for business with respect to credit through the Export Development Corporation, about \$3 billion worth of credit, very important for Canadian manufacturers.

All these would stimulate the economy, but I gather all are opposed by the Liberals.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister still does not get it. The Parliamentary Budget Officer, appointed by the Prime Minister, says that the impact of past tax cuts is all used up. That means it is all gone, there is nothing left, not for auto and forestry workers now losing thousands of jobs, not for the extra quarter of a million Canadians due to become unemployed by 2010.

Why does the minister not understand that he has done nothing for the economy and that is why the Conservatives have lost the confidence of the House? It is very simple.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member of the separatist coalition opposite raises a question. I think there was a question in there somewhere about economic plans. The only economic plan we have heard from the separatist coalition is a \$30 billion spending program.

● (1425)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** You think it's really funny.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Carolyn, relax, you are going to hurt yourself.

This is what Don Drummond said about—

*Oral Questions*

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The Minister of Finance appears to be addressing members by name and he knows that is out of order.

Honestly, hon. members two weeks ago today were saying we needed more order in the House. Today is not orderly and I would ask hon. members to restrain themselves so we can hear the questions and the responses.

The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor for a few more seconds.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, what is being proposed by the separatist coalition is a \$30 billion spending program. That would put our country into a structural deficit for a long time. As Don Drummond of the TD Bank said, this would be a disaster that would launch us into a structural deficit.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, who in 2004 suggested that the Governor General consider alternatives to an election, is now claiming that forming a coalition is undemocratic. That is untrue, and he knows it. The Prime Minister has also said that the 2004 agreement pertained to an amendment to the throne speech. That is also untrue, and he knows it.

Instead of looking for red herrings, will the Prime Minister admit that a coalition was formed because he did not make the sort of compromises a minority government must make, that he bears sole responsibility for the political crisis and that he has lost the confidence of this House?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Parti Québécois said today, "It is clear that this country is not working. The only solution is to separate, to opt for sovereignty."

The applause from the Bloc shows why this country needs a government that supports Canada, the best country in the world.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have learned from years of experience in this House that when members rise every couple of minutes to applaud, that means that things are not going well.

The Bloc put realistic proposals on the table to stimulate the economy in the interests of Quebec, proposals that have largely been adopted by the coalition but were ignored in this government's ideological statement.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his narrow ideological corridor has led him to a dead end and that he has lost the confidence of the House?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to my counterpart, the new Quebec lieutenant for the leader of the Liberals. I will quote, if I may, from last October 7's *Le Devoir*: "It is obvious to us, as a very function of what we are [a sovereignist party], that we will enter into ad hoc alliances only. That is what determines whether something goes through or not".

This is what he has just done: signed a blank cheque, handed over his seats to the Liberal leader, betrayed the people who elected him.

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it might be worthwhile for the Quebec political lieutenant to read the agreement before commenting on it.

During the campaign for the election he called supposedly to deal with the economic crisis, the Prime Minister never proposed any solutions. That explains why his government stayed in a minority position. Then the throne speech, as well as the economic statement, contained less than nothing about supporting the economy and helping the victims of the crisis.

Does the Prime Minister understand that he has totally failed, no longer has the confidence of the public, and no longer has the confidence of this House?

● (1430)

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member of the separatist coalition opposite surely has read about the tax reductions and he knows the stimulus that this provides to the economy, including the three tax reductions that come into force 30 days from now.

In January the stimulus will be 2% of GDP. The help for seniors, pensioners and small businesses, in particular on the credit side of the Business Development Bank of Canada, are all vital in this time of economic turbulence.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, our responsibility as parliamentarians is to ensure that answers are found for the public's concerns and difficulties during the current crisis. The government has totally discredited itself by doing exactly the opposite of that: creating more uncertainties and insecurity.

Is the Prime Minister aware that the initiative by the opposition parties has the support of civil society and that labour unions, environmentalists, women's groups and coalitions of artists see the tripartite agreement as a response at last to their concerns?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with respect, the strident questioning does not help the economy. What will help the economy is further credit being available and affordable to small, medium and large businesses in the country, further investments in infrastructure, a reduced tax burden to incent spending in the economy and help for pensioners and seniors.

I would think the member opposite would want to support that for the people of Quebec and Canada.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 62% of people voted against giving this Prime Minister a mandate. They voted for opposition parties. Parties on this side of the House have set aside their differences to work together. The new coalition government's priority will be to put forward concrete solutions for the economy. That is what people want now.

*Oral Questions*

The Conservatives refused to do it, so how can Canadians have confidence in this government?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the three opposition parties told voters that they had no plan to form a coalition. That was their commitment, their promise to the Canadian people.

[English]

That is what they told the Canadian people. Instead of being willing to co-operate, the leader of the NDP has admitted that from the beginning of this Parliament his sole objective was to form a coalition with the separatists. That is not what federalists, Conservatives, Liberals and NDPers across the country, voted for.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what I said during the election, and have said for years and have put into practice, is I am ready to work with other parties in the House, and we have evidenced that with all parties.

It is clear that the Prime Minister does not understand this. He has been unwilling to work with other parties. That is why he has lost the confidence of the House. That is what is happening here. He used to say that the prime minister had a moral obligation to respect the will of the House. He is refusing to allow a vote. He knows full well he has lost the confidence.

When will he recognize that fact and turn over power to those who have—

**The Speaker:** The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, as part of the culmination of the machinations of the leader of the NDP, we had those three parties together forming this agreement, signing a document and they would not even have the Canadian flag behind them. They had to be photographed without it.

They had to be photographed without it because a member of their coalition does not even believe in the country. As Prime Minister, it is not my responsibility to turn the keys of power over to a group like that. It is up to the Canadian people.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I did not hear any of this high and mighty language and moral indignation from the Prime Minister when he signed a document, along with myself and Mr. Duceppe, a few years ago and sent it to the Governor General.

He simply cannot be trusted. It is not real. What he did do was fail to put forward a plan for the economy and he failed the families of our country. That is the failure. He would not work with other parties to deliver a plan for the families of our country, who are suffering in the economic circumstances in which we are.

How can Canadians have any confidence in the Conservative government?

• (1435)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in an internal letter today, the leader of the Bloc Québécois says, “The coalition formed by the Liberal Party and the NDP, supported by the Bloc, will take control of the administration of the federal state. We will have the creation of a mechanism of permanent

consultation empowering the Bloc Québécois on every question of importance, notably concerning the adoption of the budget”.

This Prime Minister, this government, this party has never and will never sign a document like that.

[Translation]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I love this country and I have dedicated my life to Canadian unity. As part of this agreement, the Bloc has agreed to 18 months of political stability in Canada. That is what this agreement will bring to the country.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today, the leader of the Parti Québécois said that this arrangement proved that sovereignty is necessary. The members of the Bloc Québécois applauded when I quoted her.

[English]

If the leader of the Liberal Party believes in the country, he will walk away from this document and admit it is the worse mistake the Liberal Party has ever made in its history.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the one who is dividing Canadians more than anybody else is the Prime Minister, and I will show him that again.

He is saying that the Liberals are selling Canada to the separatists. His Quebec MPs are saying that the separatists are selling their souls to the Liberals. He needs to choose between these two lies. Canadians are fed up with these lies.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I am not sure what statement the Leader of the Opposition was referring to, but I am sure it was not the Prime Minister's statement. The Right Hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are two very clear choices. The Canadian people made a choice to elect the Conservative Party to govern, without the support of the separatists.

If the leader of the Liberal Party wants to become Prime Minister with the support of the separatists, he needs to put that option to the people of Canada.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as a democrat, I know that when a government is elected as a minority government, it has the responsibility to behave accordingly.

The Prime Minister has failed to address the economic crisis. He has failed. If he was a democrat, he would allow the House to show how much he failed.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** The right hon. Prime Minister. Order, please.

• (1440)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

*Oral Questions*

**The Speaker:** Order, please. We will have a little order. I know members are enjoying engaging in a vigorous debate during this question period, but we do have to be able to hear the questions and the responses. The Prime Minister has the floor.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper:** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party failed to convince Canadians in the wisdom of his platform or in the sufficiency of his judgment to be Prime Minister of this country.

If he wants to take the unprecedented step of scrapping the results of an election campaign and forming, for the first time in Canadian history, a government entirely dependent on the support of separatists to run this country, then he has the responsibility not to hide behind parliamentary niceties or deals, but to go to the people of Canada.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when this Prime Minister was fighting to put firewalls around the province we all love, I was fighting for clarity for this country.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister was trying to build a wall around a province we all love, I was fighting for Canadian unity. Everything I do, I do to make my country stronger, not weaker or divided, and not to give his party's Quebec MPs grounds to contradict him, like they did in this House today.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party respects federal powers and provincial powers. That is the basis of our federation, which the Conservative Party created.

[*English*]

This has nothing to do with federal-provincial powers. It is very simple. The leader of the Liberal Party wants to turn his back on the results of the last election. He wants to turn his back on the traditions of his own party and he wants to form a coalition with the Quebec separatists. He should either walk away from that or take it to the people—

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Saint-Lambert. Order, please.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the agreement signed by the three leaders modifies the employment insurance system by eliminating the two-week waiting period. The Prime Minister needs to realize that people who lose their jobs are much better off with this agreement than with the economic statement delivered by his Minister of Finance.

Can the Prime Minister understand that that is another reason why he has lost the confidence of the House?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois says that it

would cost nothing to make this change. In fact, it would cost at least \$900 million. To the Bloc, \$900 million is nothing. With accounting like that, the Bloc coup is unacceptable, the Bloc price is too high.

\* \* \*

**OLDER WORKERS**

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's statements show why the government no longer has the confidence of the House.

The tripartite agreement provides for an income support program for laid-off older workers that will bridge them to retirement. This Conservative government has always demonstrated a total lack of sensitivity towards workers who cannot be retrained, preferring to let them fend for themselves.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he has only himself to blame for the lack of confidence because today these workers have more to gain from this tripartite agreement than from the economic statement?

● (1445)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just stated, we have tried to expand this program. We have extended it until 2012 but the Bloc price is too high, the Bloc coup is unacceptable.

\* \* \*

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since this government has been in power, women have been muzzled in a number of respects. The latest outrage is withdrawal of their right to go before the courts in cases relating to wage parity.

Today, does the Prime Minister realize that women stand to gain from the imminent creation of a new government where the parties have managed to set partisan politics aside in order to ensure women's economic rights?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, women waited 15 years to get pay equity complaints resolved. Fifteen years. Now, we are able to resolve within a few short months another pay equity issue. We are bringing forward legislation that will protect the pay equity of women who are working for the federal civil service. We are proud to move this ahead, as opposed to the Liberals, who did nothing but chatter about it for so many years.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, by slashing financial assistance to women's groups, the Prime Minister is showing ideological pigheadedness that is most revealing.

To cite some examples: 12 of 16 regional Status of Women Canada offices closed, cuts to research, cuts to women's rights groups, abolition of the court challenges program. All this with a view to ensuring that there will be no challenges to his ultra-conservative ideology.

*Oral Questions*

Does the Prime Minister realize that once again his determination to muzzle any group that might challenge him is particularly damaging to women's rights?

[*English*]

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member recognize that our government and Prime Minister have consistently demonstrated our commitment to women? We want the full participation of women within the social, economic, cultural and democratic life of Canada. One only needs to look. We have the highest percentage of women appointed to cabinet in the history of this country.

I note that women across this country did not elect a separatist coalition.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, by cutting funding for non-profit regional economic development organizations, the Conservatives have very clearly shown that they do not understand anything about job creation. Thousands of people are losing their jobs in all regions of Quebec. It is imperative that those organizations be able to attract investment and create jobs as fast as possible.

Do the Conservatives understand that they have lost all credibility when it comes to regional development and they therefore no longer deserve the confidence of Quebecers?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It has taken more than 10 oral question periods for a Liberal Party MP to notice that there was economic development in the regions of Quebec.

We will continue to do our work on economic development in the regions of Quebec. Yes, the challenge is enormous, because of the job losses, but we will continue to do our work.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, instead of practising sound management of development for the regions of Quebec, the Conservatives in fact created a patronage fund designed to secure the re-election of the former minister and his neighbour, the present minister.

Will the Minister of Regional Development deny that his predecessor bragged that he had poured millions of dollars into his own backyard, at the expense of the other regions?

Does the minister understand that doing things like this means that he deserves to lose the confidence of the public, and of this House?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague, who has often flown into space, does not have his feet on the ground in our regions. We have done our work. We have 14 development offices in the various regions of Quebec. All applications go through the regional offices. They are analyzed by a formidable team of professionals who make their

recommendations and there has never been any patronage in that process, at least not under our government; maybe before.

\* \* \*

• (1450)

**ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians no longer have confidence in this government. During the last election campaign, the former Conservative heritage minister said that the Conservatives would compensate for their culture cuts with new programs. It took the new Conservative minister only a couple of weeks to go back on these promises and make the cuts permanent.

How can Canadians still have confidence in this government?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is what we have done. We increased the spending on arts and culture in this country by 8%. We are spending \$2.3 billion on the arts and arts and culture programming in Canada. When the Liberal Party was in power, they made cuts. We increased the budget because in our view, arts and culture programs are very important for our country and our economy. The Liberal Party voted against our increases. We voted for them because we think it is important to be on Canada's side.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that does not seem to jibe with reality.

The Conservatives do not realize what a huge impact culture has on job creation and economic growth. Yesterday the Conservative heritage minister decided to throw just a few crumbs at the organizing committee of the 375th anniversary of Trois-Rivières. The event chair thinks that the people of Trois-Rivières deserve a lot more.

How can Quebecers have confidence in this Conservative government?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in regard first to the 375th anniversary of the city of Trois-Rivières, we are proud to partner in this great celebration. We gave \$2 million to the cultural capital program for this magnificent event and we are very proud of it.

Insofar as arts and culture are concerned in Canada, the Conservative Party is putting even more money into them, a total of \$2.3 billion. We increased the funding this year by 8%. The Liberal Party voted against it. The Liberals voted against the money intended for the celebrations in Trois-Rivières. We are for Canada and for these programs that will help unite our country.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Parti Québécois has said today, and I quote, "We can clearly see that this country does not work...The only solution is to get out of it, it is to choose our sovereignty".

*Oral Questions*

Is this not exactly what the leaders of the NDP, the Bloc and the Liberals are working on right now? Are they not working on breaking up this country just to get to power? Does this government have concerns about national unity in light of the recent announcements by the three parties opposite?

[Translation]

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is hardly surprising. Yesterday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois admitted that his plan is still to separate Quebec from the rest of Canada. Insofar as sovereignty is concerned, he admitted it and was quoted as saying he was not giving up on it. Far from wanting to do Canada any favours, the Bloc leader wants to destroy it with his coup d'état. The Liberals and the NDP, with respect, have foolishly signed on to this agreement. They may be able to persuade themselves that the coalition is legitimate, but it is not because it is undemocratic. Canadians do not want it. They voted against it.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today the much respected Wellesley and Caledon Institutes released reports that say social spending is an effective and affordable way to stimulate the economy. The poor and those of modest income spend their money in their communities. Programs that support communities are good for local economies. This creates economic stimulus.

The experts get it. The Conservatives do not. How can Canadians have confidence in the government?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as set out in the fall economic update, we are continuing the Canada health transfer, with a healthy annual increase of 6%. We are continuing with the Canada social transfer, again with a 3% increase per annum. We are not going to balance the budget on the backs of the provinces, like the Liberal government did in the 1990s, resulting in hospitals being closed, universities being underfunded and innovation not happening, all because the Liberals decided to balance the federal budget on the backs of the people in the provinces.

• (1455)

**Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is all too little, too late. There is no priming of the economic engine. The economic update was an opportunity to tackle poverty. The Wellesley Institute says that poverty is making Canadians sick and that it is a drag on the economy.

On this side of the House, we have plans for EI reform, a national affordable housing strategy and real child care.

It is time to change governments. Again I ask, how can Canadians have confidence in the Conservative government?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, certainly, the separatist coalition opposite has plans. If members want to look at their plans, I was looking for an authority and I went to the Liberals' website and I saw their commentary on the NDP plan. They said that the NDP plan will "raise taxes on hundreds of thousands of small- and medium-sized businesses across Canada,

affecting sectors including manufacturing, construction, farming, fisheries, arts, and high tech....it will hurt the very Canadians who will help our economy grow and prosper".

That is the NDP plan, supported by the separatists, supported by the Liberals.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this government has decided to attack and show contempt for culture, artists and the cultural community. It is increasing the heritage budget by 8%, but only to give more money to the Olympic torch relay.

Does the Prime Minister realize that if he had put aside his ideological approach and been a little more pragmatic, he could have found solutions, as the three opposition leaders have done, that would have prevented him from losing the confidence of the House, as he has now done?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am going to keep repeating myself until my friend understands. The fact is that we increased spending on arts and culture. For example, we increased spending on the Canada Council by 17% to \$181 million. That benefits artists. The Canada Council gives artists money to meet their needs. We increased funding for that program. The Bloc voted against that. It is against the arts, against culture, against Canada, but for the Liberal Party.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if this government had been listening to the people who see the environment as an economic opportunity rather than a burden, it would not have lost the confidence of civil society and industry. It would have taken the lead by cooperating on establishing an emissions trading system with absolute targets, using 1990 as the base year.

Will the government admit that it is the author of its own misfortune when it comes to this loss of confidence?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member asked me to adjust my attitude, in particular toward the Kyoto protocol. I asked him why he had suddenly changed his position. Yesterday, the new leader of the Liberal-sovereignist coalition abandoned Kyoto and opted for a cap and trade system.

I am surprised that the Bloc abandons its principles so easily.

*Oral Questions**[English]***THAILAND**

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after doing nothing to assist stranded Canadians in Thailand while other countries moved quickly to get their nationals out, the government finally announced yesterday that it was hiring one plane to get some of our citizens.

Would the Minister of Foreign Affairs explain why such a delay occurred in developing his evacuation plan? Why does he not think that we need to get all of our stranded citizens out at the same time? Is the minister resorting to a staggered evacuation plan that was really done on the fly and is too late to begin with?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while my hon. colleague was building a coalition with the separatists, we were working.

I want to reassure the House that the first planeload of 34 Canadians landed this morning in Hong Kong. The embassy continues to work around the clock to address this. Flights are leaving; people are departing Thailand. The embassy has secured blocks of seats, an additional 70 today and 100 tomorrow, on Bangkok Airways flights to Hong Kong and has contacted all tour groups to make sure that there is available space.

• (1500)

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the result of the minister's delay means that many seniors cannot even get on a plane because they are too sick to get there. Canadians are taking a \$5,000 fleecing for flights back. More important, there are two Canadians who died tragically in this incident. This tragedy and other acts of desperation could have been avoided if the government had an evacuation plan at the ready and had its embassy officials communicated with stranded citizens.

I ask the minister again, will he act to get all of our citizens out of Thailand immediately, and not resort to a piecemeal evacuation plan that leaves others behind?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while my colleague was forming strategic alliances with the Bloc Québécois, with the sovereignists, we were acting. Today, we have arranged for Canadians to leave Bangkok. There are already chartered flights to get these people out of Thailand to Hong Kong. From there, obviously, they will return to Canada. The arrangements have already been made. The embassy is working very hard to reassure people and we are on the case.

\* \* \*

*[English]***THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, northern Ontario cannot wait any longer for economic stimulus. One hundred and thirty workers in Greenstone have lost their jobs in the last few days just in time for the holiday season. Companies like Longlac Wood Industries have raised the alarm with the government for years to no avail.

Families in northern Ontario want a government that will act to protect their jobs, their savings, their homes, but the government has refused to take action. How can northern Ontarians have any confidence in the Conservative government?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fact is this government recognized last year that there was an injection needed into the community development trust, and put \$1 billion into the trust in order to help those affected.

I have to say that the socialist-separatist coalition's concern today is quite self-serving and does nothing more than to indicate there is an attack on Canada, an attack on democracy. It is time for Canada to be stood up for and that is what we are going to do.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the impact of shutdowns hit home today with news from the Abitibi Bowater mill in Nova Scotia. Families woke up this morning and found out that they are not going to have a job for five weeks. The people of Brooklyn are the latest among millions of Canadians who are paying the price for the government's refusal to stimulate the economy.

How can Nova Scotians have any confidence in the Conservative government?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the government put \$1 billion into the community development trust. In fact, the premier of Nova Scotia said that he welcomed the money and he looked forward to this being a good first step in helping communities and businesses deal with the recent economic upheaval. That was on January 11, 2008. We acted quickly. We acted decisively. We continue to stand up for Canadians.

\* \* \*

**OPPOSITION COALITION PROPOSAL**

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are rightly outraged at the secret Liberal-Bloc-NDP coalition seizing power in a coup d'état worthy of a banana republic. It is damaging for our economy and it puts the future of our country in the hands of Quebec separatists.

Could the Minister of Labour tell this House what advice the premier of Alberta has for the opposition?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Premier Stelmach did say yesterday that the opposition parties should put Canada first and stop this nonsense.

When I was elected by the constituents in my riding, I could have been elected to sit on either side of the House, but I can say that I would never be elected to sit with a governing coalition and separatists.

This government will continue to stand up for Canadians and support our economy.

*Government Orders***PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of three ministers from Nova Scotia: the Honourable Chris D'Entremont, Minister of Health; the Honourable Cecil Clarke, Minister of Justice and the Honourable Mark Parent, Minister of Environment and Labour.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during oral question period, the Prime Minister stated in this House that there were no Canadian flags in the room at the press conference and signing of the agreement between the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, the leader of the New Democratic Party and the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

The Prime Minister knows very well that there were two Canadian flags, along with the flags of every province and territory. In my opinion, he misled this House and Canadians, and I call on him to withdraw his remarks.

**The Speaker:** I do not believe this is a point of order because it does not concern the Standing Orders. In my opinion, there are certainly questions that contain incorrect statements from time to time, and the situation is exactly the same for replies.

It is not for the Chair to decide what is correct and what is not. In my opinion, this is not a point of order.

There is another point of order. The hon. member for Outremont has the floor.

[*English*]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, during question period the Prime Minister affirmed that there were no Canadian flags present at the signing of the tripartite agreement yesterday. That was false.

The Prime Minister should be required to apologize as there were two Canadian flags.

**The Speaker:** I have already dealt with that. I do not think a statement that it may have contained an error is a point of order. It is not for the Chair to decide what statements were correct or not. Members have made their point but I submit that it is a matter for debate, not a matter affecting the rules of the House.

[*Translation*]

Order, please. The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour is rising on another point of order.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when we asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development a question, she replied three times that the Bloc Québécois cost too much money.

My rights and privileges as an elected member of this party have been attacked. I therefore ask the minister to withdraw her comments. All members have the right to sit in this House and all members cost the same amount of money. One party does not cost more than another party, in proportionate terms. It was insulting to all Bloc Québécois members, and I would like the minister to withdraw what she said.

**The Speaker:** I will look at the minister's remarks and what the hon. member said, and I will come back to the House, if necessary, for a retraction. I did not hear the comments during question period.

● (1510)

[*English*]

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, I also rise on a point of order. Yesterday, in question period, I asked the Minister of Finance if Nova Scotia would have an exemption from the cap on equalization outlined in the economic statement. The minister did not answer the question in the House but later in the day the Halifax *Chronicle-Herald* reported that when the government was asked about my question, finance officials provided them with the answer in writing.

Will the minister table the same document in the House that was provided to the Halifax *Chronicle-Herald*?

**The Speaker:** I am sure the minister will look at the point that the hon. member has raised and answer the question when he is here. However, since the minister is not here it is a little difficult to arrange for the tabling of a document in his absence. That will be up to him to answer.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*Translation*]

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL STATEMENT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

**The Speaker:** When question period began, the hon. member for Sherbrooke had the floor. There are four minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would have thought you a little more generous. I have only four minutes to express what I feel about the Conservative government, today especially, after the remarks they made during statements by members and in oral question period. It was pathetic to see, in particular the Conservative members for Quebec, who, in my opinion, are far removed from the needs and aspirations of the people of Quebec.

I will probably not have the time to say all that I wish, or to try to inspire the Conservatives. Given how the Conservatives behaved this afternoon during question period, I will use an example to explain.

*Government Orders*

When I was young, I had a little cat. As you know, a cat is a domestic animal that is quite friendly, often soothes people, is approachable and, of course, likes to be petted. One day, the cat hurt itself and I noticed its animal instincts came to the surface and it could be quite nasty to anyone who came near. What I see here is not a domestic animal but a wild beast that has been seriously wounded because it realizes that it has lost people's confidence.

In the same way, the Conservative party has lost not only the confidence of Parliament and the members of the opposition, but it is losing any confidence or credibility in the eyes of the people of Canada and Quebec. You know what an injured animal does; especially a wild animal. It is astonishing. It will do anything to save itself. We can therefore expect anything from this government. That is why I repeat that the opposition parties have lost all confidence in it. And, no matter what it tries to do, the cat was out of the bag in the Speech from the Throne and the economic statement. Now we know what the Conservatives want. Quite simply, they want power for the sake of power. They want total control. We have seen their actions against democracy; and that is unforgivable. There can be no going back; no matter what they do, or what they say. Confidence has been broken; it has been shattered. This is a point of no return.

The Bloc Québécois associated itself somewhat with the other opposition parties, and to this extent the coalition is non-partisan but against everything the Conservative government might do to the people of Quebec and Canada. Most of the time, what the Bloc proposes is good for Quebec and protects Quebec's interests 99.9% but is also good for the people of Canada and those Canadians who are having trouble with employment insurance for example.

My colleague also spoke about the waiting period. We will get rid of it. There are unemployed people in Canada too and he should think of them. There are other important aspects as well. There are people in Canada who lose their jobs and are retirement age and cannot get back into the workforce. A program for older workers is possible in Canada too, but it is also very good for Quebec.

Insofar as investments are concerned, the finance minister did not even read what the Bloc Québécois suggested. We know this because he admitted yesterday, after the question asked by my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain, that he did not know what the Bloc had proposed. He would do well to take an interest because the opposition has lost confidence in this government forever. We need change, and in a hurry.

•(1515)

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, 100% of confidence measures under the new proposed coalition will need the support of the Bloc. We also know that the Speech from the Throne is a confidence measure and that it lays out the vision the government has for this country.

If there were a Speech from the Throne under the new coalition government that strongly articulated support for a united Canada, including Quebec, would the hon. member support that Speech from the Throne?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Mr. Speaker, I do not indulge in a lot of hypotheses like the hon. member, whom I did not recognize unfortunately and who is probably newly elected. Despite all the good faith he demonstrated in order to get elected, he is probably realizing that he too was relying on Conservative hypotheses to defend his party.

As I said earlier, the Conservatives are far removed now from the interests of the people, their needs and aspirations, and most of all, any solutions.

I suppose the people of this member's riding are experiencing the same things. He must realize that regardless of what he was told earlier, his Prime Minister wants a majority at all costs. Regardless of what it takes or how it is done, he wants a majority in order to have total control.

Imagine taking away the funding of political parties. Where does that usually lead? We could re-read history, but I hate to think it could happen again in Canada. We have already seen governments take away all the funding of political parties in order to make them disappear.

The Conservatives are doing this at a time when they think people feel they are pretty well off, but the bulk of that money came to them under the old legislation. They did not even want to say who had funded them. The attack on democracy and free expression of the various parties in a democratic society is a fundamental element and by its very existence constitutes a point of no return. There is no way I can believe that the member who has just asked me that question was unaware that there was no significant element in it to deal with the crisis.

The Bloc Québécois submitted some proposals that the Minister of Finance did not even read. Then the Conservatives asked the opposition parties for their cooperation. The opposition parties decided to take the situation in hand and to cooperate in order to meet the needs and aspirations of the public, and especially to present some solutions people could understand and were both practical and for the short term. What the Conservative Party is lacking right now is a vision.

Since January 2006, anyone with the slightest clue about finance and economics knew what was coming. It was not a matter of using a crystal ball, there were facts pointing to it. People could see the ups and downs happening, and the way things were headed. The Conservatives are incapable of meeting the needs of the population. They have clearly demonstrated this. The Bloc Québécois has presented its measures to help the people of Quebec and in so doing to help the unemployed elsewhere in Canada, as well as people dealing with problems such as a shortage of social housing. We are meeting the needs of Quebec. Yes, we are defending its interests, and this automatically protects Canada from the Conservatives at the same time.

*Government Orders*

• (1520)

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, to begin, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Sherbrooke, for the opportunity to join the debate and to take 10 minutes to express my views on this economic statement. Before doing that, since this is the first time that I have spoken officially in the House in this session, I would like to thank the voters of Terrebonne—Blainville who, for the fourth time, have given me their confidence. I thank the voters, the volunteers and my own staff who helped me to a great victory. I will not hide the fact that all the members of that devoted group are ready to start again tomorrow, if necessary.

One would have expected, after an election fought over the economy, that the economic statement would be filled with figures. You will remember that we were thrown into an election campaign because this Prime Minister and this government said it was time to talk about the economy. Regretfully, we have been given an economic statement that resembles nothing so much as *more laissez faire*. It is an ideological statement that shows no signs of compassion towards the people and the companies having trouble getting through this crisis, because this is now a global economic crisis.

We know that all the countries around us—even the European countries—have injected billions of dollars to support their economies and to help people get through this crisis. The European Union has injected \$200 billion and the United States has injected \$800 billion. We believe that if our government had not been so disconnected, if it had shown the compassion it should have for the people who do not receive the same salaries as we do, and who do not live in the same conditions, possibly this government could have injected some money and introduced economic measures to help the people of this country.

As the head of the Bank of Canada said, we could even go into a temporary deficit that could be repaid over a period of time. But this government does not want to hear about deficits, anything but that. We know that, in economic terms, when we are faced with a crisis we must expect a little deficit that can be offset later.

Instead of stimulating the economy and providing some breathing room for the country, this government chose to strangle it. Most appalling of all, instead of the economic measures one might expect in an economic statement, what we received was a big slap in the face; a real blow. It is as though there were only some sectors that needed to be knocked down, instead of helping the country in general.

Those blows, that slap in the face, have led to the formation of the present coalition. The Conservative leader, and this government, decided to abandon our businesses and our people. All countries agree: when there is a full economic crisis, in principle, we should be creating jobs. We could have people working to build houses for those who need them. We could, perhaps, put people to work developing transportation and transportation infrastructures. Unfortunately, that is not what happened. Nothing was announced.

The Bloc Québécois has already put forward proposals. We put forward a whole series of measures but those measures were not listened to and not taken into consideration. They could have

suspended the compulsory repayment to the home buyers' plan for a year.

• (1525)

We are all familiar with these young couples who are in trouble. They were told they could use virtual RRSPs as their down payment on a house. Not only must they pay their mortgage, but they must also pay for their virtual RRSPs—which do not exist and were loaned to them—and their taxes. Both spouses must work, and they feel economically and socially suffocated. That is also difficult. No one ever thought of giving these people a little breathing room.

They could have done that by giving people jobs, by creating a fund that provides money for home renovations that will improve energy efficiency. In my riding, people tend to heat their homes with oil. I have an older house and heat with oil. Why? I could not heat it with electricity because it would cost more. The house is not insulated for electric heat. I for one would have liked to see an eco-energy program.

The equalization formula could have been fully respected. It was a brutal slap in the face to Quebeckers when they were told they were being denied the equalization surplus. The guaranteed income supplement for our seniors could have simply been increased gradually. Their old age pensions increased by about \$2 a month, sometimes only \$1.09. That is barely enough to buy a cup of coffee. Also, seniors who were eligible for, but cheated out of, the guaranteed income supplement could have been gradually reimbursed.

They could have expanded access to employment insurance and eliminated the waiting period. They could have provided more support for people who work in agriculture. They could also have extended the ecoAUTO rebate program that suddenly disappeared. These were good programs. Unfortunately, they are not being given any consideration. Those programs could have helped ordinary people. But ordinary people are not important to these people. What is important to the government opposite is industry. But there again, they have not helped it. They have not created loan guarantee programs that would have provided cash to invest, for example. Last week, two companies in my riding closed down for lack of cash flow. The cuts to the technology partnerships program could have been stopped. They could have given them a shared risk program.

They could quite simply have modernized Canada's outdated antidumping laws and brought them up to the same level as what other countries in the European Union have. In fact, I introduced a bill to that effect, Bill C-411. They did not do it. They can also, as the Bloc said, even use government procurement as a lever for economic development. How many of our businesses would be happy to help Public Works and Government Services Canada, but are not allowed to because PWGSC buys from American subsidiaries? They could have implemented specific policies for the industrial sectors that are facing special challenges, such as traditional industries.

*Government Orders*

They could have done a lot of things, but no, what we got from this government was a slap in the face. That is not what an economic statement is. Unfortunately, the present government is the author of its own misfortune. We who believed when they talked about action, and compromise, and openness, at the time, we have, in a sense, been had. The public has been had, because it was not expecting this kind of economic statement, not remotely. We get email after email from people who are disappointed, even anglophones in the western provinces.

This statement is clearly devoid of any compassion for the people of Quebec. We will therefore quite obviously be voting against it.

• (1530)

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we are seeing as the economy is affected by the total collapse of the normal streams of capital financing is that for everyday people, the benefit methods that they have had in the past need a lot more assistance.

One of the things that we have noticed is that for people who are being given pink slips and thrown out of work, particularly in the resource-based and manufacturing economies, the waiting period for EI assistance has really been a barrier for families. Members can imagine being thrown out of work, having to wait a couple of weeks and not having that bridge financing.

I would like to ask the member particularly about helping those families out. A member of the faculty at Carleton University noted that probably one of the best ways to put some stimulus into the economy is to reform the EI system, and I would like her comments on that proposition.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. NDP member for his question, because it gives me an opportunity to go back to this issue of compassion towards our fellow citizens.

Currently, in my riding, there are many people losing their jobs and this waiting period is a problem. Let me explain why. First, there are businesses that offer work sharing arrangements. When employees are laid off, they can no longer use the waiting period.

Second, it is a fact that the employment insurance account is funded in part by employers and in part by employees. That fund does not belong to the federal government but, rather, to the employees.

Those employers who find themselves in a bind and who must lay off employees are pleased that these employees do not have to go through that waiting period. As for the employees, they are pleased to be able to get immediate assistance. Personally, I do not see how this government can stick its nose in something that belongs to employers and employees, and how it can manage this account, when both sides are eligible to that fund, without any consideration. They are entitled to that fund, because it is theirs, since they are the ones who put money into it.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to hear

her perspective on this financial and economic update, and that is what it was. It was not a mini budget. I know that some people have heard from the community and the media has reported it as being a budget. The finance minister and the Prime Minister were clear that it was going to be strictly a financial and economic update on the situation where we are today. The budget will be tabled on January 27 as long as this new coalition government does not proceed.

I know there are a lot of concerns about helping our seniors with their stock portfolios, particularly in retirement communities across the country. I represent Kelowna—Lake Country where approximately 19% of my constituents are 65 years of age or over, and they are very concerned about the RRSP and the RRIF withdrawal limits. I am just wondering if the member supports that initiative and thinks it is a good initiative for Canadians.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Mr. Speaker, first I must say that the hon. member's face does not seem familiar. I suppose he is a new member here, or else I did not recognize him. Perhaps he just never caught my eye.

I want to tell him that, for the past two years, we have been waiting for this government to come up with a budget that will help ordinary people, a compassionate budget. We were told that another budget would be tabled at the end of January, or in early February, but that will be much too late. That said, the 25% rule currently advocated by the government is not sufficient. We are saying that it should even be increased to 50%.

Mr. Speaker, you are indicating that my time is up, and that is unfortunate. There are some whose skin is darker, and those people are more easily noticed.

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the constitutional psychodrama cooked up by the three opposition parties to get around the will of the people and further their partisan interests is not an innocent political game. It has serious consequences for national unity, Canada's economic prosperity and Canadians' financial security.

I will leave it to others to expose the incredible flimsiness and irresponsibility of the arguments the opposition parties are making in an attempt to justify their undemocratic tactics. Others will no doubt also want to point out how the utopian coalition imagined by the opposition could threaten our economy.

However, as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, I want to draw the attention of this House to how this political crisis could affect our country on the international stage. Here in this place, we are not isolated from the world around us, which is continuing to turn, while our government could be paralyzed by three leaders who were recently rejected by Canadian voters.

The world will not stop turning while the leader of the opposition tries to turn his loss into a win. We must not forget that the Liberal-NDP junta, with its Bloc accomplice—the survivor, the socialist and the sovereigntist—says it does not have confidence in our government.

*Government Orders*

However, the people of Canada quite recently and quite clearly sent a message that they did not have confidence in these parties to lead the country. And the three would-be putschists will never manage, with the stroke of a pen, to wipe out the ballots of millions of Canadians who did not vote for them. We must not forget that nearly 38% of Canadian voters supported our party on October 14.

A little over 26% voted for the Liberal Party—the worst election result in that party's history—while just over 18% voted for the NDP and 10% for the Bloc Québécois, because Bloc votes have to be counted on a national basis now that the Bloc leader styles himself as a national leader who can dictate policy for Canada while he waits to separate.

No subterfuge, no theatrics can change the fact that Canadians gave the Conservative Party more votes and more seats in this House than any other party.

[*English*]

As my colleague the Minister of Finance has reminded us many times over the last few weeks, Canada is not an island. I would add that, sitting atop Parliament Hill, the opposition members should not imagine that they are above the democratically expressed will of the people.

Why would the votes that got them here in the first place as members of the House, as representatives of their constituents, count for more than the votes that gave our party a strong plurality in the chamber? How can a man who led his party to its most disastrous showing ever think he can anoint himself prime minister with the help of the leader of a party that has never held power and another whose mission in life is to destroy our country?

This is not a scenario that is easy to explain to our allies and partners who are striving mightily to achieve economic prosperity through political stability.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

On October 14, when our party was returned to power, Canadians chose a government which they trust to manage the economic crisis that is affecting the whole world.

There are limits to this notion of “strategic voting” that some commentators love: no one in Canada voted for the Conservative Party in the hope that the leader of the opposition would become prime minister, that the New Democrats would become part of the government, and that the sovereignists would hold the keys of power.

Canadians know that hard times require energetic action and courageous choices. They also know that uncertainty and instability scare away investments, increase the cost of money, reduce credit and kill jobs. Let us take a moment to put ourselves in the situation of a foreign investor who is hesitating between a number of countries, because he wants to get an attractive return. Would he be tempted by a country where the government is being held hostage by opposition parties that want to gain power without the support of voters? Would he have confidence in a prime minister living on borrowed times, whose lone ambition could only be to turn over power to another unelected Liberal minister? Would that investor be

reassured by the presence, behind the scenes, of a party whose *raison d'être* is to sabotage Canada, a party that would put Quebec in the worst economic situation of its history?

And no one here is suffering any illusions: the Bloc leader has not become a federalist, and he is definitely not abandoning his sovereignist ideology. In this regard, here is what he said yesterday, immediately after putting back his magic pen into his pocket: “We can have common objectives while remaining committed to who we are. I do remain committed to who we are, and I believe that in making this move, I am helping the cause for which I am in politics.”

By contrast, our plan is geared to the demands imposed by our economic situation and by the international situation. We want to help reform global finance, ensure sound budgeting, secure jobs for Canadian families and communities, expand investments and trade, and make government more effective. In order to achieve these goals, we will cooperate with our international partners to find ways to bolster employment.

That is why the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister recently teamed up with their G20 counterparts, gathered in Washington. I personally had the privilege of representing our country at the APEC summit, held in Peru, where I had the opportunity to meet privately with officials representing some 20 countries. All expressed respect and admiration for the way our economy, and particularly our banking system, is serving our country in these very difficult times.

Since we were elected, we have also taken the necessary steps to ensure growth and stability in our economy. Since 2006, need I recall, we have reduced the federal debt by \$37 billion; cut income and other taxes by \$200 billion for 2007-2008 and the next five years; lowered the tax rate on new business investments, giving us the lowest rate of all the G7 countries from now to 2010; made unprecedented investments in infrastructure; and invested in science and technology and in education and training.

More recently, to keep our financial system strong and stable, our government took steps to inject liquidity so that financial institutions could continue to lend money to consumers, home buyers and businesses at an affordable cost. We have created a safety net to ensure that our financial institutions are not at a competitive disadvantage in the world.

● (1545)

One of the things we have done is to institute new rules for mortgages guaranteed by the government, so that Canada does not experience a mortgage bubble like the one we have seen in the United States.

We have already taken significant steps to stimulate our economy and we took them before many countries began to take action. Those measures are proportionate to our economy, and in fact are much more significant than the measures taken by the other advanced economies.

*Government Orders*

Next year, Canadians will pay \$31 billion less in income and other taxes, amounting to nearly 2% of GDP, as a result of the tax relief we provided in 2006. Because we were the first to take action, we are in a better position to face the storm today than are the other industrialized countries. In fact, the experts agree that Canada's economic performance is the best among all the G7 countries.

Certainly we can be proud of this economic performance in this time of worldwide financial turbulence. Canada is not immune to the economic slowdown, however, and no one can say with certainty what the future holds for us. In recent months, projections have fluctuated widely everywhere in the world, mainly because of the collapse of financial institutions and the credit freeze. Given what has happened to financial institutions around the world, and in particular in the United States, we have been prepared to face every risk that might arise.

In these difficult times there is at least one thing certain: political instability is particularly bad, and even dangerous, for an economy like ours that is very open to the world and therefore faces strong competition.

I also cannot ignore the situations that our foreign policy will have to deal with, immediately and directly, because of the crisis created by the opposition. For example, because all our ministers had returned to Ottawa, Canada was not represented by any elected member this week at the Summit of NATO Foreign Affairs Ministers, where matters as fundamental as the military operations in Afghanistan and the accession of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO are being discussed.

[*English*]

Tomorrow, in Oslo, Norway, more than 100 states will sign an historic ban on cluster munitions but Canada will not be represented by a minister. So engrossed in its own political games, no opposition party was willing to pair one of its members so that Canada might be present at those important international meetings.

[*Translation*]

Today or tomorrow, I will be speaking with the new United States Secretary of State, Mrs. Clinton.

Is there anyone in this House who believes that our most important trading partner and closest ally is unfazed by what is happening here?

What does the international community think when the main photo from Canada shows a smiling sovereigntist leader making a pact with the leader of the sponsorship party, the party of the fiscal imbalance, the party of over centralization, whom he has always vehemently denounced?

The Liberals and the New Democrats are trying to play down the pact they signed with the only party in this House that is an avowed and zealous opponent of national unity. Did they even think of the message this outrageous situation is sending to our partners?

Even President Sarkozy, who recently stated that Canadians are the friends of France and Quebecers members of the family, must be wondering.

How will the father of the Clarity Act, the heir to Laurier and Trudeau, a student of both Chrétien and Martin, explain to our partners his new-found friendship with the sovereigntists? How will he convince the members of the Forum of Federations, whose creation he strongly supported, that the best way for a federation to prosper is to invite anti-federalists to help govern?

In closing, I invite the members of the opposition to look beyond their fantasy scenarios, their partisan concerns, the ministerial positions they covet.

They will see, in our neighbours to the south, a new president who would like nothing better than to strengthen our countries' relations. They will see the President of France and of the European Community working hard to reform international institutions. They will see that ancient hatreds and new terrorism are just as virulent in many regions of the world.

Perhaps they will also see a great country, one that is respected, admired, even envied by countries everywhere, one that needs everyone's good will, and all its energy to continue to make a name for itself in the world and ensure the prosperity and security of its citizens.

That country is Canada and all of us—almost all—have sworn to serve to the best of our abilities.

• (1550)

[*English*]

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, while listening to the speech of the hon. minister, it seemed to me that he was forgetting a great deal of what has happened in recent years. He forgot that it was his own party that was prepared to enter into an agreement with the Bloc Québécois and be reliant upon its support to govern. I do not understand how he can suggest now that something his party was prepared to do can be so awful. That, to me, is the height of hypocrisy.

A few years ago his party accused the previous government of acting like it had a majority when in fact it had a minority. The fact is that in the recent election his party did not receive a majority of the seats in the House. He ought to understand, having served in elected life for quite some time, here and provincially, that in the Canadian system, based on the British model, for a government to exist it needs to have the confidence of this chamber. The current government has lost that. Why will it not recognize it?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** Mr. Speaker, the member raised the issue about the height of hypocrisy. It is an interesting question given the fact that if he were to take the total number of seats the Liberals have and add them to the total number of seats the New Democratic Party has, he would rapidly realize that he is in a minority and that he does need the support, unfortunately, of the separatist party in the House.

In other words, he is saying to me that he justifies his action in this putsch to take over the reins of government despite the fact that his party, along with the NDP, do not have a majority of seats and need the support of the separatist party. That is the height of hypocrisy.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, many of my colleagues would love to question the Minister of Foreign Affairs. First of all, because we have just heard some outrageous statements. The first of these was the reference to ministerial positions, which I am not interested in, and we are not interested in. I get the impression that his main concern was to protect his ministerial position. That was what I was hearing. What I was hearing was a panicky man anxious to keep his portfolio.

The question I would like to ask is this: Could he list for me one strong measure that has been taken to deal with the present crisis as far as the unemployed in regions like ours are concerned? Can he name me one single strong measure that the government intends to take, or has taken in recent months, to deal with the crisis as far as the unemployed in the regions are concerned?

• (1555)

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and would refer him to what we did via the 2006 budget, that is Advantage Canada. The Bloc Québécois felt it appropriate at that time to support the budget speech and we were very glad they did. We did not need any coalitions with the Bloc Québécois to be able to do that.

Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that, at the time of the last budget, when we proposed personal income tax cuts and when we proposed lowering the GST in order to provide the people of Quebec with more leeway, more opportunities, more purchasing power, the Bloc Québécois opposed it.

The real question today is to find under what conditions you, the holier-than-thou Bloc Québécois, sold out your right to veto because you decided to blindly support the budget the new government would like to present, on two occasions. This was either done blindly, or it was done knowingly.

Will the leader of the Bloc Québécois tell us the truth? Will he tell the whole truth? Will he table his secret agreements?

[English]

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we should ensure we address you when we talk to each other in this place. That is the way we conduct ourselves. I know the member is used to the legislature in Quebec.

I have a question for the foreign affairs minister. Why is it that when there is a problem the government seems to always blame someone else. It never looks in the mirror and says that maybe it had something to do with the problem.

I will give an example. We are being accused on this side of working together and of somehow putting out the country and making it vulnerable. I would ask the foreign affairs minister, and he intimated this a minute ago, how the Conservatives passed their first two budgets. I think the answer is pretty obvious and that is exactly what we are talking about here.

Why is it that they need to blame everyone else and not take things into account on their own? Why do they always blame someone else?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** Mr. Speaker, the only point I am making is that something important happened on October 14. Canadians looked at the NDP's program and the Liberals' program which proposed a carbon tax and they rejected both of them.

Therefore, when my hon. colleague tells me that his party has changed all that, that it has no more program, and that it has made a deal with the separatists to drive the Canadian economy, do members think that is serious? Do they really think that will fly with the Canadian population?

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first chance I have had to stand in the House since the election so I want to thank the people of southern Alberta for sending me back here to help stand on guard for this country, and, in this last week or so, we have been doing that, as we need to.

I want to maybe change the picture here a little. The foreign affairs minister has had the opportunity to travel with the Prime Minister outside the country to some of the international meetings that he goes to. I understand that the Prime Minister is looked to for guidance from some of the other leaders of other countries. I know the minister was at the APEC conference. Does he have a comment on just exactly the presence that our Prime Minister has when he is dealing with other leaders from around the world?

• (1600)

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** Mr. Speaker, clearly the opposition party does not seem to think it is important. A couple of weeks ago the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance were in Washington, where they signed the Washington declaration, along with the other 20 leaders of governments and heads of state who were there.

It is an important initiative. The program covers three general items: first, domestically, get our house in order; second, increase trade because that is the clear direction we need to take; and third, Canada will respect all its obligations that it has taken under its engagements in terms of the millennium objectives.

I, as well as my colleague, the Minister of International Trade, brought that to the APEC, where more countries came onside. They listened to the Prime Minister, who did an excellent job in representing Canada. When we left the APEC meeting, we had more countries in favour of the Washington declaration than we did when we arrived.

It is important for us to go in this direction. It is important for us to support it. The most important thing was the leaders of other countries turned to us and said that our banking system was fantastic, that we had done a great job. This is thanks to the guy sitting beside me, the right hon. Prime Minister.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we certainly are in a bit of a mess. It is kind of ironic that the Prime Minister does not want this matter to come to a vote. It is apparently because he is afraid of what the House might say, so he is doing anything and everything to avoid facing the House and trying to obtain the confidence of it in the measures he has proposed in the fiscal update.

We have just been through an election recently. I congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on the result, as well as all members. It is in fact an honour to be here.

*Government Orders*

One thing I heard repeatedly during the election was Canadians expected us to co-operate with each other, to act like adults, to show that we would work toward the betterment of the nation and all of those things. I know other members heard exactly the same thing.

Everyone will recollect that we had a five round election in this very House for the Speaker. The central issue in that election was none other than decorum in the House. We all commented on it. We were embarrassed about it and embarrassed by the fact that when people, particularly school children, were in the gallery, it was not an impressive display of parliamentary decorum. That was the number one message from my electorate.

I gave a speech a week ago Friday and was asked by a member of the audience whether decorum in the House might improve and we would show more respect for each other, et cetera. I hesitated and in doing so I probably disclosed my answer before I spoke. I really had no faith that this would occur. I have been in the House 11 years and the House is what it is. At times what we see on television is an embarrassment.

We heard the Speech from the Throne and there was some respect and an exchange of views. In fact, the Speech from the Throne was amended by the Liberal Party and it then enjoyed the support of the party. The conviviality and the respect seemed to last maybe three, four or five days and that was pretty well it. Then the fiscal update was announced.

The fiscal update is supposed to be an economic statement. It is supposed to reflect what the Department of Finance thinks are the economic numbers and projections going forward. It is supposed to reflect inflation, GDP, growth in nominal GDP, anticipated revenues, et cetera. It is simply that; it is an economic statement.

When I was in the Department of Finance and worked on these numbers, we thought that if the discussion about the fiscal statement lasted more than a day, then it was a failure.

Inserted into the fiscal update were several things that had absolutely nothing to do with it. The signal was laid down by the Prime Minister that this was gotcha time. This was a time to attack democracy. There is nothing like using a crisis to advance one's political cause. He decided to launch an attack on women, unions and political financing. I have no idea what any of those things had to do with the fiscal update.

We had the chorus of Conservatives launching into this irrelevancy and we had, unfortunately, a political statement made for ideological purposes in a fiscal update, which, in effect, ended the civility of Parliament. All three parties had an immediate reaction to this launch of attack on democracy.

I have watched the Prime Minister in action for a number of years now. I wanted to believe he got the message, that he wanted to set a better tone in the House and that he would set a tone which would create a level of stability that would not embarrass us all when we went outside the chamber.

● (1605)

Unfortunately the Prime Minister cannot help himself. It is not in his DNA. It is as if every waking moment of his political life is spent

dreaming up new ways in which he can basically eliminate any opposition to his views.

I do not think he is going to rest until he has the rest of us goose-stepping our way down the halls of Parliament chanting *heil Harper*—

**Mr. James Bezan:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member knows full well we cannot use names of members in the House.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The member for Scarborough—Guildwood is familiar with the rules of the House.

**Hon. John McKay:** Mr. Speaker, the sentiment is quite clear. The Prime Minister wants to squash any opposition whatsoever, notwithstanding the fact that he is a minority prime minister and still has not figured out that he got less than 40% of the vote. After all the millions of dollars he spent on advertising, he was able to bump his vote up 2% and a few seats. Still the people of Canada had the good sense to deny him a majority. They have denied him a majority twice now.

The opposition members in the House represent over 60% of the popular vote and 55% of the members in the House.

One person calls the shots in the Conservative Party, and it is the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister only. The rest of the ministers and members of caucus are decoration only. That is it. Therefore, the decision to insert these statements into the economic statement was the Prime Minister's and the Prime Minister's only.

I do not have a very high opinion of the Minister of Finance, but even I do not believe the statements of attack on democracy were inserted by the finance minister. This has created quite a controversy and I want to read part of a column from Margaret Wente in this morning's *Globe and Mail*.

I know some members have heard this, but it bears repeating. As member know, Margaret Wente is not exactly enamoured with the Liberal Party or any of the other opposition parties. She said, “[The Prime Minister] was supposed to be the steady hand at the helm”. This is a bit of nonsense in and of itself. He never told the Canadian public that we were in deficit and have been in deficit for months now. She went on to say:

But now, even his long-time loyalists whisper that he's lost it. They are right. You can put up with a bully. You can even put up with a paranoid, controlling bully. But a paranoid, controlling bully with catastrophic judgment is another matter.

She said that the insertion of this attack on democracy in the fiscal update was in fact a “catastrophic” error in judgment. She went on to say:

Their leader is a brilliant brain with the emotional intelligence of a 13-year-old. The magnanimity of victory eludes him. He can't seem to shake the simmering resentments of the outsider who knows he's the smartest guy in the room but still can't get respect.

That is what Conservatives' friends are saying.

In the same *Globe and Mail* this morning Gordon Gibson, another somewhat less than an absolutely friendly person to the Liberal Party of Canada, stated:

*Government Orders*

—you put one lifeline in place before severing the other...This attempt to cut the funding, however, was petty, vulgar, intemperate, low-down, mean-spirited, nasty, smart-ass, ignoble and sleazy, in every way unworthy of a great political party. And in a way that any voter can understand.

That is what the Conservatives' friends are saying.

I, along with probably everyone else in the House, have been receiving an enormous flood of emails, some in favour of the proposed coalition and some clearly not in favour of the proposed coalition.

When one is in a government controlled by a paranoid bully, who has made a catastrophic error in judgment, the Westminster Parliamentary democracy has a way of dealing with that kind of person. It is called a confidence vote. It is a very simple thing.

From time to time in Westminster parliamentary democracies, there are paranoid bullies who make catastrophic errors in judgment and the system is built to address those issues. However, in this case the paranoid bully with catastrophic errors in judgment is afraid of the House. I guess that is the paranoid part. He is afraid to put the vote.

● (1610)

Today's entire question period could have been ended very easily by a simple statement from the leader of the Conservative Party, the Prime Minister of Canada. He could have said that tonight at 6 o'clock we would vote and the whole thing would go away. One way or another it would go away. But no, the Conservative Party is going to adopt a carpet-bombing initiative between Friday and when this House resumes. The Prime Minister is going to prorogue Parliament.

The entire amount in the Conservative piggy bank is going to be spent on advertising campaigns to convince Canadians that parliamentary democracy should be subverted and that the Prime Minister should be allowed to carry on.

It is a very simple concept. When a prime minister loses the confidence of the House and the prime minister has a minority government, he or she has to get the point. In one way or another a coalition of some kind has to be cobbled together.

I have heard members over the day complain about the separatists. It is highly ironic that for the first two budgets of the Conservative government in the 39th Parliament apparently they were good separatists. They were nice separatists. The Conservatives loved those separatists because those separatists made sure that the government could survive on those two budgets. Now we are in the 40th Parliament and those formerly really good separatists have become bad separatists, nasty people. Those bad separatists are now saying that they have reviewed the fiscal update and for reasons best known to them, they think a coalition form of government would actually serve the interests of Quebec and our nation better than the Conservative government would.

It is kind of interesting and somewhat ironic, and completely hypocritical, that somehow or another just a year or two ago those separatists were really good separatists and now apparently they are bad separatists.

Mr. Speaker, you are a student of history. You know that the Liberal Party is the party of Paul Martin, the party of Jean Chrétien,

the party of Frank McKenna, and the party of John Manley. We have a rich heritage. Our coalition partner is the party of Roy Romanow, the party of Tommy Douglas, both of whom in their time were fiscally responsible premiers of Saskatchewan.

It is therefore not an unusual arrangement whereby the parties of those two heritages say, "We have a fiscal mess on our hands and we are headed over a cliff. While the Prime Minister decides to fiddle and Rome burns, we are going to get together and propose to the nation a way out of this mess". The first thing to do to get out of this mess is to be a touch honest with the numbers; just start with the numbers.

I looked at the fiscal update and there is a projection of a \$6 billion deficit. The finance minister said that under no circumstances would he ever be a finance minister that would introduce deficits in this country. Now he is talking about structural deficits. I heard one commentator say that deficits are a little like potato chips: once we eat one, we keep on going and going.

Before we get to the airy-fairy stuff in this economic update, we have a \$5.9 billion deficit. In two years the surplus is gone. That is hard to do, and I am amazed that the Conservatives have been able to do it. In two years we have gone from a \$13 billion surplus to a \$5.9 billion deficit, but the Conservatives do not want to say anything to anybody.

Then we get to the fairy numbers. The fairy numbers follow the \$5.9 billion deficit, and the Conservatives talk about effective management of government spending. Apparently until now there has been ineffective management of government spending, but now the Conservatives have religion and there is going to be effective management of government spending. That is really good phrasing and I admire the creativity of the Department of Finance in terms of its ability to put lipstick on a pig, so to speak.

● (1615)

The truth of the matter is that we are going to sell off significant assets in order to cover off the deficit. We are going to sell off about \$4.3 billion in assets.

Mr. Speaker, I know you are from Haliburton. It is a nice spot. I like Haliburton. However, most of the folks in Haliburton would not be spending the money from the sale of their house before they even put the "for sale" sign on the house. That is fundamental. There is no set of accounting principles, inside or outside government, that allows us to book a sale of an asset prior to actually putting a "for sale" sign on the asset, or even identifying the sale of the asset. In very simple language, this is spending the proceeds from the sale of the house well before the house has sold.

It would not be all that difficult if the finance minister just admitted that we are in deficit. Why is it that he is incapable of recognizing what the Parliamentary Budget Officer said, which is that the deficit we presently have is a result of the policy decisions that have been made by the Conservative government.

*Government Orders*

We live in an international economy, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that we are in deficit, not because of the difficulties in our local economy and in the international economy, but we are in difficulties because of policy decisions that the Conservative government made. Our Liberal Party has warned the government time and time again that it cannot continue its free-spending ways and reduce its fiscal capacity over and over again without consequences. The direct result, we have said to the government, is that the government is spending itself into a fiscal deficit. Surprise, surprise; we are in a deficit. The finance minister refuses to tell the Canadian public the truth and so we are where we are.

The economy is stalled and we need a fiscal stimulus. Every other country in the world is instituting a fiscal stimulus. The Americans are stimulating their economy by \$1,859 billion, which is \$1.8 trillion. That is a lot of money. Even China is stimulating its economy by \$726 billion and Japan by \$341 billion. Canada's idea of a fiscal stimulus is -\$4.3 billion.

The Conservative finance minister has said that we will be having zero deficit over the next three years. The reality is that we will have a far more substantial deficit than that.

The Liberal Party of Canada has warned the government time and time again and all we have got for our troubles has been ridicule, a massive advertising campaign to destroy the reputation of the leader of the Liberal Party, but surprise, surprise, the Liberal Party is right, the Conservative Party is wrong, and the nation will suffer.

• (1620)

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in this House to actually relay some true facts, because the hon. member is very bad with math. I guess that is no surprise on the other side of the House. That is partly why the Liberals are there. They think that the \$40 million they have not paid back in the sponsorship scandal is irrelevant. However, we are not here to discuss that. We are here to discuss the economic stimulus that this government has already put in place.

I listened with great interest when the hon. member actually refused to recognize the truth. Last year alone, Canada provided 1.4% of gross domestic product, and that is permanent. This coming year it will be 2% of our projected gross domestic product.

The member referred to the United States. The large number that he had trouble spitting out is 1.2% last year of its GDP, and it is temporary. In Japan, it is .7% of GDP, and it is temporary. In Australia, it is 1.1% of GDP in 2009, and it is temporary.

The point the hon. member does not get is that this money that we have put into the economy already has actually kept us in a strong fiscal position. He refuses to accept the fact that we realized this before the Liberals even saw it coming.

**Hon. John McKay:** Mr. Speaker, this is more amusing than anything else, sadly amusing really.

Here we have a government that inherited probably the strongest fiscal situation in the G7 and in two years it has been able to run a \$13 billion surplus into a \$6 billion deficit. It is a talent but not much of a talent. I doubt it would be considered to be much of a talent outside these four walls. Not only did the Conservatives run it into a

\$6 billion deficit, they refused to tell anybody that they were in fact in deficit.

During the election it was see no evil, hear no evil and smell no evil. The Conservatives said, "Of course we are not in deficit; we could not possibly be in deficit, and by the way, do not invest in Ontario". Unfortunately some people took their advice and did not invest in Ontario and have not invested in the economy.

We have had three quarters of negative economic growth and our economy is teetering, but it did not have to be that way. If the Conservatives had listened to the advice of the Liberal Party of Canada they would not be in this mess. The Conservatives are in a mess and it is one of their own creation. If they do not believe me, they can believe the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am the member for Jeanne-Le Ber, and it gives me great pleasure to ask our Liberal Party colleague a question.

Today, during question period, we heard something rather strange in the House. The Conservatives changed their tune depending on whether they were talking in English or in French as they tried to point their finger at the opposition party that was the biggest sell-out.

We heard the Prime Minister say, in English, that the Liberals had sold their souls to the Bloc Québécois, and we heard his political lieutenant for Quebec say, in French, that the Bloc had sold out to the Liberals. I get the impression that they are trying to pull a fast one on either Quebecers or Canadians, or possibly both.

I would like my colleague's opinion on the credibility of a government that engages in the kind of double-speak where the English version is the polar opposite of the French version.

[*English*]

**Hon. John McKay:** Mr. Speaker, the credibility of the government is pretty well done. I read the financial pages in the newspaper this morning and saw various quotes by Conservative commentators that the government has taken us over the cliff. It is extremely frustrating because it did not have to be this way.

We are now faced with a difficult situation. The country needs an economic stimulus, one which is well thought out. The auto industry, which is in the part of the world from which I come, needs some thoughtful, intelligent stimulus in an appropriate way, as does the forestry sector. There is nothing in the economic update that would give any reasonable person a shred of hope that the government actually knows what it is doing.

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member from Scarborough has done a really good job of demonstrating that the Conservatives and the Prime Minister have been ruling as though they had a majority when they do not.

*Government Orders*

I would like to add that if we had proportional representation, as 97% of the democracies in the world have, the Conservatives would only have 117 seats, the Liberals would have 81 seats and the New Democrats would have 57 seats. There would be 23 greens in the House. Under such a system, the separatists, of which the Prime Minister and the Conservatives are so fearful, would have 19 or 20 seats.

Would the hon. member from Scarborough care to comment on whether the Liberals have come to the point where they would like to support proportional representation as we move toward real democracy?

**Hon. John McKay:** Mr. Speaker, it is a legitimate point of debate and an interesting response. I did have a conversation with the Prime Minister of New Zealand on this very point. New Zealand had introduced proportional representation. It had other problems, which we could get into at another time.

I do want to point out that the history of Canada is the history of coalition. Members will recollect that Macdonald governed with a coalition. The Macdonald-Cartier coalition was a well-known coalition that governed this country both before and after. In addition, the Macdonald-Taché coalition worked.

The members opposite fail to recognize that coalitions can actually bring stability to a parliamentary democracy. We have, through this agreement, effectively created a 30-month period of stability, as opposed to a Prime Minister who just seems to want to run from every vote.

This whole problem can be settled very simply. The Prime Minister could stand in his place and say that we vote tonight and it will be all over.

• (1630)

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member from Scarborough, who was the parliamentary secretary to the minister of finance, has spoken with a great understanding of the fundamentals of our budgetary and fiscal situation.

My question is related to the sense of urgency around the economic update. We have heard that young families are depleting their RRSPs just to pay mortgages. Yesterday in the *Financial Post* there was an article concerning the whole question of designated benefits and the need for pension insurance. We are talking about a liability of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Does the member think that, within the context of the independent budgetary officer and what he has heard from the Minister of Finance, it is possible to put a counter-proposal through a budget that would deal with the urgency of these issues? Does he not think that is what the people of Canada are looking for?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** A very short answer from the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

**Hon. John McKay:** The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is, in a heartbeat. There is not a scintilla of doubt that were a stimulus package worked up that was intelligent, thoughtful, directed and pointed, much like, for instance, the infrastructure proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition about a year ago, we would be avoiding some of the worst excesses of this downturn in our economy.

If the government had done what the Leader of the Opposition proposed, we would have \$7 billion already hard at work in the infrastructure of this nation addressing all kinds of issues.

Under the watch of the government, we have gone from “Freedom 55” to “Freedom 85”. Canadians will be working a lot harder and a lot longer because of the—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Equalization; the hon. member for Sudbury, Finance.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand today to speak in support of our government’s response to changing world economic conditions.

I will begin my remarks by sincerely thanking the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for re-electing me as their member of Parliament for the fourth straight election. They have spoken with clarity in giving me the honour and privilege of representing them as their voice in the 40th Parliament of Canada. I thank them for that privilege.

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, as it has been in every campaign. I thank them very much for being there for me.

Being elected as a MP is a responsibility that I accept with the full knowledge that decisions the chamber makes on a daily basis affect the lives of all Canadians, whether intended or unintended. That is a significant burden of responsibility. It is a position of utmost trust. I believe that the confidence placed in our Prime Minister and in the Conservative Party is a recognition that we appreciate and respect the trust of the people of Canada and that they in turn trust and respect us to govern Canada in a fair and judicious manner.

As parliamentarians, we in the House have a responsibility to work together and make Parliament work. It is incumbent upon all of us, all parties and all leaders, to put partisanship aside and make Parliament work in the best interests of all Canadians, particularly during difficult economic times. It is equally important that the government and the Minister of Finance are afforded the flexibility to respond to the changing global fiscal situation as the caring, compassionate Conservatives Canadians have come to trust.

For the thousands of Canadians in my riding and across Canada who today do not have a family doctor because the old Chrétien-Martin regime balanced the budget on the backs of the elderly and the sick, that is unacceptable. I will only support measures that are fair, balanced and fiscally responsible. I am pleased to note that the Prime Minister supports that position with me.

*Government Orders*

Under strong fiscal management by the Conservative government, Canada is the envy of the world. We have been lowering income taxes, creating jobs and paying down debt inherited from previous administrations. This has allowed our government to take a balanced, disciplined approach to current economic conditions.

While our government is prepared to assist specific sectors that may be experiencing difficulties, we are not prepared to throw taxpayer dollars at industries without a plan on their part that includes specific assurances that jobs will be protected or created and that the long term health of their industry does not depend on taxpayer subsidies.

As Conservatives, we recognize that a government can and ought to prepare for economic shocks. We will take the same approach to the upcoming economic shock as we made to the political shock this country suffered.

Just three short years ago, the Conservative government inherited a democratic deficit that some observers blame for the unfortunate fact that separatists still sit in Parliament. The Canadian federation is stronger today than it has been since the Constitution wars almost led to the break-up of Canada in 1995. Thanks to the actions of the current government, Canada is strong.

It will take successive Conservative governments and further actions, such as bringing democracy to the other place, before the threat of Canada breaking up is finally laid to rest.

Canadians feel vulnerable as a result of the looming recession and the global economic situation.

In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, it was the threat by the opposition in the last election to bring in a huge new tax on everything, a so-called carbon tax, or, as it was referred to in my riding, a chimney tax, that resulted in the official opposition having the worst showing since Confederation.

●(1635)

The people in my riding and their Conservative government are smart enough to know that, in a time of global economic uncertainty, the worst possible reaction would be to bring in a huge, new, unknown tax on everything. Now is not the time to be dreaming up some kind of social experiment to push on Canadians. Theories do not pay the bills.

Canadians want sound, practical policies that bring home the groceries.

As compassionate caring Conservatives, we reject the tax-and-spend approach of the opposition. Canadians want a government that plans ahead, prepares for inevitable external shocks and ensures that during those times of international events, over which we have no control, their government is not only prepared to invest in Canadians and to help them through these tough economic times but is also capable of doing so.

I am pleased that our Conservative government, in its first mandate, invested in the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke with \$300 million in new funding for Atomic Energy of Canada. Thanks to that direct financial support, the best in over 30 years, the government has provided AECL, which is a principle employer in

my riding, with hundreds, if not more, good paying, quality jobs. They have been maintained and added to Chalk River Laboratories of AECL in Chalk River, Ontario.

On behalf of the thousands of Canadians across Canada and in Ontario who are employed in the nuclear industry, designing and building the most technically advanced, clean electrical power generating system in the world, I would tell the people of Ontario to buy Canadian. Reliable, economical, clean electricity has been the backbone of Ontario's success as the manufacturing and industrial hub of Canada. I would tell all Ontarians to put their confidence in the men and women who work and pay the taxes in the province.

The federal government joins the Province of Ontario with our commitment to the environment to reduce airborne pollution 20% by 2020. This complements the goal of the province to reduce pollution caused by coal-fired electricity plants. When we buy Canadian nuclear, we all win.

At this time I send my greetings to the brave women and men who are currently serving in Afghanistan, particularly those whose home base is CFB Petawawa. I thank them for their support. I want to tell them that I have their backs back home. For the families and loved ones of our serving soldiers, I want to say that my thoughts are with them always, especially during this holiday season.

I am very proud to be a member of a government that is committed to providing the best equipment and best support to our armed forces to do their job.

Since I was elected in 2000, CFB Petawawa has experienced tremendous growth. This has happened after years of cutbacks and equipment rust-out that occurred under the old Liberal regime. It reduced our ability as a sovereign nation to act like one.

In Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, we have witnessed over 1,000 new jobs added to CFB Petawawa, soldiers and civilians. This growth has been good for the military and good for the upper Ottawa valley.

Like many other parts of Canada, my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke has had an equal share of challenges and successes. Challenges remain in our traditional industries. The family farm, which has been a mainstay of life in the Ottawa valley for generations, is under constant pressure. Since I was first elected I have worked on behalf of local farmers to bring forward programs and policies that support farmers. I look forward to working with the Minister of Agriculture, as well as my local farm organizations and their representatives as we negotiate current problems, as we have done in the past.

Our government has demonstrated that it listens to farmers and farmers have responded by sending Conservatives to Ottawa. I say to my farmers that they will always have my support.

*Government Orders*

•(1640)

The closure of the mill at Portage-du-Fort has had a negative impact on the forestry industry that never fully recovered from the negative impact of the old government's inability to settle the softwood lumber dispute between this country and the United States. It is clear that we need new markets and a new forest strategy particularly when we look at the global marketplace and the rise in low-cost competitors in areas with longer growing seasons. This is an opportunity as much as it is a challenge.

In the throne speech our government confirmed that we will continue to help our forestry sector with measures that promote innovation and the sale of goods abroad. In my riding, private producers are the majority. Forestry producers find themselves in a difficult situation where production costs continue to rise and profits are non-existent. The very survival of many woodlot-based family businesses are 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.

The future of forestry in the Ottawa Valley will depend on our taking advantage of the so-called green energy market. An example of this market would be the wood pellet industry that uses low-end material from sawmills to create a clean-burning fuel in the form of pellets. These wood pellets can be used to heat homes. Forest residue can also be used for energy cogeneration plants.

The federal government is committed to exploring these and other uses of the forest through our eco-energy initiative. That initiative is our commitment to helping Canadians with practical things like controlling the cost to heat one's home while at the same time planning for the future and a healthier environment by lessening our dependence on fossil fuels for energy.

I would like to thank those constituents who have contacted me and supported my efforts to affordable broadband high speed Internet to the unserved and under-served areas of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. I am pleased to confirm that due to the efforts of myself and my fellow Conservative caucus members broadband rural connectivity was included as a category that could be funded under building Canada, our \$33 billion plan to rebuild crumbling infrastructure in Canada.

We recognize the importance of modern communication and the need to build the information highway in rural Canada, in places like Renfrew County and all of eastern Ontario. I look forward to continuing to work with those municipalities that have identified modern communications as a priority. Our government is committed to the needs of Canadians and I look forward to working with all members of the House as we pursue common goals.

The events of late have caused great anxiety among constituents who live in my riding. I am going to read several excerpts from phone calls, emails and faxes that have recently been received.

The first one comes from constituent Larry Black, who writes, "Is Canada still a democracy? Is it still viable to ask the average non-voter why you do not vote? Whatever happened to our democratic

right? Are elections still worthwhile or should I say democratically still viable? Is Canada going to be under the control of a separatist Bloc party which plays for all the world to see the new Liberal puppet leader? These are very viable questions you need to answer. I don't know the answer and the possibility of the answers scare me. For days now I have been watching Canadian politics with a growing fear that my democratic rights and freedoms are about to be stolen. On October 14, 2008 Canadians went to the polls. We elected a stronger minority Conservative government under the leadership of Stephen Harper, in which we gave the Conservative Party—

•(1645)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. The hon. member is an experienced parliamentarian and knows that she cannot use the names of members in the House.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Pardon me, Mr. Speaker, I beg your forgiveness.

We must mention that the Liberals received 76 seats as opposed to our 143, the NDP 37 seats and the Bloc received 50 seats with two independents. This, as everyone knows, totals 308 seats and under this the Conservatives have 37.6% of the vote, the Liberals 26.2%, the NDP 18.2% and the Bloc 10%. As we face the greater possibility of a coalition government to be led by the Liberals with active support from the NDP and backup from the Bloc, these and more numbers will be very important.

I have a letter from Mrs. Boretski. Her key point is that, "This new government was elected less than two months ago and for the opposition to get together to overthrow the government on the issue of fiscal restraint is abhorrent".

Ms. Cesar says, "It is probably better to have an election than a coalition. The opposition is hungry for power".

Mr. and Mrs. Cahill ask, "Is there anything we can do? We do not need the Bloc running this country".

Mr. Bradley states, "If they are defeated they should be allowed to go back to the people and do it again. I think a coalition government would be a disaster".

Mr. Edwards wants to know, "What in the heck we can do to try and avert this disaster? Are buses going to Ottawa to rally?"

Mr. and Mrs. Diverge states, "Any kind of coalition government that is being proposed by the leaders of the Liberal, NDP or Bloc parties, while it may be permitted during our present Constitution, it is disgusting and revolting to take power through the backdoor".

Mr. and Mrs. Whodida ask, "When is the Prime Minister going to see the separatists for what they are, namely a bunch of whiners who are only interested in bleeding Canada economically to death to their sole benefit".

Mr. and Mrs. Jackson want us to know that they back the Conservative government, "The others are acting like a bunch of baboons and they are idiots".

Mr. Faught is very angry. He said, "The Prime Minister cannot sit on the fence. He should call an election".

*Government Orders*

Mr. Kroeger says he is against this coalition, “It is ridiculous. This is supposed to be a democracy”.

Mr. Kulack cannot understand why they would do something like this. His understanding is if this goes through he will never vote again. He has voted all his life and he knows hundreds of others who have said the same thing. He wants to spread the word.

Mr. and Mrs. Caleo said, “People should organize and do something before this gang of no-goods take charge of our country”.

Ms. Cavanaugh said, “This is just awful what is happening to our country. That Liberal Party didn't even want that man to be in their party to run it and now they want him to run Canada?”

Rita is calling about the happenings on the news. Basically she is seeing three guys from Quebec who are trying to topple the government and hijack the balance of power.

Mr. and Mrs. Kernoff said, “The Prime Minister was voted in and we should leave it at that”.

Mr. Mandan states, “I am just sick about this coalition going on and I would like to express my discontent quickly and would like to know the best way to do this”.

Mr. and Mrs. Grisson are getting a petition to stop the coalition from taking power from our government.

Mr. MacDonald wants to know if the oath that all parliamentarians take when they get elected, that they swear or affirm belief in the government, does the same thing apply to separatist members?

• (1650)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech with great attention. I have a couple of questions for the hon. member however.

There are many democracies older than ours that regularly have coalition governments. I would like to know if the hon. member considers that these countries and the people who live in these countries have an inferior democratic sense than we do here in Canada. That is the first question.

Second, we do not have the perfect democratic system in this country. No country has a perfect democratic system. As a matter of fact, a government in this country can be elected with less than 50% of the popular vote. In some countries they have runoffs until a party reaches 50% of the vote. Does that mean her government is not as legitimate as a government in a country that gets elected with a clear majority?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, the older countries that the member was referring to rarely, if ever, make pacts with separatists. The other industrialized nations are looking to Canada and emulating what we did over a year ago to stimulate our economy. We cut the hated GST. We are in line to continue reducing business taxes. We will continue to take such measures to protect our seniors.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for supporting me once again in the most recent election. I would also like to thank my husband, Réal, our children,

Megan and Malte, my staff, and my campaign officials for my reelection.

I would like to remind the member opposite that a majority of Quebecers—78%—voted against the Conservative government. We got our mandate from our nation, which gave sovereigntist candidates running under the Bloc Québécois banner a 75% majority. That makes us legitimate.

Quebec blocked your majority in this House. You have to respect that. The Bloc Québécois has made proposals concerning the economic statement. Rather than act responsibly, the government delivered an ideological statement. It decided to suspend the right to strike and to undermine women's rights.

My question is for the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. In a bid to avoid losing the confidence of the House, why did her party not accept some of the measures my party proposed to her government?

• (1655)

[English]

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, 90% of Canadians did not vote for the Bloc Québécois; 0% of Canadians voted for this unholy coalition.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to put this question to the member opposite. She spoke about the forest industry and the innovation measures that have been taken. My question is this. Why have the mills closed down in the towns in my riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, in northern Ontario, towns like Hearst, Smooth Rock Falls, Opatatika, White River and Wawa? There were no innovation measures to keep them open. These communities are going through very hard times right now.

I would like to remind her that her party has lost the confidence of the House. The best thing to do is to let the coalition go ahead and do the work that is needed to protect Canadians and our economy.

[English]

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind members opposite that in response to the challenging times our forestry sector is facing, we introduced the community development trust. If the member's people have not accessed it, perhaps it is time for her constituents to elect a member of the Conservative Party because Conservative members work for their constituents.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been having a busy day reading the emails that I received from my constituents today. The hon. member gave a wonderful speech and closed it by referring to some of the emails that she has received. Hon. members in this House need to hear how frustrated and angered Canadians are that the NDP have formed a coalition with the separatists and with the Liberals. I would like, if I could, to read one email very quickly. This email is from the Bruneau family: “On behalf of my wife and children, I want to encourage you and the Conservative Party to take whatever measures you must take to prevent this coalition of the left, that is currently posturing to take over our country. This coup has obviously been in the works for some time and the likes of the Liberals, led by whomever, and the separatists undemocratically taking over the government makes me seethe with contempt”.

That is just one, and as the House can see I have many more. I wonder if the hon. member could refer to a couple more that she might have that she could share with us.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Barry Evans wrote, “Regarding the three stooges, is there anything as a person I can do to help?” Mr. and Mrs. Greensleigh are very disturbed over the events in Ottawa and want to know what can be done. Mrs. Brown wrote, “For heaven's sake, have we got anyone that's going to do something about that God-darned coalition government?” Mr. Code wrote, “Just prorogue and cause another election”. Ms. Leedum is very opposed to any coalition. She voted for the Prime Minister. She says that French leader doesn't belong with us. She is a low-income senior and she wants her voice to be heard. Ms. Gilchrist wants to “prorogue this mess and let's have an election”. Mrs. Hopper wrote, “I would prefer to have another election than have these egomaniacs govern Canada”. Mr. and Mrs. Jessop wrote, “These three stooges' affairs must end”.

• (1700)

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to raise an issue that should be of concern to all members here.

The opposition is sitting there very smugly right now. Those members are mocking us. I do not think they realize how divisive their actions are to this country.

I want the member to comment especially on what is happening in rural Canada.

Rural Canadians are, almost without exception, not represented on the other side. Rural Canadians are feeling that it is going to be very upsetting to have their leadership from the big cities and so on.

There is one issue that the NDP is going to have to explain. There are 10 MPs who campaigned on the fact that they were going to get rid of the gun registry. Now they have joined with the people who are strongly supporting it and are going to stick it to the rural residents. This is very divisive.

Is the member hearing anything in her constituency from people expressing concern about what is going to happen to that particular program?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, every day people call my office to ask when we are finally going to get rid of the gun registry.

It is expensive. It is doing nothing to save people. Taking guns away from hunters and farmers in rural Canada is going to do nothing in terms of stopping gang violence in urban centres.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join the debate on the government's economic statement, because it is at the heart of the democratic crisis that now exists in this Parliament.

Let us remember why an election was called. The Prime Minister had introduced and passed an act providing for fixed election dates. The next election was to take place in 2009. The Prime Minister said there was such a great economic urgency that an election was necessary. He went back on his own word and decided to call an election because of the economic situation.

So, we had an election, and a minority government was elected—a government that does not have a majority in this House. The message sent by the people was that the party forming the government should take account of the views of the opposition parties, when putting forward its proposals, in order to obtain that majority. One would have expected at least a neutral attitude on the part of the Conservative government toward the opposition parties, so this government could obtain their support on economic or less partisan matters. We could have debated the merits of the proposals, put them on the table and moved forward.

Instead of that, the economic statement was a provocation; they added fuel to the fire. For example, they said they would abolish public funding of parties. Do you know what that means? In Quebec, there has been a system of public funding of political parties for 30 years. There was no such system in Canada until a few years ago. The Conservative party decided to do away with that.

Next, they decided to take away the right to strike from public servants. That is another measure that goes against the wishes of the majority, here, in Parliament. The Conservatives thought they could bulldoze the opposition, especially since the Liberal party had lost the election. They were wrong. They fanned the flames when what they should have done, very simply, was to deliver a real economic statement dealing with economic measures.

The government even tampered with the issue of pay equity. This means that three groups of people are affected. There are those who want a healthy democracy, who want the citizens to decide. However, the government said no, we have to go back to the system where it is the businesses that decide. That was the first mistake. Then, the government targeted pay equity by tossing aside all the efforts made by women to achieve equality. The government wants to deprive them of their instrument, it wants to shelve everything.

That is indeed what happened. However, when the government realized that the opposition was standing up to it, it suddenly backed off on each and everyone of its proposals. Public financing was no longer a critical issue, and nor was the right to strike. Worse still is the fact that there is no plan in this economic statement to get the economy back on track. This is truly surreal, considering that the government called an election for that very reason.

*Government Orders*

We then submitted proposals, at the government's request. The Bloc Québécois tabled a number of them and several ministers said here in this House that this was a good thing, that it was constructive to move forward with those things. However, there is nothing in the economic statement. Throughout the world, whether in Europe, in Great Britain, in France, in Asia or in China, economic recovery plans are being implemented. As recently as yesterday, the UN said that massive investments are required for distribution and creation, to promote world development. However, the Conservative government decided to adopt the exact same attitude as the Republicans had done just before the 1929 crash. It took Franklin D. Roosevelt to get them out of that situation. The Conservatives and the current Prime Minister are behaving exactly like the Republicans, when the Americans had to kick them out in order to be able to emerge from the Great Depression. We find ourselves faced with the same situation.

The government was very surprised, therefore, that the opposition parties could stand up all of a sudden, when actually it was the general public who said they wanted an economic recovery plan. The Conservative government is so caught up in its ideology that it is incapable of making adjustments or proposing different ways of doing things. The opposition parties all told the government, therefore, that it would not have the confidence of the House on the basis of this economic statement.

• (1705)

We started to discuss what it would require of us all and what we could do together. The Bloc Québécois was a bit ahead of the game because we had made some proposals to the current government and submitted them to the parties that are going to form the next government, the Liberals and the New Democrats. These are things we have been requesting for years and I will provide some specific examples.

We have been asking for a program to help older workers who lose their jobs. A few years ago in my riding, Whirlpool closed a factory in Montmagny that provided 600 jobs. We started asking for the restitution of the program for older worker adjustment or POWA. We got some amendments in the Speech from the Throne to this effect, but the Conservatives never kept their promise.

The Conservatives have always considered older workers who lost their jobs to be just workers and not citizens. It never crosses their minds that these people, who have often worked and paid into employment insurance for 25 years, who supported their families for 30 years and are now 57 or 58 years old, deserve a program to help them reach retirement.

When we asked for this to be included in the coalition program, the other parties agreed. This is a tremendous victory for Quebec. It is a victory for all of Canada as well because it is a way to share the wealth. This is the kind of approach that the Conservatives are incapable of taking.

Then we asked for the elimination of the two week waiting period for employment insurance. Is there any greater security we could provide to our working people in recessionary times? When people lose their jobs, from now on, they will be able to draw their benefits during the first two weeks. Is there not some kind of compassionate gesture like this that the Conservative government could have made?

We have had a bill to this effect for years—we did not begin asking for it just yesterday morning.

This possibility exists in the program developed by the coalition. Thousands of working people fought the deficit, more than any other group in society. The hon. members of this House got tax cuts. People who have jobs got tax cuts. But the unemployed, who created the \$54 billion surplus in the employment insurance fund, did not get anything or any return on their investment. Was it so difficult to give them their benefits from the very start because they had been paying their contributions from the first hour they worked? That is the kind of initiative we would have liked to see from the Conservative government but did not find in its economic statement.

We also proposed a support plan for the manufacturing and forestry sectors. Everyone says we need to invest in innovation. We must invest in order to support the manufacturing and forestry sectors. I live in an area where the forestry industry is very important. It is facing a terrible crisis because there is almost no market left in the United States. Would it have been so difficult to have an action plan to increase exports to Europe? Would it have been so difficult to go ahead with a plan to provide better conditions and adequate retraining for the workers affected? No, instead it was decided to leave that sector to its own devices. That is the Prime Minister's ideology. He says we should not interfere with the economy; we should let it adjust itself. The fact that this affects real people does not matter. That is the approach taken by the current Prime Minister, and something that most members and most Canadians do not support.

We also asked that regional economic assistance be restored. Just as the economic crisis was setting in, the good minister at the time decided to cut funding to non-profit economic development organizations in Quebec. Talk about adding insult to injury. It meant telling people that, not only will we do nothing to help you, but we are going to take away the means that were already in place. It is understandable why people were so angry with the Conservative government that 80% of Quebecers voted for other parties and the vast majority voted for the 49 Bloc members who are here today.

Then there was also restoration of the cultural assistance programs. A lesson can be learned from the cuts to those programs, unless one happens to be one of the ten or so Conservative members from Quebec. In Quebec, culture is more than a business or a market, it is an expression of what our nation is, of who Quebecers are. If it is affected, the whole population is affected. Would it have been so hard for the Conservative government to admit that they got the message from the election and to restore that money? That would have made it possible to continue to promote culture outside Quebec and outside Canada, so that our authors, our creative people, our artists, can express themselves and have opportunities to make themselves known. There are no better ambassadors.

I recall the words of a Quebec comic during the campaign: pretty soon there would be no one representing Canada abroad except our troops. That was part of a public service message. Humorous messages are often the most effective.

*Government Orders*

•(1710)

It is all very well for us to have soldiers doing their jobs abroad, but there is no reason to cut the funding for cultural representatives.

So there are five situations that need to be remedied, but the Conservative government has not remedied them. One of these is compliance with the Kyoto agreement. For a long time, Quebec individuals, companies, aluminum smelters and the like have been expressing a desire to see the Kyoto protocol respected, because this is the best way to have sustainable development. They feel the Conservatives' approach is unacceptable.

They were not asking the Conservatives just to bow down and accept the complete protocol overnight, but progress could have been made toward this, and the intention to get on side with the global consensus could have been expressed. On this issue, now that the Americans have elected a new president, Canada is the only one out of step, but they see it as everybody being out of step except Canada. The rest of the world, which wants to improve the environmental situation and deal with climate change, must be wrong. Only the Prime Minister of Canada, who comes from Alberta, is right, and that is because the oil and gas industry has to be protected.

Last year, the government said it would cut corporate taxes according to a multi-year plan. The problem is that companies in the manufacturing and forestry sectors do not turn a profit. Therefore they do not benefit from tax cuts.

Consequently, certain programs were needed, such as programs to provide loan guarantees, assistance for innovation and purchases of new equipment. That is what we expected to hear from the government.

Therefore, we find ourselves in an extraordinary situation. An election was called to obtain a mandate to implement an economic action plan and then, after the election, the elected government decided to attack political parties, women and workers' rights rather than taking action to deal with the economic slowdown.

In my opinion, there can be no baser attitude in Parliament than to have put that statement on the table just when the economy was taking a nosedive. The economic statement should have dealt only with economic matters. They should have tried to help our workers, our regions, our citizens, to cope. But that was not what we found in the government's economic statement.

The economic statement met with a torrent of opposition. The government began backing down on a number of items but it did not seek to bring any resolution to the main issue of tabling an economic development plan. That is the issue for which the Conservative government has received the harshest condemnation. The government decided that it alone was on the right track, while all the other member countries of the G7 and G20 put forward, ideas, projects and concrete investments. We are talking about hundreds of billions of dollars. Here, the Conservative government is hiding behind the fact that it had already done what was required in the past. But the economic crisis is not a thing of the past; it is happening now and will carry forward into the future. Therefore, we need measures to deal with the situation and there are none.

As for the proposals made by the Bloc Québécois to the Minister of Finance, and that he applauded as being constructive, we would have expected to see some of them in the economic statement. We were not asking that all of these proposals be implemented. We could accept the fact that some of them would not be put forward, but we would have liked the government to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation. However, it did not do that. What we have is this Reform Conservative—not Progressive Conservative—approach, which says that the government must do as little as possible regarding the economy, because ultimately that approach will produce good results.

I also wondered if this was not a way for the government to hide, to some degree, the current state of public finances. What is the true magnitude of what we will end up with at the end of the year? After all, the budget officer said that the decisions made by the Conservatives were responsible for the deficit that is anticipated this year, namely the GST cuts of one and then two points. Indeed, these measures deprive this government of a lot of leverage.

Lowering the GST may have helped sell more products made in China, but it also resulted in our manufacturing industries having fewer tools to compete and to provide competitive products. We can see why the opposition finds the economic statement unacceptable. This government was judged very harshly, particularly in Quebec.

•(1715)

I thank Quebeckers for listening to the Bloc's message and for not letting the Conservatives form a majority government. One can imagine what it would be like if we had had a Conservative majority government. The economic statement would have included even fewer initiatives to help the economy, but more measures to restrict freedoms.

In my opinion, Quebeckers did a service not only to Quebec, but to all of Canada by refusing to give that majority to the Conservatives. Today, if the government were not in a minority position, the opposition would be out in the streets. Women and workers would have had to take to the streets to protect their rights. Now, in this House, the opposition has stood up and said that it will not give its support to the government regarding its economic update. Canadians do not want an election tomorrow, but they want a government that will manage our finances and that will move forward with economic changes. This is what we are proposing, and this is in compliance with the parliamentary procedure.

I will conclude with this point: whether we are defending the interests of Quebeckers or promoting Quebec sovereignty, the Bloc Québécois honours its commitments. We have always said that when a bill or measure is good for Quebec, we will vote in favour of it. And if a measure is bad for Quebec, we will vote against it. That is still our policy in the current situation. We will not be part of the government, because we do not think that is the best solution. However, we decided to sign the agreement because we think that is the best solution for Quebec and for Canada as a whole. This notion is shared by the two other parties, which would form the government.

*Government Orders*

We have shown respect for Canada as a whole by not demanding that we be part of the government. The agreement bears this out. I hope we will be able to move forward as soon as possible with a government agenda that includes a plan for real change, a plan for development and economic intervention. The Conservative government will never be capable of producing such a plan as long as the current Prime Minister is in charge, since he does not believe in intervention, and not only because that is his belief, but also because of ideology and stubbornness. Quebeckers are fed up with that stubbornness. And so is the rest of Canada. This will never stop the Bloc Québécois from continuing to promote sovereignty.

We believe that the best solution for Quebec would be to have a sovereign state, a country where Quebeckers can make their own decisions in a parliament over which we have complete control, a parliament in Quebec City. Placing control in the hands of Quebeckers would eliminate the need for the measures we are forced to take here to ensure that Quebec's voice is heard in the federal Parliament and throughout Canada. That is why we maintain that the Bloc Québécois provides the best representation for Quebeckers in the federal Parliament. We are not, in any way, hindered by Canada-wide dynamics. We respect those who want to pursue that, but when it comes to protecting Quebec's interests, we forge ahead. We know that we are on the right path, and we respect the mandate we received from Quebeckers.

• (1720)

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have asked this question of Bloc members a couple of times today, and I want to get this member's take on it.

As we know, in the new coalition 100% of confidence measures would need support from the Bloc. That includes the Speech from the Throne, which is a vision for Canada. One would expect that the Speech from the Throne would include a strongly articulated support for a united Canada, including Quebec.

When such a strong statement for a united Canada, including Quebec, comes out, what will the member's position be on it?

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, our position will be the same as the one we took with the Conservatives. We allowed their first two budgets to pass because they included money for the fiscal imbalance. The Conservatives hung on to power then because of the Bloc Québécois' support, because of Quebec sovereignists. We felt that the budgets gave Quebec enough money to move forward.

We had the same approach to previous throne speeches. I would suggest that the member review everything that has happened over the past few years. Everything happening now has happened with the Conservatives since 2006. This is the same situation. We are capable of taking on our responsibilities. We have done it in the past, and we will continue to do it. Every time there is an election, we seek a mandate from the people by telling them that if they vote for the Bloc Québécois, they are voting for an opposition party, but they can be sure that we will defend Quebec's interests and promote Quebec sovereignty. That has always been clear.

The Conservatives agreed to work with us when it suited them. That is what we were hoping for with this minority government, if only it had agreed to act on the people's desire for a new economic plan.

[English]

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was shocked when I heard that the current Prime Minister signed a letter on September 9, 2004, along with the leaders of the PQ and the NDP, asking the then Governor General to allow the replacement of the then government of Paul Martin.

Why was it okay to try to replace the Paul Martin government and now it is an evil idea to do basically the same? Could the member sort out the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister?

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, I thought I saw that the Chair was not very happy with the word "hypocrisy", even though I know that it is acceptable parliamentary language. The Conservatives have used the word in the past, and it must still be acceptable. But it is not up to me to say, it is up to the Chair.

It is important to tone down the debate. Everything that is happening now, with the opposition proposal, is in accordance with parliamentary procedure and tradition, so much so, in fact, that the Prime Minister did the very same thing a few years ago, as my colleague said.

I will not say that this is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is acting as though he did not do that two years ago. It is not what he did two years ago that is hypocritical, it is the fact that he is acting as though he did not do it. In fact, that is exactly what he did.

Personally, I have complete confidence in the people. I always find that the people are right and are able to sort everything out, no matter how complicated things get. In the end, the people knew what they were doing when they elected a minority government. They elected a minority government because they did not believe they should give this government, this party, full latitude—even though that is what the party would have liked—because they were not sure what the party would do with all that power.

Today, we have learned an amazing lesson. The people of Quebec were the wisest of all. They decided to elect fewer Conservative members than last time, with a smaller percentage of votes, because they could not have confidence in anyone, least of all the Prime Minister, under the circumstances. He was announcing cuts to culture and taking an unacceptable punitive attitude toward young offenders. He was reopening the abortion debate with a bill that his minister is still supposed to reintroduce. There was never any suggestion that the bill would not be reintroduced. For all these reasons, Quebeckers stood up and said no to the Conservative Party.

Today, Quebeckers are still dissatisfied, this time with the economic statement.

*Government Orders*

●(1725)

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to underscore the attitude of respect and cooperation that now exists in this House of Commons. The Conservative government promised a new era of cooperation and respect, and failed in that regard.

We witnessed a historic moment when a coalition was formed. The Bloc Québécois agreed, in the interest of the economy and in the interest of Quebecers and Canadians, to set aside the issue of sovereignty to take care of the economy, just as we, the Liberals and the NDP, will set aside the national question to some extent to focus on the economy. That is what is important. It is a historic agreement.

[*English*]

The agreement between the Liberals and the NDP, which is supported by the Bloc, puts aside the questions of national unity to focus on the unity of the economy and the strength of the economy. This is a large, important day of respect and co-operation here of which we can all be proud. I congratulate the members of the Bloc for being part of that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, the member thinks his wishes are horses. With respect to nationhood, the Bloc has in no way given up its desire to help create a sovereign Quebec. We will continue to work toward that goal. We will continue to stand up for sovereignty because that is the best possible scenario for Quebecers. We did not surrender that right in the agreement we signed.

In my opinion, Quebec is a society that deserves a country of its own, that deserves to have 100% of the decision-making power, that deserves to have 100% of the right to make its own laws and sign treaties. I consider these things to be essential.

However, in the short term, in the context of this agreement, we are ready at the economic level. If a new government does take power, the coalition will introduce measures that are in the best interest of Quebecers, measures that the Conservatives rejected. We think that these measures are the best way to deal with the reality we have to face right now.

Nevertheless, in no way does this mean that the Bloc Québécois cannot ask questions in the future about any subject it wishes to address, including the future of the nation and the perception of whichever government is in power. That is how the Bloc Québécois will carry out the two mandates it was given by the people.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, today we caught a glimpse of the Conservative Party's Reform roots. Earlier today, we heard comments that were downright offensive about the Quebec nation's legitimate, democratically elected representatives. Among others, we heard the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke read rather unimpressive, even despicable emails and letters from Reform activists and supporters, missives that were hostile toward Quebec. It is distressing to see this kind of Quebec bashing rear its head in the House of Commons once again. This proves that the Conservatives are ready to do whatever it takes to cling to power, and that includes attacking the Quebec nation's legitimate, democratically elected representatives.

Does my colleague feel our pain when people call us baboons?

●(1730)

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, what is the most obvious is that the Conservative Party is dominated by the Reform approach at all levels. In the Prime Minister's economic statement, that is absolutely the approach that they used. They may have put some Conservative icing on it, but the cake is Reform. We can see that on all levels—whether principles or technique—it is the same thing. Today I had a flashback to days gone by. That was how things were done from 1993 to 1997—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member's time is up. Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I rise to give my maiden speech in the House as the member of Parliament for Edmonton—St. Albert, I beg the indulgence of hon. members as I make some acknowledgments.

First I want to express how humbled and honoured I am that the great citizens of St. Albert and northwest Edmonton entrusted me with the duty of representing them in the House.

With all due respect to the other members, I have the distinct honour of representing the best big city and the best small city in Canada at the same time. I commit myself to working on their behalf to the best of my ability.

For decades Edmonton has been among the most culturally vibrant cities in Canada, besides being the capital of Alberta. The University of Alberta is one of the elite universities in the country. Our river valley is a true gem. It is the longest urban park in the world.

Edmonton really is the city of champions. I have been an Edmonton Eskimos season ticket holder for many years. The Edmonton Eskimos have won 13 Grey Cups since 1954, more than any other team. The Edmonton Oilers are also champions and have won five Stanley Cups, which tops any other franchise outside of the original six. We are also proud to be the outdoor arena of choice for soccer in Canada. Commonwealth Stadium regularly brings in as many fans for international matches as anywhere else in North America.

Mr. Speaker, you probably know a lot less about St. Albert, a wonderful city of almost 60,000 people located just outside the northwest boundary of Edmonton. In a province barely 100 years old, St. Albert has a charming, well-established feel in its own lovely valley on the banks of the Sturgeon River. It also has a vibrant arts community and a great deal of cultural richness. St. Albert is the oldest non-fortified settlement in Alberta. In fact, in 2011 St. Albert will celebrate its 150th anniversary.

St. Albert is home to many small businesses and, like Edmonton, its industrial area is being shaped by the energy boom taking place in northern Alberta, the energy boom that has been the main driver of Canada's economic buoyancy in the last years when so many nations have suffered major economic losses.

*Government Orders*

As their representative, I will defend the interests of small and medium-sized businesses. I will also ensure that our energy sector remains robust, because government programs will never help sustain our economy in the way that the success of industry and private enterprise can.

The Edmonton Garrison is on the border of my constituency, and the former Griesbach base is in the southeast part of the riding. I doubt that many ridings in the country have the honour of being home to as many men and women who are serving and retired members of the military as Edmonton—St. Albert does. This is very important to me.

I take seriously our duty in the House to ensure that the people who have devoted their lives to keeping our country safe and respected are well taken care of. I will add that unlike most members of the opposition, I am extremely proud not only of our soldiers, but also of the Afghan mission itself.

It will not be easy to satisfy the expectations of the citizens of Edmonton—St. Albert, because my predecessor was such a distinguished and respected parliamentarian. John Williams served in the House for 15 years, arriving with the first group of Reform Party members in the heady days of 1993. Among other achievements, he chaired the public accounts committee for an unusually long period of time, and he did so because of the respect he earned as a watchdog on government waste.

The highlight of his tenure occurred when he put the spotlight on the sponsorship scandal and made sure that Canadians found out about the corruption and kickbacks the Liberals were engaged in with their hard-earned tax dollars. He will be remembered for his periodic publication “The Waste Report”, which served as a watchdog of mismanagement of public funds.

I am reminded every time I speak with voters that John Williams was correct. Our biggest job as parliamentarians is to ensure that government does not misuse the money we take from our taxpayers. Whether we are in opposition or whether we are in government, we have to stand up not only for the Canadians who are asking for the help of the government, but also for the ones who pay our bills. We have to think not only of the needs of the citizens, but also of the realities of the people who are employers and taxpayers. This is what I heard on the doorsteps of every neighbourhood in which I knocked on doors this fall.

Replacing a man like John Williams will be a tall order, but as one of the tallest members of the House, I hope that with some indulgence members will come to embrace me as they did him.

I proudly hail from Elbow, a prairie town in eastern Saskatchewan, which is also your home province, Mr. Speaker. Like a great Conservative prime minister who presided in this chamber, I am a lawyer by training and a proud graduate of the law school of the University of Saskatchewan.

• (1735)

The Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker—

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** He was from my riding.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:**—from the riding of the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin is to be honoured by this government by having his name put to a new icebreaker. He was a hero of mine when I was a small boy growing up in prairie Saskatchewan. I would love to go on about the constituency of Edmonton—St. Albert, but these are times of great peril, both in the House and in the nation.

This fall Canadians gave the Conservative government a clear mandate to continue taking action on the economy. During a global downturn, the last thing our country needs is for opposition politicians to claim entitlements for tax dollars and ultimately to take power without a mandate from the people.

The benchmark TSX index took a near-record dive Monday, dropping 864 points, or 9.3%. It sustained further losses today. That is a clear indication of the economic incentives we can expect from this proposed coalition government. The investors of Canada got a chance to vote early on this proposal, and they voted it down.

Under the current Prime Minister's leadership, our government was ahead of the curve in anticipating the global economic slowdown. We are and have been injecting billions of dollars in stimulus through tax cuts, investments in roads and bridges, and protection of the banking system.

Our focus is the economy, but the opposition parties have their own priorities. While all Canadians are tightening their belts, they feel entitled to make taxpayers pay for political party staff, for polls and for advertising. They want to replace the elected government just to preserve \$17 million worth of entitlements. This is clearly unacceptable for a modern democracy.

This time of difficulty is indeed a great opportunity for us to invest in initiatives that will pay benefits in the long term, especially with regard to correcting the infrastructure backlog that exists across this country. However, we cannot afford to be hasty about it. Canadians chose us because they trust us to be prudent and not desperate.

In addition to the infrastructure investment, there is also a chance in this troubled period to make investments in key Canadian industries. I firmly believe, however, and I think Canadians agree with me, that it would be irresponsible to simply dump money into the coffers of any companies that have run into trouble, just as it would be irresponsible to start building roads and bridges everywhere for the sake of propping up temporary jobs.

Prudent economic management means measuring twice and cutting once. This is why I congratulate the efforts of the hon. industry minister, who has been working diligently on the industry file and requesting that the auto industry come up with detailed restructuring plans. Detailed restructuring plans mean Canadians can be reassured that any of their money directed to the auto industry is an investment in something that is sustainable and that makes Canada stronger in the long term, as opposed to using our money to prop up companies for a short time period, only to face the same scenario a few years and a few billion dollars later.

*Government Orders*

There has to be more consideration than that. Canadians elected this government because they trust us to act with deliberation and with the long-term well-being of this country in mind when we make these important decisions. They do not expect this government to throw billions of their dollars into anything if it is not going to reap dividends.

The opposition accuses us of failing to act as quickly as other industrial nations. To this I counter that there are two very good reasons for Canada to act with more deliberation and prudence than others.

First, we are in better shape than the other industrialized countries in terms of our economy and our solid banking system. They rushed to inject money into various sectors because those other countries' crises were well under way. We have been growing so robustly over the last three years that with few exceptions, we are not feeling this downturn, except perhaps in the stock market. I would argue that we could easily wait until the end of January before committing to huge investments, so that when we act, we can act with a well-considered plan and not a hasty one.

The second difference between Canada and any other country with which we are compared is that much of our economy is deeply intertwined with our neighbours to the south. This means we cannot act alone if we want to act effectively. The Americans, like us, have just come out of a national election and are in the process of deciding what they are going to do with their stimulus package. It would be irresponsible to risk moving at cross-purposes to American actions.

Among their big decisions is how to help the big three carmakers. Does it make any sense for Canada to decide by itself what to do in this regard? No.

• (1740)

Obviously the U.S. is a central player in our marketplace. Just as obvious, we should work in concert with what happens on the other side of the border and with the incoming American administration.

This is only one example of many interconnected aspects of our economy, which illustrates the point that until the U.S. makes its trillion dollar decisions, we cannot know that we will make effective choices with our billion dollar decisions.

I am here to speak about the fiscal update and I will return to the subject of the economy, because our crisis is about to get much worse.

The latest moves by the opposition are obviously making our good stewardship of the nation's economy, a side issue being replaced by their naked ambition.

Both my Ottawa office and my St. Albert office have been absolutely deluged by Canadians who are outraged by the coalition of the Leader of the Opposition, who has been lured into by a party that wants to make Canada a socialist state and by a party that wants to pull Canada apart. I share the outrage that so many Canadians feel.

It is one thing to say that a coalition government is better for Canada when no party clearly has a mandate from Canadians. However, that is not the case. Just six weeks ago, the people of Canada spoke very clearly. They said quite unambiguously that they

did not want the Leader of the Opposition to be prime minister, not now and certainly not in the times of economic instability like the one we are about to face.

We learned soon after this coalition started that the leader of the smallest party in the House, a man who knows he will never be elected by Canadians into government because his NDP views are so out of touch with reality, had been plotting for some time to take over, with the separatists as his co-conspirators.

In the fiscal update the Minister of Finance announced our intention to lead by example in this period, where all Canadians must be prepared to tighten their belts, and proposed that all parties should give up their \$1.95 per vote, which was brought in five years ago. When this happened, the opposition parties, especially the Liberal Party, panicked. Why? Because they cannot raise enough money from people donating to them voluntarily. As with most things in society, the members of those parties think the government should spend taxpayer money on their behalf because, ostensibly, the government knows better.

The panic on the part of the Liberals was just the desperation for which the NDP members were waiting. They immediately took the anger and the insecurity of the opposition parties and before the weekend was over, had committed the Leader of the Opposition to this undemocratic plot.

A lot of Canadians and a lot more sober-minded caucus members from the opposition are wondering why exactly he was lured into this unholy pact with the socialists and the separatists. We should not be too surprised since the Leader of the Opposition has two former NDP premiers on his front benches.

Let us consider his motivations for a moment. His unpopularity drove the Liberal Party to its lowest showing ever. Since Confederation, no Liberal leader has been rejected more strongly across the nation than the man who ran the Liberal Party down to 77 seats on October 14. He was humiliated and most of his caucus members held their noses when he announced he would stay on as interim leader until they found someone to lead them in May. Clearly, at this point, he has nothing to lose and he is desperate to do anything that might salvage his reputation.

Canadians see right through this and we cannot allow it to go forward. They said in October that they did not want him as their prime minister and when they said it, they meant it. He is desperate to salvage his reputation, but he is selling his soul and also the soul of his party and, sadly, the soul of the Government of Canada to the people who will run our economy into an abyss that will take us decades to recover from and people who will set the cause of national unity back decades. People can call them devils if they want to. I call them socialists and separatists.

Unlike our government, this coalition never told Canadians what it would do if it took office, so we are left to speculate. Let us do that.

*Government Orders*

The leader of this gang has wild plans about how he can save the world with radical environmental schemes. Today we heard his friend, the leader of the Green Party, in a press conference, crowing that a seat in the Senate, or maybe even something better would await her, if this left-wing coalition ever flies. His green shift is not something he has ever disowned, even though so many of the Liberal candidates disowned it in the recent election campaign.

The NDP and the Bloc also have some extreme views on how we should take whatever steps we can to save the world, no matter what the costs to our economy or to our taxpayers. This is not what Canadians chose, especially in a time of economic crisis.

● (1745)

Not only is this not the direction Canada chose, it is not the direction western Canadians want. There is plenty of outrage in all parts of the country over this, but especially in the west. By getting into bed with people who want to pull Quebec out of Canada, the proposed coalition has given new life to those who have entertained the idea of pulling all parts of Canada apart.

We know perfectly well that the members of the NDP think that the oil sands, which are fuelling not only the energy independence for North America but also the Canadian economy, need to be shut down. We know perfectly well that they think Greenpeace is a more reliable source of information than any provincial government or independent study.

We knew all along that the Liberals green shift, in their uniformed zeal, would hurt the economy of the nation and especially the economies of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Canadians did not vote for that, and they would not vote for it if they were given a chance tomorrow.

Normally, I would be happy about anything that would drag the Liberal name into great depths of unpopularity. However, the stakes are too high for the country I love to let the Liberals go ahead with this dangerous, undemocratic, unprincipled and un-Canadian plot.

Here is what Jeffrey Simpson from *The Globe and Mail* had to say about the prospect of these three unsuccessful leaders:

If this coalition takes power, therefore, Canada would be led by a temporary prime minister who almost every Liberal MP wishes were not the leader. Not having been successful in leading his own party, it would be fascinating to watch him run a coalition government....It will certainly be a shock to the 74 per cent of Canadians who did not vote Liberal, and the large majority who ranked Mr. Dion by far the least popular leader, to discover that he has somehow managed to become prime minister.

Don Martin of the *National Post* wrote today that the biggest Liberal loser in—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert is new, but I will let him know that even when we quote from other articles, we still cannot use proper names. If he is going to quote from an article and it contains the proper name of a member of Parliament, I ask him to refer to that member by title or riding name.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that caveat. *The National Post* wrote:

The biggest Liberal loser in the party's electoral history, a self-admitted campaign failure who advocated carbon taxes as sound economy policy and lacks significant Western Canada representation, seems set to become prime minister next week.... This means an electorate that cast a third of its votes for the Conservatives will have their representation replaced by a hodge-podge of lowest-common-denominator

policies produced almost overnight by parties leaning left and toward leaving.... While the discipline of power may keep the coalition together, more or less flying in loose formation for perhaps a year or even longer, this is not a system of sustainable government as much as it is a power grab minus a compelling reason to exist.

I pray for the sake of democracy and for the sake of Canada that this unholy alliance not be allowed to proceed. Governing is a privilege, not an entitlement. A leader that the electorate overwhelmingly rejected, surrounded by two former NDP premiers and six other socialists and the unthinkable, being propped up by a party whose *raison d'être* is to put Canada asunder, is clearly Canada's worst nightmare. It is undemocratic, un-Canadian and unconscionable. I pray for the sake of Canada it not be allowed to proceed.

Today, I pray for the future of Canada.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, where I come from, we call that talking from both sides of your mouth at the same time. I have listened to what the hon. member had to say. He finds it aberrant that there is a possibility of a coalition government. What was wrong with his party, the Conservatives, associating itself with the Bloc Québécois just weeks after the 2004 election? Why? In order to govern as a coalition. So why was it a good thing for them to associate themselves with a separatist party then, and now it is a shameful thing for the Liberals and the NDP to want to associate with each other in order to ensure that the economy can move ahead properly?

This is a mixed message. As I said, it is talking from both sides of your mouth, as we say where I come from.

As far as the economy is concerned, could the hon. member tell me if he is in favour, or not in favour, of eliminating the two week waiting period for employment insurance?

Quit using this double-speak, quit telling people to their faces that you will do this or that, and then saying something else behind their backs. In reality, you wanted to defeat the Paul Martin Liberals, and that is also what you wanted to do to the Bloc Québécois. What is the difference today?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is against the rules to address another member directly.

The hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, the member has been here a lot longer than I, so he knows there is no parallel to what has occurred on Parliament Hill this week to what happened in 2004.

The media has reported that the 2004 letter asked the governor general simply for consultations. It was not a signed pact to form a government among the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the socialist party and the leader of a party, whose motivation is to break our country apart. It was simply to ask for consultations.

I am sure the hon. member and all hon. members in the House will appreciate the difference.

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, that is truly pathetic. It is a little like the burglar who is caught before he breaks into a house and says that it is okay because he was caught before he committed a crime. Come on. That is nonsense. The fact is that the Conservatives are concerned about only one thing, and that is losing power. That is the only thing they are afraid of.

I would like to tell my friend—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** I am almost done.

I would like to tell my friend that not so long ago, during the last Parliament, the Conservatives repeatedly asked this House for its confidence, and they asked the Bloc Québécois the same thing. In fact, the Conservatives were able to remain in power during confidence votes on the first two budgets of the 39th Parliament because they had the support of the Bloc Québécois.

At the time, that was obviously a good thing. It was fine for the government's survival to depend on the Bloc Québécois. But when it is not the government's survival that is at stake, but the survival of a coalition government, suddenly that is a bad thing.

Had my colleague been a member in the 39th Parliament and had he been forced to join with the Bloc Québécois on a confidence vote on the budget, would he have resigned? Would he have left the Conservative Party? What would he have done if he had had to vote with the Bloc Québécois?

[*English*]

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member was in the 39th Parliament, he would know that the support of the Bloc Québécois for the current government was on a case by case basis, vote by vote. It was not *carte blanche*. It was not in a signed contract.

The hon. member suggested that the Conservatives were only interested in maintaining power. I suggest that never in the history of Canada has there been such a blatant power grab than what we saw yesterday, with the pact among the three leaders.

If opposition members are so concerned about holding on to power, why do they not put this pact to the Canadian electorate and let them decide?

• (1755)

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the previous speaker on this side of the House. I want to quote from the actual letter that is the subject of discussion here. It was sent to the governor general on September 9, 2004, and it states:

“Excellency:

As leaders of the opposition parties, we are well aware that, given the Liberal minority government, you could be asked by the Prime Minister to dissolve the 38th Parliament at any time should the House of Commons fail to support some part of the government's program.

We respectfully point out that the opposition parties, who together constitute a majority in the House, have been in close consultation.

We believe that, should a request for dissolution arise this should give you cause, as constitutional practice has determined, to consult the opposition leaders and consider all of your options before exercising your constitutional authority“.

This letter was signed by the current Prime Minister, the current leader of the Bloc Québécois and the current leader of the NDP.

Why was it okay to try to replace the Paul Martin government, but today the idea is evil?

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely no analogy or no parallel can be drawn between 2004 and 2008. That was a letter asking the governor general to consider all her options and for consultation.

Let me be clear about this. Yesterday on Parliament Hill three leaders appeared in this precinct and signed a contract telling the Governor General that they were prepared to become government.

What the hon. member for the New Democratic Party indicated was a letter to the the former governor general asking for consultation and encouraging her to consider all her options.

That is much different than a signed pact among the rejected Leader of the Opposition, the socialist leader and the separatist leader, telling the Governor General that her only option was to allow them to form government.

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we now know that this separatist coalition has been in the planning stages for months. The very disturbing fact I have heard from Canadians to whom I have been talking, and I am sure everyone in the House has heard the same thing, is that Canadians do not want a separatist coalition government. They want Parliament to respect the results of the election which was held just a few weeks ago, yet there was this sinister plan going on behind the scenes to take over and disrespect the decision of Canadians.

It is unfortunate that the member is experiencing this. I have been here for the 38th Parliament, the 39th Parliament and the 40th Parliament and I have never seen anything that would so disrespect the will of Canadians. It is undemocratic and it is unfortunate that our new colleague has to experience this.

Why does he think the separatist coalition would so disrespect the will of Canadians? Why are the coalition members not listening to Canadians?

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the members of the coalition and I cannot speak for the separatist leader of the Bloc Québécois who is a party to it.

All I know is that the residents of Edmonton—St. Albert are universally opposed to it. They are outraged. My office has been absolutely swamped by phone calls and emails. People are calling it a crisis in Canada. They are saying that the proposed coalition government would be illegitimate.

*Government Orders*

We are in difficult times. Our country is at a crossroads. I ask all Canadians to look deep inside themselves and ask themselves if this is really what they want. Do they want to be governed by a party that was rejected overwhelmingly in the last federal election in coalition with the New Democrats and propped up by those who want to tear Canada apart?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment.

Would the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert call it democratic when the Prime Minister got a mandate from only 22% of Canadians? He got 36% of the vote and only 60% of Canadians voted. That equates to 22% of Canadians who voted for the Prime Minister.

Would he call that democratic? Is the Prime Minister he would support, the same prime minister who wanted to build firewalls around the province from which he comes?

• (1800)

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, the current Prime Minister has a caucus of 143 members which is almost double the size of the caucus to which the hon. member belongs. We have a first past the post system where a plurality elects members. Under the current system clearly this government won the last election with an increased mandate over that of the 39th Parliament. The Conservative Party ought to be able to govern.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in the House to respond to the economic statement.

We can all agree that the pace of events on Parliament Hill are racing forward at an unprecedented rate. At this juncture in time, no one can predict an outcome. That is why I would like to address my constituents of Don Valley East and explain to them how we arrived at the current situation.

By all accounts, the events of recent days were triggered by the economic statement that was released by the Minister of Finance last Thursday. After the Prime Minister travelled to high profile international meetings such as the G20 and APEC, which were aimed to stabilize the global economy, it was widely expected that the Conservative government would deliver an economic stimulus package similar to those pledged by other leading economies. Unfortunately, the economic statement contained no stimulus package whatsoever.

Let us compare what the other G20 countries did. China pledged \$700 billion; Japan, \$65 billion; Germany, \$36 billion; France, \$30 billion; and the U.S., \$1.5 trillion. What was the Conservatives' stimulus package? Zero, nothing. Instead they cut \$6 billion, completely the wrong direction, which is not surprising because the Conservatives have been going down the wrong path. This is from a finance minister who brought Ontario into a deficit. He was the architect of the Ontario deficit.

The Conservatives and their finance minister are inept. They do not know what to do.

At no point in our 141 years of Confederation has Canada ever witnessed the completely self-induced destruction of a federal government by its own prime minister. In fact, at no other point in

our history has a finance minister been forced to retract the main elements of an economic statement literally within 24 hours. That is a humiliation. It has badly wounded the reputation of the Conservative government in the midst of this global financial crisis.

Canadians do not have confidence in the Conservative government. Without question, last week's economic statement has seriously undermined the Conservative minority government, which is now facing an uncertain future brought on by themselves. Even now the Conservatives are frantically backpedaling, yet none of them seem to realize that the chain has fallen off the bike and they are going absolutely nowhere.

How did we arrive at this state of affairs so quickly? Let me provide a little synopsis.

During the election, the current Prime Minister misled Canadians by stating that he would never take the country into deficit. He fear-mongered throughout the whole election. He is fear-mongering here in the House and so are his members of Parliament. He claimed that the fundamentals of the economy were strong.

The election was unnecessary. It was brought about only because the Prime Minister had seen the books. He was afraid of what the economic future looked like. The election cost taxpayers \$360 million, plus a byelection that cost \$3.5 million, which he supposedly eliminated in the process. The Prime Minister, in order to hide his economic failures, cost the taxpayers \$363.5 million. As well, he broke his own election law of fixed election dates. The law had been passed and the next election was supposed to be in October 2009.

The Prime Minister thinks nothing of breaking laws, of wasting taxpayers money and of misleading the public.

• (1805)

The Prime Minister did not even have an economic plan during the election. He did not know how to create an economic plan so as soon as he was elected, he copied the Liberal plan. However, one cannot copy a plan if one does not know how to implement it. It is like a parrot that repeats words but does not know the meaning of the words.

The Prime Minister, who claimed to be an economist, is inept and so is his finance minister. That is why we are where we are today. Had he been a good economist, somebody would have hired him. Unfortunately for Canadians, he is their Prime Minister and he is a very high risk. Not only is he inept, he is so ideologically bound that he has no idea how to help average Canadians, those who have lost their jobs.

Instead of a stimulus package that all G20 countries had agreed to, the economic statement had no stimulus package, no plan, nothing for the manufacturing industry, nothing for forestry, nothing for the auto industry, and the list goes on. To use an analogy, while Rome is burning, the Prime Minister is asking, "Where is the fire?"

What did the economic statement put forward? There was no comprehensive strategy to navigate the country through a global economic recession. It was a mean-spirited, neo-conservative, Republican type of diatribe.

*Government Orders*

The economic statement attacked pay equity, the collective bargaining rights of public servants, and blatantly attempted to wreck the foundation of public electoral financing. People should remember why the public electoral funding system was introduced. It was introduced so as to remove corporate interference. However, the Prime Minister still has to come clean on who funded his leadership. To whom is he indebted?

Canadians need to be reminded that the RCMP raided the offices of the Conservative Party. Why? Because of illegalities. The Conservatives tried to shut down parliamentary committees because of the in-and-out scandal, the Mulroney-Schreiber inquiry and many more issues.

The public needs to know that political parties have to be free from rich money and corporate influence. We can say that, but nobody can say that of the Conservatives because they have shut down any inquiry and their books need to be audited.

Seven weeks ago the Conservatives released their campaign platform and there was no mention of pay equity, campaign financing or collective bargaining rights. It was just 14 days ago that the Conservatives released the Speech from the Throne and still there was no mention of these issues. In fact, the Prime Minister had stated that he wanted to turn over a new leaf and work in co-operation with the opposition. Yet, in six days, what did he do?

In the economic statement he became an ideologue and an autocrat, and tried to destroy democracy, but at whose expense? It is at the expense of thousands of auto workers who are wondering if their federal government will stick up for them during their economic crisis. It is at the expense of our forestry sector where we see pulp mills being disassembled and shipped off to China. It is at the expense of the average people who work in our manufacturing sector who are beginning to lose faith in their federal government.

The ancient Greeks had a term for this type of behaviour. It is called hubris. In Greek mythology, overwhelming pride and arrogance inevitably would lead to self-destruction. The Prime Minister has certainly discovered his Achilles heel. He is transfixed, if not mesmerized, by his own narrow-minded political agenda to wipe out opposition parties at any expense.

However, democracy means having opposition parties. We go around the world trying to teach others about our democracy, yet the Prime Minister wants to eliminate opposition. What sort of a Prime Minister is he? Perhaps he should go to Iran and rule over Iran.

By all accounts, the Prime Minister has not only lost the confidence of this House, he has lost the confidence within his own Conservative caucus. Most important, he has lost the confidence of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

● (1810)

Holding Conservative pep rallies around the Governor General's house or sending out umpteen emails to members of Parliament is not only in very poor taste but also smacks of a lack of judgment, desperation and the desire of the Conservatives to hold on to power.

The Prime Minister was supposed to have addressed the economic crisis but instead engineered a political crisis that has placed his government on the brink of defeat. What sort of leadership is that?

By all accounts, the Prime Minister has no one to blame except himself.

What needs to be done? In our Westminster form of government, the opposition is called upon when the government no longer enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons. In this instance, the opposition has already stepped up to the plate and informed the Governor General that we are prepared to govern on a co-operative basis and navigate our economy through the crisis.

If the Prime Minister thought he had the confidence of the House, why did he eliminate or push back the opposition day? It shows that he is scared. In our democracy, it is the job and duty of the opposition to hold the government accountable and stand as a government in waiting when things go wrong. That is what opposition parties are doing, holding the government accountable.

The Conservatives do not like being held accountable. We have examples of the ministers of agriculture, the previous minister of environment, the previous minister of health, and the list goes on, who, when issues of accountability and transparency came up, they hid or they stopped the functioning of parliamentary committees.

What is the solution for getting Canada out of this economic recession? Recently, the head of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities pointed out that infrastructure spending would serve as one of the most beneficial tools of economic stimulus.

We heard some rumours or some rumblings of investment infrastructure but the \$33 billion that have been promised for the past two years have been sitting and nothing has been done. Hundreds and hundreds of local projects are ready to go across the country. We need nuts and bolts investment in roads, bridges, water pipes and housing.

Right now we have the small town mayors ringing alarm bells about sewage treatment plants that are about to suffer catastrophic failure simply because no one in the federal government will listen.

The message is clear: Doing nothing will not create jobs or mitigate a recession. Canadians want to know where the \$16 billion surplus is that was left to the government. What happened to that money? How could the government waste away that money?

No one has any faith in the finance minister, who, I remind the people, was the architect of deficit and left Ontario in a \$5.6 billion deficit. That is the finance minister whose economic statement was abandoned by the government in less than six days. His talk about so-called technical deficits and fantasy surpluses in the next budget does not fool anyone.

The real question is this. How did the Conservatives manage to burn through a surplus in less than two and a half years? Now they want to sell the government assets. This reminds us of Mike Harris and his government strategy of selling Highway 407 to Spain. What sort of pride can anybody have in Canada if a government wants to sell its assets? Who will own the CBC and who will own the CN tower?

*Government Orders*

The inability of the Conservative government to be economically competent has led us to this situation.

● (1815)

Against the advice of just about every economist in the country, the Conservatives implemented a variety of ill-advised tax cuts that did nothing to spur consumer spending or stimulate the economy. At the same time, the finance minister launched the largest spending spree in Canadian history known as budget 2007. This is not rocket science. Any Canadian will say that one cannot blow endless amounts of cash when one's income is continually shrinking. The budget officer has stated that the current government is taking in \$40 billion less than it is spending.

However, we would not be in a deficit situation if the finance minister had listened to good advice and not implemented the useless tax cuts. When my constituents ask me how we arrived at this point, I will be compelled to tell them the truth. It is the government and the Prime Minister who have taken the focus off of Canadians suffering due to the economy and placed all of its attention on a government that is fixated on nothing more than political brinkmanship and holding on to power at all costs.

The Prime Minister forgets that 67% of Canadians did not vote for him or his party. The rhetoric in the House today from the Conservatives shows that they are in panic mode. It shows they are clinging to power. They are so desperate that I have to let my constituents know that is what the Conservative government stands for. It does not protect Canadians. It is more bound by its own ideology.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I thought I had seen everything when I saw the member for Papineau, the son of Pierre Trudeau, actually join his leader in a standing ovation for the leader of the separatist Bloc. A few minutes ago, I heard him speak and, in defending this separatist coalition, he talked about putting aside the question of national unity. It is pretty astounding stuff.

I actually want to turn my attention to the economy. The member was talking about the economy. I noted that during the election her leader, the Leader of the Opposition, said that he would never form a coalition with the federal NDP. He stated:

—because its economic policies are based on “Monopoly money”.

they...have a platform that is full of Monopoly money that will come from nowhere except for the ability of our industry to become competitive in the world and it will cost jobs to Canadians.

He said that on September 24, 2008. Does the hon. member agree with her leader?

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, what I would like to bring back into focus is the economy and the issue of deliberately cooking the books.

I will read from emails that I have received from constituents. One states, “The issue of deliberately cooking the books regarding our surplus and deficit situation is unacceptable. The finance minister will need \$10.3 billion to balance the books and he then assumes that the \$10.3 billion can be treated like cash on one hand by selling undisclosed assets. Do you know anyone who would like to buy the CN Tower at a bargain price? How do you say fraud?”

A letter to the Prime Minister states, “I am writing to express my dismay at the economic statement the government made in the House on Thursday, November 27th. After your statement to the G20 and APEC meetings about the seriousness of the economic situation worldwide, I and I am sure most Canadians are shocked that your finance minister pretended that Canada was not in a deficit position”.

The real issue is the economy and the fact that the government has no stimulus package. It is the government's ineptness toward the economy and its inability to work with opposition parties that needs to be churned.

● (1820)

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the right hon. Brian Mulroney was the Conservative prime minister for eight years, he left this country on the edge of bankruptcy. The present Prime Minister has only been here three years and he is already taking this country in the same direction.

As the hon. member is a certified accountant, would she be able to tell the House and her constituents how we can draw similarities between the two prime ministers?

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives like people to think they are fiscally prudent and economically responsible but we have a history. No Conservative government since Borden has ever balanced budgets. When the Liberal government inherited the books of the previous Conservative government in 1993, there was a \$42 billion deficit and a \$500 billion debt and it was compounding at an interest rate that was unparalleled. I was doing receiverships at that time and this was totally unparalleled.

What did we do? By 1997, we turned the books around and in 2000 gave a \$100 billion tax cut, which was a stimulus for the economy. We invested in cities and in infrastructure. We made a lot of investments to the benefit of the general public.

It is important for the Conservatives to realize that whenever they take over government, they go into a deficit. When they inherited \$16 billion in surplus, why did they whittle it away? What did they do? Where is their economic judgment? I think one has to question that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of my Liberal and Conservative colleagues.

Once again, we have the start of the Quebec bashing that is so characteristic of the Reform members. They attack those elected by the Quebec nation, whether federalists or sovereignists. Yet, they are all members who were democratically and legitimately elected. They are attempting to attack the separatists, I would go so far as to say the evil separatists, such is the ferocity of the attack. But in the end, they are attacking those elected by the Quebec nation. And what stands out is that the separatists are attacked in this way only in English. For example, the Liberals are being accused of associating with bad separatists. but when speaking in French to the Bloc members, they say the opposite. The Bloc Québécois is criticized for associating with the bad Liberals. It is ridiculous and an insult to the intelligence of Canadians.

I would like to ask my colleague whether she believes that when a government conducts itself in this uncaring way that it confirms that it does not deserve the confidence of citizens.

[English]

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, the member hit the nail right on the head when he talked about hypocrisy because the Conservatives are hypocrites. When it comes to the Conservatives making deals with the Bloc Québécois or the NDP, that is fine. However, if it is somebody else who is making a deal, it is not fine. When it comes to accountability, it is okay for the Conservatives to be involved in scandals. I am sure people realize that 12 of Mulroney's cabinet ministers went to jail. That is okay but if it is anybody else that is not acceptable.

The Conservatives talk from both sides of their mouth. They are hypocritical and, therefore, have lost the confidence of the House. Canadians do not trust the Conservative government and have no confidence in the Conservative government.

• (1825)

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there has been mention of some previous prime ministers, but there is another prime minister that the House should take note of today, particularly with respect to the discussion of this coalition of the separatists, and that is Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

I wonder if the member opposite would venture an opinion as to what Pierre Elliott Trudeau would think of this coalition of separatism that is going on so shamefully today with the Liberals.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, I do not believe in reading anybody's mind. What I believe in is reality. The reality is that the Conservatives have not done a single thing, sous, nothing, zero, for the economy. Instead, they reduced the parliamentary processes by including nothing in the economic statement but trying to get rid of democracy.

When somebody gets rid of democracy, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, as far as I can say, would be aghast at that.

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is talking about getting rid of democracy and this is a financial statement that was delivered in the House. I do not know what she is talking about.

The opposition parties claim the reason they formed this coalition of socialists, separatists and Liberals is that this government is not managing the economy properly. Let us look at the tax reductions we are offering Canadians. In this year alone, the year we are in right now, there is a \$12 billion tax reduction in the GST; a personal tax reduction of \$10.5 billion for this year; and a \$6 billion reduction in business tax. That is \$28 billion in tax reductions.

The opposition complains about a surplus of roughly \$12 billion being reduced. The fact is we are running balanced budgets. That they are saying that we are in a deficit position now is simply wrong.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier this afternoon on debate I thought I heard the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood make some unparliamentary remarks at approximately 4:07 p.m.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

The blues came out in the interim and I had a chance to look at them. I think upon review, Mr. Speaker, you would agree these remarks are in fact highly insensitive, inappropriate and unparliamentary.

I wonder therefore, Mr. Speaker, if you could review the blues, take the matter under advisement, and report back to the House at the appropriate time.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. member. I will certainly make sure that the blues are reviewed and if there is a need to come back to the House, I will do so in due course.

The hon. member for Don Valley East.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, the fact that the hon. member opposite did not know what I was talking about shows his lack of economic judgment or math. When we talk about giving GST tax breaks, that is exactly what the budget officer said. The government is taking in \$40 billion less in revenue. If revenue does not match expenses, then we go into a deficit. Where did he find surpluses?

If that is the type of economic—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member's time has expired.

---

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

### EQUALIZATION

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this issue.

I asked a question about what appears to be a conflict between the throne speech and the economic statement, and the piece of legislation that provides for a formula for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to have a 3.5% escalator clause every year for 15 years.

I really did not get an answer. I did get some kind of an answer, but it did not address my exact question. The minister must have misunderstood my question, but I know the parliamentary secretary will not.

I would like to point out that in the throne speech it states: “—Equalization payments also grow, but that they do not grow more quickly than our economy as a whole”.

Our economy next year is projected to grow at perhaps .3% or .8% or somewhere around that range, but the legislation for the equalization formula for Nova Scotia says that Nova Scotia will simply get a 3.5% increase every year for 15 years. There are two formulas actually, but the 2005 formula which has been enhanced with this legislation is to have a 3.5% increase every year for 15 years.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Again, the throne speech and the economic update both say that it will be capped at the rate of growth of the overall economy. That is a conflict. They cannot both be right.

I am asking the parliamentary secretary if he can shed a little light on this and help us understand. Is it the 3.5% in the legislation or is it going to be capped at the rate of overall growth of the economy?

• (1830)

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to assure Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador with this answer.

As the member knows, both provinces can rest assured that the exceptional treatment afforded under their offshore accords is secure.

Our Conservative government's cumulative best-of guarantee is in no way affected by recent changes announced in November that put equalization on a more sustainable long-term footing. As has always been the case with equalization, the amount each receiving province gets depends on its fiscal capacity relative to other provinces.

As a rule of thumb, a province growing faster than the national average might see a decrease in equalization while a province growing less than the national average could see an increase. As a result of their offshore accords, additional offset payments are made to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador based on how much equalization they would have received if they had no offshore revenues bolstering their respective fiscal capacities. These payments will continue without change.

These provinces also benefit from our government's cumulative best-of guarantee. This ensures that they will do at least as well under the new O'Brien-based system on a cumulative basis as they would have if they had remained under the old equalization system that was in place when the 2005 accord was signed.

The cumulative best-of guarantee and the 2005 equalization accord system are not touched by the November announcement. The Minister of Finance guaranteed that no equalization receiving province's equalization payments for next year, including offshore accord offsets, would go down as a result of his November announcement. Even though Nova Scotia would normally have received less because it had been doing relatively better than other provinces, its total payments in 2009-10 will be held to the same level as 2008-09.

In addition, if total cumulative payments to Nova Scotia fall below the payments the province would have received under the 2005 equalization system, the province will receive an additional guarantee payment.

I understand the member knows all this already. Reading from the November 22, 2008, St. John's *Telegram* the member was "welcoming the news that the Atlantic Accord agreements will not be impacted by a recent change to the equalization program". The member also knows that federal support to Nova Scotia has increased during our government, and will continue to grow. He knows total federal support for his province reached \$2.7 billion in 2008-09, a \$363 million increase over 2005-06.

The member knows Nova Scotia will receive \$1.5 billion in equalization and accords offsets alone next year, a 14% increase

above the Liberal government. The member also knows Nova Scotia will benefit from an initial crown share settlement payment of \$234 million this year, something the previous Liberal government refused to do.

I hope the member will stand up for Canada and oppose handing our government over to the separatist-backed coalition attempting to seize power.

**Mr. Bill Casey:** Mr. Speaker, that did not hurt. I have been looking for that answer for quite a while. The parliamentary secretary clearly understood my question and he gave me the exact right answer, and it is even the one I wanted.

I did acknowledge that the government was going to honour the original arrangement with the province of Nova Scotia after the throne speech because I did get assurance that it would be fixed. However, it was right back in the economic statement. I thought that I had lost it, I had it, then I lost it, but it is back again anyway tonight. I appreciate the parliamentary secretary for doing that.

I would ask one more question.

Some documents were provided to the Halifax *Herald* to confirm this. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary would consider tabling those documents as I am sure they are exactly the same thing as he just read now. Some documents were provided to the *Herald* I think yesterday.

• (1835)

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, I will certainly look into whether those documents can be provided to the hon. member.

Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador's exceptional treatment afforded under their offshore accords is secure.

I would remind the member that the cumulative best-of guarantee is untouched. This means that, at a minimum, both provinces will continue to receive additional offset payments based on how much equalization they would have received if they had no offshore revenues bolstering their respective fiscal capacities. If, like Nova Scotia, they had opted into the O'Brien formula, they would continue to benefit from the cumulative best-of guarantee.

I remind my colleague of the words of the former minister of intergovernmental affairs, the new leader of the separatist-backed coalition when he said, "The federal government believes it would be ill-advised to grant such special treatment to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland or any other province".

## FINANCE

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to address an extremely relevant issue for Canadians these days, the lack of support for Canadian families in the economic statement of the Conservatives. Credit card companies are gouging consumers and the government does not want to act to change that.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

In these tough economic times, more and more Canadian families are feeling the effects in their bank accounts. More and more families are relying on credit cards to pay for day-to-day needs such as rent and groceries. With the holidays quickly approaching, it is completely heartless that families already experiencing record debt levels are faced with another 5% credit card interest rate increase. Yes, an additional 5%, bringing the astounding interest rate many families will have to pay to close to 25%.

Something needs to be done to protect consumers from what is very clearly a cash grab on the part of credit card companies. Credit card companies should not have the ability to gouge consumers and take advantage of the current economic situation for their own profitable gains. Considering the dire circumstances faced by the majority of Canadians, the government's response to my question was to stop using these cards, or as the Minister of Finance indicated, shop around.

These are not solutions to a problem, but rather a government that sloughs off struggling Canadian families and ensures their friends, the big banks and big oil companies, make record profits. No wonder the government has lost the support of the House. It has also lost the support of Canadian people.

Just a few hours ago, I had the opportunity to meet with the Canadian Independent Petroleum Marketers Association. They spoke to me about how many of these family-owned gas stations, with many of these operations in my riding of Sudbury and throughout northern Ontario, were having to give more and more of a percentage of their credit card earnings to the banks. It is not just a family issue. It affects small businesses as well. Ultimately, business owners will ensure that those increased costs are put to the consumer. Who gets hit again? Consumers. Consumers will feel the brunt of these increasing costs.

While the costs of merchant transactions remain the same, credit card companies are charging more, up to 10,000% more in some cases to merchants. Small businesses need limits. Currently, our country has no framework in place to protect consumers or small businesses from the greed of credit card companies.

As I asked last week, Canadians were told that while the banks could count on the government's help, consumers were on their own. That was obvious in last Thursday's economic statement. The government does not get it. At a time when consumers and businesses are hurting, it is more interested in political games rather than acting on behalf of Canadians. When will the government acknowledge it did the wrong thing by not supporting Canadian families and small independent businesses in its economic statement?

• (1840)

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, consumers use credit cards of their own free will. The best consumer protection framework includes competition and full fee disclosure accompanied by choice. Federal law requires credit card companies to disclose interest rates and fees prior to agreements. Further, numerous credit card products with differing interest rates are available. Consumers shop around for the best option for their individual needs.

To ensure Canadians are fully informed of their options, the federal government does play a role. Through the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, we help consumers make informed credit card choices, including publishing a semi-annual report. This free report, entitled "Credit Cards and You" provides consumers with comparison tables outlining the rates and features of more than 200 credit cards. The online version also includes an interactive web tool to aid consumers in choosing a credit card. I encourage consumers to compare packages and services offered at [www.fcac.gc.ca](http://www.fcac.gc.ca) or call toll free 866-461-3222. That is responsible government.

What is not responsible for the future of this country, however, is a Liberal-NDP-Bloc government that would bend to the whim and the desire of a separatist party whose only reason for existing is to destroy Canada. That is exactly what the member for Sudbury is shamefully trying to do.

The NDP leader has privately admitted that his party has had a secret and long-standing deal with the separatist Bloc to overthrow this government, a deal pre-dating the government's recent economic and fiscal update. That is shameful.

We will make sure that every person in Sudbury knows what their federal representative, the member opposite, is supporting. He is supporting a secret deal made in the backroom to hand over their government to a party that wants to destroy Canada.

Did the member campaign on that? Did the member's campaign material include a little blurb about betraying Canada with secret deals with separatists? I am going out on a limb to say, no, I do not think it did. I wonder what the people who voted for him are thinking right now. I wonder what his local newspaper, the *Sudbury Star*, thinks of the member's new best friends, the Bloc, which was described in an editorial the other day as wanting "to destroy Canada as we know it".

Gerry Labelle, a prominent member of the greater Sudbury community, has publicly noted that many in the member's riding are outraged, stating, "I have yet to speak to anyone who is not unhappy about this". That is in Sudbury.

I also understand that so many people are outraged that a rally may be organized in the coming days to express their opposition to handing over Canada to the separatists. I want the member to go to that rally. I want him to look his constituents and their children in the eye and say, "Selling out to separatists is in the best interests of the future of our country".

A proud day for the NDP? Tommy Douglas is rolling over in his grave.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for talking so graciously about my riding, because yes, I have heard from constituents in droves, actually, and they are in support of the coalition. Unfortunately, as he mentioned, Mr. Labelle actually lost that election and that is why I am standing here today. I would ask the hon. member to check his figures next time.

What is shameful is that the member has not answered a question on an issue that is affecting millions of Canadian families, but rather has addressed it in the political partisan game once again. Obviously we see why the House does not support the Conservative government. The Conservatives forget about Canadian families, put their issues first and never worry about how families are being affected.

The New Democrats, the Liberals and the Bloc are putting families first. The economic statement did not do that, and so what we will do is—

• (1845)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, if you want to check the record, you will find that I actually did answer that question, and appropriately.

Members of the NDP should hold their heads in shame for scheming and making backroom deals to sell out Canada to the separatist Bloc, damaging Canadian unity like nothing before. Do they realize what this will do for our economy, for our jobs, for investments?

Eric Lascelles of TD Securities does. He said:

The inclusion of an explicitly separatist party in the ruling coalition in the form of the Bloc Québécois would likely cause some trepidation in financial markets, especially on the part of international investors. The turmoil generated by the uncertainty of these events in combination with the unknown of a new three-party coalition could prompt flight-to-safety flows in Canada.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

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