



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, February 26, 2009**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 26, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)  
[*English*]

### INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 39(1) of the Access to Information Act, a special report of the Information Commissioner entitled, “Systemic Issues and Report Cards 2007–2008”.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[*English*]

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### MAIN ESTIMATES, 2009-10

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting the main estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 2010 was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

\* \* \*

### CRIMINAL CODE

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (organized crime and protection of justice system participants).

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association respect-

ing its bilateral visit to Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda, from June 22 to 28, 2008 inclusive.

[*English*]

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association respecting its participation in the annual co-chair's visit held in Beijing in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Nanning, Guilin and in Hong Kong, China, March 17 to 21, 2008.

\* \* \*

•(1005)  
[*Translation*]

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### STATUS OF WOMEN

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women concerning gender responsive budgeting.

[*English*]

This report concerns the importance of gender budgeting as a tool toward achieving gender equality. Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee requests that the government table a response to the report.

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled, “Canada in Afghanistan”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

It is a pleasure for me, again, to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled, “Omar Khadr”.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled, “Corporate Social Responsibility”.

*Routine Proceedings***RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT**

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-328, An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce the rights of indigenous peoples act.

The bill seeks to ensure that federal laws in Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was signed by 144 member countries in September 2007.

The UN declaration was the culmination of two decades of negotiations with indigenous peoples globally and it established a universal framework of standards for human rights, collective rights, self-determination and mechanisms for the resolution of disputes.

In summary, the bill seeks to ensure that Canada's aboriginal peoples, some of the poorest and most marginalized, will enjoy respect, protection and the same access of opportunity as all other Canadians.

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## STATUS OF WOMEN

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, presented to the House on Wednesday, February 11, be concurred in.

I am very pleased to rise in the House to speak about the issue of violence to women. Ever since I have been in this House, the women members of my party, those who have sat on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and myself, have been the staunch defenders of the campaign against violence toward women. I will take a few moments at the start of my speech to quote an excerpt from an information pamphlet prepared by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. It was first written at the time of the Women's March in 2000, and was updated in 2002.

What is violence against women?

Violence can be physical (such as punching, kicking, choking, stabbing, mutilation, disabling, murder), sexual (such as rape, any unwanted touching or act of a sexual nature, forced prostitution), verbal/psychological (such as threats to harm the children, destruction of favourite clothes or photographs, repeated insults meant to demean and erode self-esteem, forced isolation from friends and relatives, threats of further violence or deportation if the woman attempts to leave), stalking (such as persistent and unwanted attention, following and spying, monitoring of mail or conversations), financial (such as taking away a woman's wages or other income, limiting or forbidding access to the family income), and other forms of control and abuse of power). Violence against women is about the control and coercion of women. It is a significant problem in Canada and around the world, also including female genital mutilation, child marriage, dowry-related murder, honour killings, female infanticide, and trafficking in women. Mass rapes and enslavement of women are also used as an instrument of war and genocide.

My colleague from Laurentides—Labelle has often spoken about this, particularly concerning women in the Congo, who are currently facing a terrible situation.

We have seen, in the excerpt I just read, different forms of violence against women. There are threats of deportation, for example, but we can also talk about violence against women who have chosen to live elsewhere with a spouse because he promised eternal love, and then cannot go back to their home country. That is the case with Nathalie Morin, who is being held by her husband in Saudi Arabia like some sort of hostage. Her husband is not allowing her to return to Quebec with her children.

We also saw that other types of violence against women include taking away a woman's rights and her wages. I will focus on this type of violence because it is a direct consequence of the guidelines, laws and rules that we are developing here in Parliament, and which are being demanded by the current government.

Transforming pay equity into a game of negotiation is a form of violence against women. Taking away a woman's right to defend herself, to protect her rights, by cutting funding to groups that defend her is a form of violence against women. Cutting the court challenges program and therefore keeping women who have been victims of violence and have had a difficult time appealing their case is a form of violence, violence against women. Preventing women from lobbying to put the spotlight on certain challenges, their needs and their current reality is a form of violence against women. Cutting subsidies to these lobby groups as this government has done is yet another form of violence against women.

● (1010)

Another form of violence against women is preventing women's groups that do research from doing feminist research. That kind of violence against women is almost pathological. Since coming to power, this government has been attacking women, its apparent goal, as the text I just read put it, "to demean and erode self-esteem". When the government claimed that equality had already been achieved to justify depriving women of the tools they have had at their disposal for years, tools that have helped them move forward and make progress, it made a big mistake. That is violence against women on a grand scale, institutionalized violence.

Everyone knows that this government has had it in for women since coming to power. We did not hesitate to fight to make the government see reason, to try to make it understand that a step forward for women does not mean a step back for men. On the contrary, as long as women can assert their rights, there will be greater equality in the world and more opportunities to move forward together, to go farther and to ensure that every person's rights are respected.

*Routine Proceedings*

We are talking about violence against women, and this government has taken a more or less institutional approach to perpetrating violence. Every one of this government's bills affects women directly. That includes employment insurance bills because we know that women have limited access to employment insurance. The same applies to social housing bills. Tax cuts benefit only the highest income earners, when we all know that 37% of women earn less than \$20,000 per year. If that is not violence against women, then I do not know what is.

Violence against women means preventing women from reaching their full potential, preventing them from being all they can be, preventing them from moving forward and giving their children what they need to one day become enlightened members of a free society.

The government's repeated attacks reflect a near obsession. And every time we have the misfortune to get up in this House and ask the government why it is obsessed, we are told that 52 million people are wrong and that the government is right. Every day we get thousands of emails, notes and letters from women, telling us about what they are going through and imploring us to help their cause. They ask us to defend their cause, because they say they do not understand why this government has it in for them. All these women need an answer today, and they are entitled to one. All these women have the right to know why this government is choosing to set women back 30, 40 or 50 years in some cases.

Mr. Speaker, I know that if it were up to you, you would likely tell me that I am right. As the father of several children, you know how important it is for your wife to be able to make the best life she can for your children. I, too, want to make the best life possible for my children. I want my colleagues to be able to do the same for their children. But as long as we condone the violence that is being perpetrated here in Parliament, we will never be able to discuss and address the violence being done elsewhere. We need to start with what is going on in our own backyard.

● (1015)

What I am saying is that we need to start coming together and making this government understand the risks it is taking as it continues undermining women, day after day.

Yesterday, this government unveiled a poster about strong women, a strong world, equality and women's leadership. But where is the leadership by the Conservative women? Where are these strong Conservative women, where is this strong world?

Conservative women cannot even defend the women of Quebec and Canada. They cannot even get up in this House and in their caucus to talk to their cabinet colleagues and make them understand that their position on pay equity makes no sense. What can we expect from them but doubletalk?

Today too, I suppose, we will not get much of an answer. It is the same week after week. We have been asking questions about pay equity for weeks now and all that the President of Treasury Board can say is that it is the best thing in the world for women. I think he should go and do some work on this because if there is a critical kind of violence against women, it is preventing them from earning a decent living and having the same considerations as their male

colleagues. That is a huge violence against women because they struggle and work every day just as hard as their male colleagues.

Why do the Conservatives refuse them the same advantages, the same benefits and the same salary on the pretext that they should have to negotiate equity and are not simply entitled to equal pay?

In 1929, five women fought to have women recognized as persons. Their statues can be seen on Parliament Hill. These women would be furious today to see how the government makes a farce of everything to do with women's rights. All the women in this chamber should try to emulate the courage of those women in 1929 who went all the way to the English courts to insist that women should be recognized as persons. Now the government is trying to do the opposite. They slowly nibble away at the rights of women and eliminate the advances that were at least giving them the impression they were making progress.

Nellie McClung would be very disappointed today at the extent to which the government has failed to keep its word. In January 2006, the Prime Minister said he would give women equality. He has broken his promise and goes on breaking it every day. If this sort of violence is endorsed by Parliament, why would people in civil society bother getting caught up in all these niceties?

If the government itself does not recognize the violence it does to women, how in the world can our criminal lawyers, police officers and groups that work with women who have been abused hope to make them understand that they are right, we are listening to them and we will do something for them? It does not make sense.

When our own government does the opposite of what it should to protect women from violence, it does not make sense. Nor does it make sense to think that civil society will do any better.

● (1020)

And yet, many groups continue to defend women daily.

The government has just cut funds for Africa. These funds were essential in helping women with AIDS, the grandmothers looking after children with AIDS and women in refugee camps, who are assaulted and raped daily and used as weapons of war. It is cutting funds for these countries. That is abominable.

It is more evidence of the lack of respect of this government, evidence that this government does not want to see an end to violence against women. It is further evidence that this government is in fact exacerbating violence against women. Everything it does points in this direction. Everything this government does is currently to the detriment of women and causes them distress.

*Routine Proceedings*

I received an email this morning from a woman in Nova Scotia. She would not vote for me, but she asked me to do something. She does not know who to ask anymore. She cannot ask the Conservatives to help women or the Liberals, who have chosen to support the Conservatives on the matter of pay equity. She asked me to do something and told me that she and thousands of women were suffering.

Suffering is violence against women. Being unable to feed the children or pay the rent and having to choose to send a child to school without a meal so as to have milk for a younger child is what violence against women is about.

I hope that my Conservative colleagues will be open-minded enough today to listen instead of closing up as they usually do. Perhaps a crack will appear through which they will understand that, if they wanted it, it would be so easy. The employment insurance fund contains some \$54 billion. It would be easy to eliminate the two week waiting period. Women would thus have much better access to employment insurance. It is all very well to take courses or training, but when you have no job waiting for you, it does not mean much. Denying women access to employment insurance amounts to violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask for your solicitude. I would also ask you to please understand and have all our colleagues in this House understand just how much we must do to end violence against women. Violence occurs against women in other situations and circumstances as well.

Violence is done to women with firearms. The government wants to abolish the firearms registry, as we know. We also know, though, that this government does not consider long barrelled firearms dangerous. However, the firearms that destroy the most lives and kill the most women are long barrelled firearms—not little revolvers. They are used, of course. There are sidearms as well. However, these firearms are almost legal for the government, although they spread the greatest violence in their path.

I have only a minute left to close—a very short time. I had prepared texts, but am not managing to keep to them. I have a hard time doing so. I am an emotional and passionate woman. The women contacting us each day to ask us to support them can count on all of the members of the Bloc to defend their cause and continue to work hard to end all violence against women, especially the violence initiated by this government.

• (1025)

[*English*]

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for bringing this very important topic before the House and for her strong words to us in her speech this morning.

I want to ask her specifically about two groups of women. Lesbians often face an extra burden of violence and abuse in our society because they are women and also because of their sexual orientation. They have been ignored by our society and by further attempts to ensure that they have full equality in our society. Also, transsexual and transgender women do not have explicit protection under Canadian human rights laws. Gender identity and expression is not a specific ground in the act, although there are other

provisions, sort of backdoor provisions, to allow complaints to be laid. Transsexual and transgender women face incredible violence. Many transsexual and transgender women are murdered every year around the world. They face very severe discrimination in jobs, in housing and in the provision of identity documents, for instance.

Would the member support adding gender identity and expression to the Canadian Human Rights Act and to the Criminal Code provisions around sentencing and hate crimes?

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

It is quite true that I care deeply about all groups that struggle to be recognized and to have their rights recognized. My colleague said that lesbians, transsexual and transgendered women have even greater difficulty than people who have decided to come out of the closet or people who have decided to live their lives without worrying about what other people will say. It is true that we have seen many hate crimes committed against homosexuals, lesbians and transgendered people. We have seen this and we still see it every day, which, to me, is an absolute disgrace.

I think a study is needed so that such groups can be included in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think we need to examine this issue very seriously to determine whether certain groups should be added to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think it is our responsibility to take a very close look at this situation. I cannot presume to know what my hon. colleagues will decide, but I think it is our duty to look closely at this situation in order to ensure that all the groups represented in our society have the same rights and the assurance that they will not suffer such senseless violence.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate my colleague from Laval for her excellent presentation on violence against women. We will see shortly that this House will use any means to prevent my colleague from continuing the debate. That is the way of the Conservatives and the Liberals.

I will give her the opportunity, in the few minutes she has remaining, to explain to us what will happen to pay equity for women because of the provisions adopted by the Liberals and the Conservatives in the last budget. How is it that women will again be subject to the violence of not obtaining full pay equity?

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who always has very clear and thought-provoking questions.

I was a union president for a long time. One of the duties of a union president is to ensure that its members are properly represented and that, no matter the offence, members are defended. I believe that this is the first time that I have seen a union receive a fine of \$50,000 for wanting to defend its members and to do its job. That is unheard of.

*Routine Proceedings*

I do not know what the Human Rights Commission will do, but I would rail against such an action. Imagine the situation. I am a member of a union and of the public service. I realize that I do not have pay equity. I ask for my right to negotiate, because that is the only option now, but my union can do nothing to assist me. And since I can no longer resort to the court challenges program I cannot even defend myself. The government knows very well that there are millions and billions at stake in these cases but that poor employees do not even have a cent.

That is definitely a form of violence against women.

[*English*]

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for moving this motion and for her passion today on a very important matter.

I want to continue with the theme of the attack on pay equity as very much an expression of symbolic violence against women. Whether or not it is physical or psychological, the damage is felt. I am wondering how she would deal with the words uttered by a Conservative hack, Tom Flanagan, who said:

Equal value was one of those really bad ideas of the 1970s, like big hair, polyester leisure suits, wage and price controls, Petro-Canada. Most of these are in the evolutionary graveyard of bad ideas, but equal value is still around, so the [present] government deserves credit for moving against it.

How in the world can we tolerate that kind of hateful language? How is it that the government has yet to denounce publicly these hateful words?

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think that my colleague is surprised that the government has failed to condemn Mr. Flanagan's statement. Few of the people advising the government and its leader have a mind quite as warped as his. I also know that my colleague is not surprised that the government has not asked Mr. Flanagan to apologize because it actually agrees with his ideas. Consequently, every idea Mr. Flanagan proposes to the government and its leader is received joyfully and with open arms. That is clear from its implementation of various directives and regulations.

I am still wondering why the women on the government side have not stood up and objected to this, why they let these things happen. Have they no backbone? Have they no strength? Is there no such thing as a strong world when it comes to Conservative women?

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the member for Laval to tell us about the Conservatives' position on the status of women. What is their true position, the one on paper as well as the one in practice?

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for her excellent question. As I pointed out in my speech, I have never seen a government attack women's rights the way this one has. I have never seen a government attack women to this degree. I have never seen a government purposely do as much as this one has to eliminate appeal rights and try to pass private bills of which it is the silent architect.

Last year, we had Bill C-484, and I have no doubt that another Conservative Party member will introduce a similar bill. If so, I hope the government will know what to do. There is nothing so pernicious as a government that would have everyone believe that it believes in women's equality. There is nothing so pernicious and violent as a government that would have women believe that they have everything they need, then does everything it can to override and chip away at their rights, and, for all intents and purposes, extinguish them. That is terrible.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes for a brief question.

**Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Laval mentioned earlier that the Canadian International Development Agency has decided to make massive cuts in its aid to Africa. We are well aware that African women use micro credit to support their families by creating small businesses and thus they put food on the table.

How can she explain that the Minister for La Francophonie, a woman, and the Minister of International Cooperation, another woman, have both let this happen?

**Ms. Nicole Demers:** Mr. Speaker, I am really ecstatic to here such questions from my colleagues in this House. We can see there is a real interest in all these problems, whether they are universal, national, or regional. The women in the government are doing nothing to defend women, regardless of where those women live. Whether in Quebec, in Canada, in the Congo, women everywhere will have to just give up the fight, because—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

[*English*]

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the extremely importance of this issue that has been brought forward by the hon. member. It is something that permeates and lies in the very inequality of women. The fact is there is a huge amount of gender discrimination. It is still alive in Canada and around the world.

What highlights what the member is speaking about is the fact that in 2005 Canada stood at number four on the United Nations gender development index. That index speaks to a country's efforts to improve the social and economic status of women in that country. Today, Canada stands at 83. In three short years, Canada has slid to the depths at which it now stands. This has to be laid at the feet of the current government.

The issue of violence against women in its many forms is an important one. It was a Liberal government in 1994 which brought forward a survey that showed how violence affected women and girl children in this country from the age of 14 moving forward and the depth of violence. We mapped this out and brought forward a strategy to deal with violence against women in this country.

*Routine Proceedings*

One of the things we noted was that the issue of violence against women was not just limited to gender but that the diversity of women's gender and of women's experience, immigrant women, women from minority groups that condoned violence within the home, domestic violence, and the inability to get justice on those issues. Those were things the Liberal government of the day dealt with in the 1990s. On an international front our Liberal government brought forward concerns of violence at the Beijing conference, the concept that women's rights were human rights. It was an absolutely horrible thing to suddenly realize that it had been forgotten that women's rights were human rights. Finally, in 1995 we saw language for the first time that told us about the depth of violence in all its forms against women in this country.

We looked internationally at violence against the girl tribe, girl children who are forced into marriage at the age of 10 in many countries, girl children who are bought and sold. It was the Liberal government as well that looked into the fact that young women still were being trafficked across the country. Young girls were being moved from province to province. There was massive trafficking. It looked at girls being trafficked in and out, and at commercial sexual exploitation of children under tourism.

It was the Liberal government that brought in legislation to deal with sexual tourism, to deal with trafficking. In fact, a massive bill dealing with trafficking of women and girls was brought in by a Liberal government. Of course I need not tell the House that that government was brought down before the bill was passed. The NDP members who stand in the House and make such wondrous statements about violence against women colluded to bring down the government before that bill could be passed.

Also, on the issue of violence, the hon. member referred to domestic violence, most of it including guns. It was a Liberal government that brought about gun control legislation in 1995 but it was absolutely voted down, not only by the Conservatives of the day but by the NDP that did not support gun control legislation.

This is an extremely important broad ranging topic. The lack of action by the Conservative government and the ability of the NDP to support the Conservatives in that lack of action needs to be discussed in greater detail.

This is such a serious topic that it deserves to be debated today in another forum in a very fulsome manner, but the motion was presented to the House without any notice. In the next 20 minutes the Standing Committee on the Status of Women will be meeting. There are witnesses who are waiting to present to the committee today. They have come from outside Ottawa to present to the committee. We cannot afford to deal with this issue right now and give it the appropriate attention it deserves.

We must return to this topic on another day when we can discuss it in all of its detail and fulsomeness and bring to the attention of the people of Canada the problem with respect to women's equality in this country.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

● (1040)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Deputy Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Call in the members.

*And the bells having rung:*

● (1050)

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

*(Division No. 13)*

**YEAS**

Members

Aglukkaq	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Anderson	Ashfield
Benoit	Block
Boucher	Boughen
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Coady
Cuzner	Davidson
Dechert	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dreeshen
Easter	Eyking
Fast	Finley
Folco	Gallant
Garneau	Glover
Goldring	Goodale
Gourde	Guarnieri
Hawn	Hoepfner
Jean	Kennedy
Kent	Komarnicki
Lake	Lauzon
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes	McLeod
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Neville
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pearson
Petit	Poillievre
Preston	Rajotte
Regan	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Simson	Smith
Sorenson	Storseth
Sweet	Tonks
Tweed	Uppal
Valeriote	Van Kesteren
Wallace	Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilfert	Yelich — 78



*Routine Proceedings*

## NAYS

## Members

Angus  
Beaudin  
Bonsant  
Bourgeois  
Comartin  
Davies (Vancouver East)  
Demers  
Duceppe  
Faille  
Gagnon  
Guay  
Laframboise  
Lessard  
Marston  
Ménard (Hochelaga)  
Paquette  
Pomerleau  
Siksay  
Wasylycia-Leis— 37

Bachand  
Bellavance  
Bouchard  
Carrier  
Crête  
DeBellefeuille  
Desnoyers  
Dufour  
Freeman  
Gaudet  
Laforest  
Lavallée  
Malo  
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)  
Paillé  
Plamondon  
Roy  
Thi Lac

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Deputy Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

• (1055)

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place with all parties and I believe you will find unanimous agreement for the following motion: That the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology create a subcommittee whose membership will be composed of five members consisting of two Conservative members, one Liberal member, one Bloc Québécois member, and one NDP member, named after the usual consultation with the whips, with all the powers and authority of the standing committee, to undertake a study of the crisis faced by the automotive industry of Canada, and the understanding that any legislation referred to the full committee take precedence over the work of the subcommittee; that, the subcommittee not meet at the same time as the full committee; and that the subcommittee report its findings and recommendations to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology by March 21, 2009.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

\* \* \*

## PETITIONS

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by many residents of the greater Vancouver area, including some from Burnaby, who are concerned about the safety of bus operators and transit workers.

The petitioners point out that 36% of bus operators and transit workers in 2005 experienced acts of physical violence, and they note that in the Criminal Code there are stiffer criminal penalties for individuals who assault police officers while they are performing their duties. The petitioners are suggesting that people who provide the essential community function of a transit operator or bus driver be similarly protected.

The petitioners call on the House to support the legislative initiative of the member for Burnaby—New Westminster which extends to bus operators and transit workers the same protections under the Criminal Code afforded to police officers assaulted while performing their duties by establishing stiffer penalties for assailants.

## ANIMAL CRUELTY

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present a petition signed by residents in the metro Vancouver area, including east Vancouver, who are expressing their concern about animal welfare. They want to draw to our attention that there is a scientific consensus and acknowledgement that animals can feel pain and can suffer, and that all efforts should be made to prevent animal cruelty and reduce animal suffering.

They are calling on the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare. As this is being worked on at the United Nations, I call on all members and the Government of Canada to support this initiative.

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition I am honoured to present from the constituents of beautiful Langley. The petitioners say that there are a number of life threatening conditions that do not qualify for disability programs. The current medical insurance benefit of 15 weeks does not adequately address the problem. They are calling on the House of Commons to enact legislation to provide additional medical EI benefits to at least equal maternity EI benefits.

## ASBESTOS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by thousands of Canadians that calls upon the House of Commons to recognize that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known, that more Canadians now die from asbestos-related disease than all other occupational causes combined. Yet, Canada remains one of the second or third largest producer and exporter of asbestos in the world.

These petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all its forms and institute a just transition program for the displaced asbestos workers; end all government subsidies of asbestos, both in Canada and abroad; request that the Government of Canada stop blocking international health and safety efforts designed to curb its use; and protect workers from asbestos-related disease, such as the Rotterdam convention.

\* \* \*

• (1100)

## 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 Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*Business of Supply***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of discussions among all the parties of the House, and I believe that you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Parkdale—High Park, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, 2009.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. opposition House leader have unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*English*]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.)** moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, and as experience has demonstrated, the most efficient, expeditious and stimulative method of transferring federal funding for municipal infrastructure projects is by means of mechanisms similar to those put in place, beginning in 2005, to share with municipalities on a per capita basis a significant and growing portion of the federal excise tax on gasoline; and the House calls upon the government to transfer at least half of its proposed new infrastructure funding in this manner over the next two years, with no requirement that these additional federal funds be matched by the municipalities with which they are shared.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a matter that I think reflects the new responsibilities of the House and the new conditions that Canadians face in their communities, and particularly because of the economic impacts.

[*Translation*]

This is the opportunity for all members of this Parliament to defend the best interests of their municipalities and their fellow citizens in a period of economic distress. It is essential to settle the fundamental issues for Canada's economic needs.

[*English*]

The plan of the government is to bring forward an economic stimulus package that rides significantly on the building of infrastructure. Each member of the House is being called upon to recognize that the responsibility is new in many significant respects.

The House has supported infrastructure before, but the scope of what is both required and the way in which it is meant to be done raises a significant challenge.

[*Translation*]

This motion raises a fundamental question, the same one asked by the president of the Quebec Order of Engineers: Are we, all members

of society, prepared to spend all these billions in the best interests of society in such a short period of time?

[*English*]

It has not been done by any government, to be fair, but these are fundamental interests where people have been asked to support this. People and their communities know that the support is not fundamentally there on everyone's part. Can the government spend billions of dollars? The government has said it will somehow come up with the means of spending \$7 billion to \$8 billion on infrastructure when the most it has been spent, up to now, is \$2 billion.

Are members of Parliament to simply cross their fingers, sit back and hope things will get done? We suggest today that there is a means to move forward. Parliamentarians need to stand in their place and give direction to the government to have an effective means of putting infrastructure dollars into our communities, putting people back to work as effectively as possible.

Every member of the House has a duty, a responsibility to answer this question. How will people be put back to work with these borrowed moneys? The House has been asked to take on a special trust in the budget bill, or any other infrastructure moneys that come before us, but how should they be put out to communities? We have the fundamentals identified by the engineers of Quebec. They speak of both the problems we have had in the past, sad problems like the viaduct of Concorde and so on, and our general need to get infrastructure in a responsible fashion.

In addition to that, we have difficulty working with a government that has a record when it comes to putting dollars to work. That record draws the immediate attention of the House. We need to act now.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

This measure is of vital importance to overcome the Conservatives' well-known shortcomings. Unless Parliament acts, it is clear from the Conservatives' record that redistribution of any new moneys will be held up by red tape in an inconsistent strategy skewed in favour of their partisan interests.

[*English*]

I would rather stand here and talk about the benefits of simply the best method, but we also have to take into account that, after two and a half plus years, the government has a record. Because of that record, we have brought forward this motion today. We need to take it fully into account. It requires us to step forward in a sense of obligation to move things forward.

*Business of Supply*

When the government put forward its budget, it had an opportunity to choose the best method. To give the scenario that faced the government ahead of its choices for the budget, the government proposed to put infrastructure money out through traditional means, new programs identified following those same methods. Last week we tabled a performance report from Infrastructure Canada. It is full of language about accountability. The report notes that of the \$1.9 billion promised by the government, only 4% of \$1.9 billion has been delivered. That is a 96% failure rate on what the government proposed in budget 2007 to address some of the significant infrastructure problems.

That kind of lack of effect is what the government knew ahead of time. It also had independent evaluations of a program that it continued, to give it some credit, for the municipalities, and that was the gas tax fund. The implementation of that program will tell quite a different story. In fact, some 95% of the funds on the tax transfer have made it to municipalities. It had available to it the preference of our municipal partners.

[Translation]

The two programs differ greatly in design, however, and this has an impact on the abilities of each to provide a prompt and responsible stimulus. The gas tax fund is the most effective and efficient federal funding program, because it enables the municipalities to quickly address clearly targeted and totally accountable infrastructure priorities.

[English]

This is essential. Today each member is being asked to be accountable for some thousands of dollars that the government has proposed to spend. The method being pursued is one that would not put people to work over the next couple of years.

The conclusion is inescapable on the record of the government of the day. Over \$2 billion in the last two years has had to be given back to the treasury because the government has failed to provide the mechanisms to get it out there.

In addition, it is not simply a matter of whether it can find the means to suddenly deliver four times as much infrastructure funds. We have to ask ourselves why it did not choose the model that was available and agreed upon. It has access to not only the assessment from last year, but the government has one in its hands right now that reinforces the viability of the gas tax, which we have proposed today. Why did it not do that?

Sadly, the other record of the government is something a little less savoury and acceptable. People are watching us much more closely. How we respond to this economic crisis will not only define political careers, it will define how people regard the House and the relevance members have in their lives.

The old games that have been played have had their day and it is time to change. Each member of Parliament has to examine this. For example, while a very small amount of money has been released to communities and created jobs in past infrastructure programs, the promises made by the government have been quite troubling because they have shown a pattern of bias.

Of the first approximately \$2.5 billion promised, and again not delivered, which is part of the root of why we are here today, 70% have been designated for Conservative-held ridings, the ridings of the party that holds the reins of government. That is 55% more than a fair distribution would allow. What it reflects is that Canadians who live elsewhere, who live in ridings that did not happen to elect a Conservative member are being shortchanged by 50% to make up for the shortfall. This is not acceptable.

We have in front of us the ability to turn a page today and to take responsibility in the way that every Canadian will hold us accountable. If these new \$7 billion of funds do not find their way into the jobs in communities the way people expect, each one of us will be quite properly called to account.

In December 44,000 people in the construction industry lost their jobs. We have a government that had to be dragged kicking and screaming to recognize that economic stimulus was required. It is incumbent on the House to engage itself, involve itself, insert itself and give direction about implementation for effective stimulus spending.

The members of the government side have an opportunity to do this in a manner that does not slow down or get in the way of the programs that could come once budgetary allocations are approved. This is the chance to see the meddle of the members opposite in these new conditions.

Will they vote for the interests of their local citizens, a per capita distribution fairly across the country? Will they show respect for the local municipalities? Will they recognize that the municipalities have geared up for an increase in municipal receipts of gas tax funds and that they can responsibly put those to work? Will they accept the reports that say this is a good way to get money out to communities and that they trust the fact that the municipalities will find the money to spend?

The government, the members opposite, need to let go of the partisan small-minded politics of placing money in pet projects and things that it thinks are important. This is nothing more fundamental than a decision as to whether the old politics will rule in the conditions that Canada faces today or something new and different.

We have introduced this motion in the interests of a fair discussion and debate. We have information already available about choosing the instruments. We have not had in the opportunities, limited as they have been, whether before the Senate, or in the finance and infrastructure committees, or in brief instances of talking to the minister, any indication that there is a plan to turn around a 400% increase in distribution of infrastructure moneys without multiplying the problems that have been faced.

• (1110)

Again, a 96% failure rating in getting money out on time and a 50% distortion towards Conservative ridings and away from the fairness of the rest of the majority of Canadians is unacceptable. There have been enormous problems in working with our partners, provincially and federally.

*Business of Supply*

There is nothing on the books. In fact, the government has asked the transport department, which distributed \$1 billion and which has the same number of staff and level of expertise, perhaps slightly enhanced but not to any great extent, to now distribute \$8 billion.

There is a root question for all Canadians. Can the government, which has been given probation, give us a push forward because of the economic exigencies of the day? Can it work when Canadians need it the most? Those are the fundamental questions.

In the handling of the infrastructure file, we see great significant cause for concern. Why did the government not choose the endorsed means of the municipalities? The big city mayors and the small town communities have told us what works and they can make it work right away.

If the members opposite do not agree with the motion today, then they will reinforce patterns of inequality in our country. Poor communities that cannot put up their share of the money will not get any economic stimulus. Is that fair?

• (1115)

[Translation]

No, it is not acceptable. Today is the time to change the way our communities and major cities are dealt with.

[English]

It is extremely important that we seize this opportunity. There will be no better chance. We do not want the House to fall into the typical blame and shame that happens when things do not work.

I look forward to hearing the debate from the other side of the House. We need a fulsome explanation from the government on how it will do this. The onus is on the government. We are stepping forward in a means that we think is in keeping with spirit of what the country requires, which is constructive proposals about how to move forward. Even though the record of the government is pretty sad and it has nothing to be proud of, it can make itself look better in the eyes of Canadians.

This is an essential test as well. Are the members of the governing party open to a different way of governing and taking forward suggestions from other parties? Are they finally going to get the message of the last election, that Canadians wanted them to come here with their ears and their hearts open to a means of moving the country forward? Canadians knew what Conservatives denied, and that is underneath their feet were the rumblings of an economy in trouble, of people losing jobs.

Forty percent of what is going to happen under the stimulus package is going to depend on the effectiveness of these infrastructure funds. Day by day the government is missing the chance to instill confidence in Canadians, confidence that the economy is going to get better, confidence that members of the House can find ways to supersede partisan differences.

If the party in power insists on not improving its infrastructure program with the motion we have today, it stands exposed as unable to meet the requirements of government.

We are working in a proactive fashion. We are working with this situation. We appeal to all the parties. We recognize and acknowl-

edge the roles that other parties have played in identifying, for example, this mechanism of the gas transfer tax. We recognize that all people in their local communities are probably very versed on how effective that has been.

We have this need to step forward now and to amplify the impacts that can exist in terms of putting forward the best possible means.

I can predict very clearly what will happen if we do not act today. We will have a continuation of the partisan bias that sees certain Canadians denied on the basis of their vote, not on their need.

[Translation]

The money will likely be wasted. In a desperate move to transfer this money, the Conservatives might spend money without the appropriate accountability, resulting in costly errors with borrowed funds.

[English]

This is borrowed money. This is a trust not just for our voters and not just for our fellow citizens, but for the children of tomorrow, from whom we are borrowing this money. It is essential that we put forward the capacity on how those funds are going to live up to that.

The gas tax transfer fund is dedicated to the environmental change that this country has to put forward in order to meet the needs of the economy of tomorrow. It is dedicated to recognizing that municipalities cannot be beggared by the present circumstances of the economy. They have falling property tax revenues and, as many voices have already said, they have to look after the maintenance and the rebuilding of infrastructure. They will not be able to do that if we insist on a cost-shared mechanism.

This is a reasonable proposal before the House. It asks for half the money to be set aside to be used in the gas tax transfer fashion. It means that those communities and those provinces that want to add money will be free to do so. They recognize, and we need to respect their recognition, the desperation that many communities face, and they will do that. They do not need to be told by this level of government. They do not need to have their hands held and they do not need artificial due diligences, which will take months and months of procedure and not get dollars moving in the form of the so-called shovels in the ground and, more important, not get people back into jobs of dignity.

This is the hour. This is the time in which we get to decide how we will move forward. Is this House capable of seizing its new responsibilities, not just for devising what could happen, but for taking responsibility to ensure that it does happen for the implementation of building the next Canada? That is what the present economic circumstances open for us to do.

• (1120)

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member asked that we take notice of the message from the last election. It is pretty clear from the last election that this government was given an even stronger mandate to govern this country. Clearly, Canadians trusted us to serve them well. A lesson he should have learned from this last election was that the Liberal Party suffered its worst defeat ever. He may want to reconsider that question and that challenge.

*Business of Supply*

The member made a suggestion or allegation that the distribution of infrastructure funding was unfair. In fact, he has actually issued a list of ridings that he claims are Conservative ridings that received funding to the exclusion of some Liberal ridings. I looked at the list and I noticed that he referred to Kenora as being Conservative, yet when infrastructure funding was delivered, that riding was a Liberal riding. The same holds true for Saint John, New Brunswick, and Fredericton.

Is the hon. member not getting off on the wrong foot as a rookie MP by making suggestions that misrepresent the facts, and would he correct the record for the House?

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am slightly disappointed in the tone coming from the member opposite, but I understand. The temptation is to stick their heads in the ground and believe there is no problem.

There was \$2.8 billion. We have the list that the ministry does not even want to release, that it has not had the temerity to put forward to its own members to show where the money has gone. The money was not delivered to any of those ridings, unfortunately, but the promises have been made disproportionately, and the government has been hiding ever since.

For every riding that is proposed that may be a little off on the day it was promised, there is another one that actually is in the Conservative column. These numbers are only a part of the point. The real point is the first one made by the member opposite: the message of the election. Was it for the party in power to do things its own way for its own benefit? Was that what Canadians really sent a minority Parliament back to do? Have no lessons been learned?

We will find out today if lessons can be learned by a government while it is still in power. We have a stimulus package that has many flaws. This is about fixing one of them. I say to the members opposite that if the government wishes to make those partisan points, we have only made part of our presentation, and it will miss that opportunity and it will disappoint Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my Liberal colleague's speech. He recently joined us on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

My question is simple. And the member will soon know our party's position regarding the Liberal motion. However, in terms of how things work on the ground, I would like our colleague to remember that municipalities, according to the Constitution, are creatures of the provinces.

In Quebec, the Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif prohibits all spending or direct negotiations between the federal government and municipalities or school boards without written permission from the Quebec government.

Is my colleague aware of this?

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I know that there are legislative agreements with the Quebec government, but there is also an agreement between the Government of Canada and the Quebec

government concerning the gas tax transfer—I have a copy here—that requires that the provincial government's jurisdiction be respected. The method of distribution differs across the country. The agreement differs depending on the level of government. In Ontario, the agreement is made directly with certain municipalities, but it is a different agreement in Quebec.

The goal is to find the most efficient method, based on the methods that have already shown themselves to be efficient. That is the goal of this motion.

● (1125)

[*English*]

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to engage in this discussion. As a former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, I can tell the House of those dark days when the Conservatives ignored infrastructure, and it was nice to see the Chrétien government bring in the infrastructure program in 1994.

My colleague raises a very important issue, which is that in fact we are going to have an economic stimulus package from the government and if the government is really serious about getting people to work and getting infrastructure programs going, one would wonder why it would have such a complicated approach. The gas tax is the most efficient and most effective way, and we know that many municipal budgets have already been set, so municipalities cannot necessarily find money out of thin air to match.

I ask my colleague that if in fact in this particular case the idea is economic stimulus, why would we ignore a program that even the government had supported in the past, which is the gas tax? How does the member see this as a more effective instrument in delivering the kinds of projects municipal governments require and would like to fund today? Could the member elaborate on that for us?

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Mr. Speaker, I trust that all members of the House are aware that the method being proposed by the government requires municipalities to wait for funds. They cannot start or they lose access to funds. They must wait for approvals, sign specific agreements, and detail due diligence. The big hand of big government is reaching over them and holding back those projects, whereas the gas tax fund can actually be borrowed against immediately and be used immediately to get shovels in the ground.

That is what the mayor of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and Mr. Carl Zehr, the mayor of Kitchener, Ontario, speaking for the big city mayors caucus, said very clearly:

To counter a recession this year we need a program that gets money to projects in time for the spring construction season. A program based on the gas tax funding model is the best tool for the job.

We know that. Will the government give up its patronage? Will it give up the other temptations and serve the interests of Canadians fairly and effectively? This is how municipalities can put Canadians to work and build the infrastructure that will put us in a position of advantage for tomorrow.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's intervention.

*Business of Supply*

I want to carry on in a slightly different vein from where the member for Abbotsford left off.

We talked about where money goes in a particular riding that may have been held by an MP from a particular party. The simple fact is that when money goes into a particular riding for a project, it is not just people in that riding who get the jobs. It is not just people in that riding who enjoy the facility. I will give two examples.

In Edmonton, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona is a member of the New Democratic Party. The Northlands exhibition facility is in my riding. I can guarantee that the people of Edmonton—Strathcona use that facility and that people from Edmonton—Strathcona will be employed in the expansion of that facility.

Another example is Ipsco Place in Regina. The member for Wascana was complaining the other day that the money was spent outside his riding. It is 3.93 miles from his riding. I guarantee that people from Wascana will use that facility and I guarantee that people from Wascana will be employed in that construction.

With respect to the municipalities and their ability to raise funds, we have a \$2 billion credit capacity. They can borrow on that. When they present the bill, it is paid.

Toronto underspent its municipal budget by \$190 million last year—

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

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the point raised by the member opposite about multiple benefit and so on, but the fact is that 70% of the \$2.5 billion pledged is mainly for Conservative ridings.

However, it is much simpler. All that members need to agree on is that a per capita distribution is fair and that the extra speed and accountability that come with the gas tax transfer make this approach superior. Why get tangled up in selections? Why does the federal government want to do that, when it says its goal is economic stimulus and when its record is to not get money out the door effectively, even today? The record last year was 4%.

The point is raised because it is the temptation of government to keep a hand on the rudder to serve those smaller purposes. I say to the member opposite and to all members of the House that we must resist that temptation—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are going to try to get one more brief question in here. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

• (1130)

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians watching this will be mystified at what is actually happening, having heard that the Liberals were supporting the Conservative budget without conditions with respect to flow of money for infrastructure projects although, as the Liberals themselves pointed out, 96% of infrastructure money in the past has not flowed even though it was promised by the Conservatives.

How is it possible that the Liberals proceeded with support for this bill without any conditions attached and without questions about how the numbers would flow? How can they justify their support for

a budget that may not provide any kind of stimulus, the likes of which Canadians need and deserve?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park only has about 20 seconds.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Mr. Speaker, I say very quickly to the member for Winnipeg North that we need to get the money out to Canadians and also take responsibility for choosing the best method. We have decided to support the budget, but this is improving on that support and making sure the money can get where it is going.

I enjoin her to support it on that basis. Let us do the best job possible for Canadians in making infrastructure happen quickly.

**Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to contribute to the debate on this motion from the hon. colleague. I would like to share my time with the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont.

I think we should start the debate by talking about why we are in the situation we are and by understanding what is happening globally, because if we do not understand that and deal with this motion in that context, we are going to miss exactly what we are trying to do. We will get into the gutter and start playing politics, as petty as they can become in the House.

Let me try this out for a bit. We have to understand how the banking system in the United States has failed and how the asset-backed commercial paper and mortgages in the United States have collapsed and brought us into this situation. It is not only in the United States; it has rippled into the banking systems in Europe and Asia. We are not immune to it, because America is our largest trading partner.

This is a global slowdown. It is not something that has happened just to us. It is not something we caused or asked for or had any part in promoting in any way. However, we nonetheless have to deal with it. We have to deal with it collectively, because any stimulus money that is put into the American, European or Asian economies will not spin us out of the global slowdown if it is not done collectively. It is only if we put our collective efforts together as the G20 and do it respectively in each of our countries that we will see Canadians, Americans, Europeans, Asians and so on go back to work. Then we will spin our way out of this situation.

Failing to do this, we will see a repeat of what happened in the 1930s. Hopefully we have learned from history and we will work collectively to get out of this slowdown. We have to look at the stimulus package in that light.

It is not that this is our first stimulation package. This is the second one. As the world economy was slowing down, the first package we saw started in the fall of 2007 with a \$200 billion stimulation package. This package included lowering the GST from 7% to 5%, implementing child tax credits and putting \$100 per child into the hands of ordinary Canadians for child care, lowering corporate taxes to 15% and lowering small business taxes to 11%. These agendas were started long before we got into what was recognized by the world as an international economic slowdown.

*Business of Supply*

We have to understand that what we are trying to do with the infrastructure and stimulus funding is actually twofold. First of all, we have to put Canadians back to work with their own money. We have to do it now, because they are losing jobs at the present time. However, we have to do more than that. We have to build an infrastructure that will prepare us to compete and be productive long into the 21st century and long after the current economic slowdown has passed.

• (1135)

That is why we are putting money into transit which is green. It not only improves the quality of the systems that get individuals to and fro in our major urban settings, but it is also environmentally friendly and it allows us to breathe cleaner air. We are also putting money into waste water, making sure that we have cleaner water. We are also making sure that we have green projects, that we have the very best of municipal waste disposal systems in the world, the best coal-burning and biofuel facilities in the world and the ability to create energy from those cellulosic and forest sectors and other opportunities that we have.

If we can do that with our infrastructure money, we will not be playing that petty game of who gets the most, which municipalities win and which municipalities lose. This will sustain us well into the 21st century. Everyone in Canada will win and we can be very proud of the technologies we design and the progress that we make.

We started this stimulus package three years ago. We came into power with the understanding that the infrastructure across the country was deteriorating and we had to do something about it. We put forward a \$33 billion infrastructure program. That program is being built on with our action plan, which is another \$12 billion. That \$12 billion is split up a number of different ways. We have \$4 billion in infrastructure stimulus funding.

One of the magic parts of this economic action plan, which I appreciate the opposition supporting, is the concept of use it or lose it. If we are going to stimulate the economy, we have to do it now and create the jobs when jobs are being lost. If we do not include the concept of use it or lose it, the money will go out beyond the time when it would be of appropriate use, not on the infrastructure side but on the stimulus side. It has to be done now and it has to be in new projects.

We are not prepared to put money into the hands of the municipalities or give them blank cheques and tell them they can spend whatever they want, because they would just balance their books on the backs of the federal government. They would not use the money as a stimulus for creating new projects. This money has to be used to stimulate the economy, to put Canadians back to work and to create jobs that would not normally be there.

Also, there is \$2 billion to accelerate the construction of colleges and universities across the country. Canada has nothing to hide or to be ashamed of when it comes to post-secondary education. We are number one in the world when it comes to post-secondary graduates, but we can do better. We can keep on top of this agenda. When our young people are educated properly and have the best facilities to obtain that education, we will win in the 21st century. We have to put money into the high tech part of it and make sure our universities are creating the very brightest and best. Our future is based on the

strength of our educational system and our youth. We are very pleased to be able to put \$2 billion into that.

There is another \$1 billion for the green infrastructure projects. This goes right to the visit of the President of the United States, who was here last week. He told Canada that he is very interested in the carbon capture and sequestration programs. We have to make sure that we are not only using fossil fuels in the cleanest way possible, and developing technologies that we can sell internationally, but that we are also working together to make sure that technology works.

As well, dealing with coal, which is another source of energy, we realize that if we are going to keep our GDP growing and our economic growth the same in the next 30 years as we have in the last 30, we have to double the amount of energy in that time period. Doubling the amount of energy in a clean, environmentally effective way is no small task. It is something that all of us have to look at intelligently. We have to do it in a way that understands the politics of the world. A lot of the fossil fuels come from unstable political regimes such as in the Middle East, Venezuela and so on. These are the challenges of North America and we can meet those challenges.

There is another \$500 million in support for construction of new community recreational facilities. We were very proud, as were all Canadians, when a lot of these rinks were built for our centennial anniversary in 1967, but they are getting old. They need refurbishing. This infrastructure funding is there to help build centres for cultural and other activities in the small communities across the country, from one coast to the other. We are very proud of that and it is something that is needed to sustain the infrastructure in the local communities.

We are going to do it, which goes to the essence of question in the motion before us that we are debating. How are we going to get the money out? How are we going to do it effectively? We are going to be working with the provinces to be make sure that we fast-track key infrastructure projects.

For example, part of the infrastructure project is a base fund of \$25 million over a five year period. Every province gets the same: \$25 million. That is \$175 million over seven years per province. We are not going to wait for seven years before we spend it. We are going to accelerate that so the provinces can spend that \$175 million right now. They can do it on good projects that are based on criteria set by municipal and provincial governments. It is leveraged three to one, so we are going to see not only federal money but also municipal and provincial money going into those accelerated funds to build capacity for more employment and more infrastructure.

*Business of Supply*

It is timely, very important and smart to do this kind of spending at this time because there is better competition in the bidding process for the jobs that are out there right now. I was talking to a number of the premiers. I was talking to one premier's office last week and I will be talking to another one this afternoon. What I am hearing right across the country is that the competitive bidding process is better today than it was a year ago. In fact some are telling me it is 25% to 30% better. Our dollar is going to go much further and we are going to be able to build more infrastructure because of the way we are doing it and the time in which we are doing it.

Let us do it smartly. Let us clean out some of the hindrances that we have seen. That is why in Bill C-10 there is a portion dealing with the Navigable Waters Protection Act to make sure that we get a lot of the bureaucracy out of the way, deal with the appropriate places where the environment is compromised, and not be so phobic about some of the things that are ridiculous under the act. We are going to change the definition of navigable waters. We do not want to duplicate environmental studies. We want to make sure that we do the appropriate study on that.

• (1140)

This government is building a tremendous amount of infrastructure projects at the present time and we are going to continue to do a lot more. I ask all members to please stay tuned.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government fails to understand that the FCM put forward a notion that the gas tax is the best approach to take because it is the most efficient, and the money should go toward new projects, not into general revenue.

I heard the minister talk about the building Canada fund. The government is great on announcements but very short on delivery. It announced \$8.8 billion in 2007 but how much was actually spent in that first year? Zero. The government spent nothing on infrastructure projects in that first year. Last January the FCM announced that less than \$300 million of the \$1.5 billion announced for the last two years had actually flowed from the building Canada fund.

If the minister is serious about having projects go forward in a short construction season, then he should not play politics and leave the infrastructure issue to the provinces. The government should be dealing directly with the municipalities. The way to do that is by way of the gas tax. They are going to advance their five or ten year capital forecast and move forward.

I would ask the minister to comment on that.

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** Mr. Speaker, the member's question gives me an opportunity to explain about what we are doing with the gas tax.

The concept to some degree is right, and we agree with it. The amount of gas tax for the province of Alberta, for example, in 2008-09 is \$95 million and in 2009-10 it will double, to \$195 million. It is not a matter of the municipalities not having the money.

There is a principle and a concept that my hon. colleague needs to understand. If someone is not prepared to invest his or her own money in something, then he or she does not value that item very much.

We are asking municipalities to use the money the federal government is prepared to offer and leverage it with the money from the province and the municipality's own money. If municipalities do not have the money, we have put aside a fund so they can make the political decision as to whether or not to borrow against that at a very low rate. Municipalities have no excuse for saying they do not have the money. They have the money, but do they have the political will? That must be there if they are going to invest in the right projects.

There will be all kinds of fancy projects that may not meet the ultimate goal of building the best infrastructure for the country in the 21st century. We need to make sure that we get that concept across.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the minister when he talked about some of the programs the government was putting in place on the energy front.

He said that the Conservative government invested \$2.2 billion in the biofuels program. This is a pork-barrel program. This program in this climate and with what is happening in the world is going to deliver zero dollars toward renewable energy. It is going to put a lot of money into corn-based ethanol, which is not the way to go. Those dollars are being badly invested.

In the latest budget most of the money that should be going into energy will go into carbon sequestration. This process has been totally unproven on a commercial scale. It is going to take many years to develop the technology. The companies that want to invest in this have not decided how they are going to invest. This is not a stimulation idea.

The U.S. is putting \$150 billion into proven renewable energy technologies, such as wind power and solar power. These things are really what President Obama was talking about in his address—

• (1145)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I will have to stop the hon. member there to give the hon. Minister of State a chance to respond.

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** Mr. Speaker, I can hardly believe that I am hearing that kind of nonsense from an NDP member. I thought he was concerned about cleaner air, cleaner water, cleaner land. Not only biofuels but cellulosic ethanol biofuels and biodiesel will create more than that.

The forestry sector is looking at state of the art projects, things that perhaps my colleague needs to become informed about. It is looking at using forest products to create energy and electricity.

One of the projects that President Obama was talking about was zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for coal and we all know that coal will be a tremendous energy source in the future.

I am appalled at the short-sightedness and lack of understanding that an NDP member would have on environmental issues. I encourage that member to come and talk to me and I will educate him on some of the exciting projects that Canada will have in the future.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to this motion.



*Business of Supply*

As many of my hon. colleagues may recall, in November 2007 this Conservative government made the largest single commitment to Canadian public infrastructure in over half a century when we launched the building Canada plan. This is the largest investment in infrastructure since the second world war. Since then we have moved quickly to implement this plan, working together with our counterparts in the provinces, territories and municipalities.

We have signed framework agreements with all provinces and territories. We have taken action to develop our gateways, borders and trade corridors. We have made the gas tax transfer, which provides municipalities with stable and predictable funding, permanent. We have delivered significant public transit initiatives. We have flowed money to provinces and territories so project work can begin quickly. We have committed more money to infrastructure projects across the country than any other government in Canadian history.

All of these actions will help provide a solid foundation for our country to weather the economic storm we are facing. Building Canada money is already at work in communities across the country. It is being used for more than 4,700 projects with many more on the way. These projects are not only creating jobs and stimulating local economies in the short term, but they will also have many lasting benefits. For example, we are investing millions of dollars in the expansion of the Manitoba Red River floodway and flood protection measures in British Columbia. This investment will help protect hundreds of thousands of people and billions of dollars in property from the possible ravages of flood waters.

We are helping fund the expansion of the Spadina subway and GO Transit in the greater Toronto area, new buses in Montreal, and the SkyTrain in B.C. These initiatives will encourage more people to use public transit, which is good for the economy and the environment. It will help create a better quality of life for our families and our communities.

Our government is also investing in projects that will result in cleaner water for Canadians to drink, use and enjoy. We are helping to pay for the cleanup of the Saint John harbour in New Brunswick, upgrading storm sewers in Nova Scotia, and developing better water treatment plants in Nunavut.

Every day millions of Canadians and Canadian goods take to the roads, highways and airports, all activities which support our economy. Our government is investing heavily in making those roads, highways and airports safer and better. By facilitating the movement of people and goods, we are encouraging tourism, trade and commerce, all of which have enormous benefits for our country.

Our building Canada plan will help important projects, such as the Trans-Labrador Highway, the Montague Street bridge in P.E.I., the Kicking Horse Canyon highway in B.C., and many more.

We are also investing in infrastructure that makes Canadians proud to live, work and play in their communities. Sports, tourism and cultural infrastructure across this country are getting a much needed boost from our government.

Calgary will see a redeveloped Stampede Park. The Quartier des spectacles in Montreal and Evraz Place in Regina are being revitalized. Right in our backyard, Ottawa will soon be home to a

magnificent world-class convention centre that will attract business and other groups from around the globe, opening the doors to enormous economic opportunity.

In 2011, Halifax will welcome the world for the Canada Winter Games. Our government is proud to support this event by helping fund the Halifax Mainland Common Centre, which will be a primary venue for this event and a world-class facility for training high performance and competitive athletes.

By investing in community recreational infrastructure, our government is committed to building healthy communities so that families, friends and neighbours can come together.

All of these infrastructure projects are only possible through the co-operation of all levels of government. As Canada's Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has said repeatedly, together all three levels of government can go three times further and three times faster. Ontario's Minister of Finance has said, "Today, the federal government has come to the table and has made the much-needed infrastructure investments Ontario has been calling for".

No one level of government alone can accomplish what we need to get done. Our government has stepped up to the plate with \$33 billion in infrastructure funding under building Canada, plus another \$12 billion in new funding announced in the most recent budget.

We will speed up the flow of these funds to the provinces, territories and municipalities. We will cut the red tape, so provinces and territories can put shovels in the ground quickly to create jobs. Together we will build the infrastructure that will allow Canadians and the economy to thrive now and in the future.

We will continue to work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to invest wisely, quickly and efficiently to address the needs of Canadians today, tomorrow and into the future. This is our plan.

● (1150)

I want to read a couple of articles. We have talked at different times in the House about the leadership the Prime Minister has shown on the international stage and comments from different organizations that have commended us for our world leadership. Around the globe we are the envy of other countries when it comes to the way that we not only acted prior to the slowdown but how we have worked during this time to ensure that Canada will come out sooner and stronger from this economic slowdown than other countries.

It is interesting to note, for example, an article from the *Daily Telegraph* in the U.K., that came out during the G8 meetings this past summer. The article significantly lamented the lack of leadership among the other G8 countries as we headed into the economic slowdown, but it singled out one world leader for specific recognition and excepted him from the comments it made regarding the leadership, saying that our Prime Minister had shown specific positive leadership. Here is a direct quote:

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

At the end of the article it says:

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

I am not going to quote from the article, but there was a recent article in *The Guardian* in the U.K. that viewers can check that commented a little bit on the Liberal leader and there is a stark contrast between the two comments.

I am now going to turn to an article that appeared in *Newsweek* recently on February 16, talking about Canada under the headline “Worthwhile Canadian Initiative”. This is a direct quote:

Guess which country, alone in the industrialized world, has not faced a single bank failure, calls for bailouts or government intervention in the financial or mortgage sectors. Yup, it's Canada. In 2008, the World Economic Forum ranked Canada's banking system the healthiest in the world. America's ranked 40th, Britain's 44th.

The article went on to say:

Canada has done more than survive this financial crisis. The country is positively thriving in it. Canadian banks are well capitalized and poised to take advantage of opportunities that American and European banks cannot seize.

In closing, the article went on to say:

If President Obama is looking for smart government, there is much he, and all of us, could learn from our...neighbor to the north.

Wise words there from *Newsweek*. On the international stage, Canada is regarded as a world leader because of the steps we have taken, not just during this global slowdown but as the hon. member who spoke just before me mentioned, well in advance. Right from the time that we formed the government in 2006, we have been taking steps to make Canada stronger. In the long-term those steps have served us very well up to this point and helped us to enter the slowdown later, have ensured that the slowdown here will be felt less than in other countries, and will ensure that moving forward we will come out of this slowdown sooner and stronger than other countries.

With that I will end my comments and I look forward to questions from opposition members.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question will be simple.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry heard the speech given earlier by the Minister of State (Transport) who said, among other things, that these infrastructure programs could help solve the forestry crisis. I was a little shocked by this, given that he has some knowledge of the industry.

For the forestry crisis, the Conservative government announced only \$170 million over two years. My concern is simple, and this is my question for the minister. What can we do to help a municipality such as Lebel-sur-Quévillon, for example, which has lost 40% of all its jobs in the forestry sector? That is, 40% of all the jobs in the municipality have been lost, and all as a result of the forestry crisis. What will with infrastructure program do to stimulate job creation in that municipality?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the slowdown affects sectors and industries across the country. It is a big issue. Obviously it is a global situation that affects countries around the globe and within Canada, there will be effects across the country.

Many of the steps we have taken are specific to industries. There is the community adjustment fund. There are modifications we have made to EI, for example, that makes it easier for people to get the support they need. We have the targeted initiative for older workers that the members from the Bloc have been talking about.

In terms of infrastructure, we have a \$4 billion stimulus fund to help the provinces, territories and municipalities all across the country get projects started as soon as possible to put out of work Canadians to work as soon as we can.

There is \$2 billion to accelerate construction of colleges and universities, which will have a short-term benefit in terms of the jobs that will create, but a long-term benefit in terms of the ability to train Canadians to be global leaders for the future.

There is \$1 billion to create the new green infrastructure fund. There is \$500 million to support the construction of new community recreation facilities and upgrade existing facilities, again, putting Canadians to work.

It is such a long list, it might take a little bit longer to go through it.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do have a question for the hon. member.

Over the last number of days I have spoken to a number of municipal leaders in my communities. The mayor of Mount Pearl, who calls the gas tax fund one of the most innovative new programs we have delivered in the last 100 years, thought this kind of program gets legitimate revenues moving forward in communities very quickly. He has a number of projects waiting to be done that he wants done. Mayor Simms would be very encouraged if we could move this motion through.

I spoke as well to Councillor Tom Hann in the city of St. John's who said he had over \$92 million in projects waiting for funding today. If we were to actually move forward on this motion, he could have shovels in the ground, people at work and good economic development in the city of St. John's and the city of Mount Pearl immediately.

My question is to the member, and I appreciate his comments. Why would the government not consider this motion? Why would it not consider this move toward putting some of the infrastructure dollars in the hands of communities immediately so that we can move forward on economic development, on good infrastructure development, and on getting people to work immediately?

**Mr. Mike Lake:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to serve on the industry committee with the hon. member. As a new member, it is always a challenging thing to come into the House.

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I would especially note that she is in a unique circumstance in that for the first time in history, an opposition leader allowed a free vote on the budget, and she took the opportunity to vote against the budget, as did her Newfoundland colleagues. With that free vote, 90% of her Liberal colleagues took the opportunity to support the government in the important steps.

In terms of the steps we are taking, our budget contains a long list of initiatives to stimulate the economy and make sure Canadians are working. We have doubled the amount of money in the gas tax and made it permanent. For this year it will be doubled. It is now permanent, something municipalities find very important.

My encouragement right now would be to ensure that we get the budget implementation bill back to the House, that we vote on it and that we all support it. Hopefully this time around the hon. member will rethink her position with the free vote and actually support the budget in an attempt to get the money flowing to the communities she talked about.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to speak to this Liberal motion. The purpose of the motion is to recommend to the government that investments in infrastructure programs be made in the same manner as in 2005, namely, through a formula for the distribution of the gas tax, which was a per capita distribution for each municipality. This investment represents half of all the funds available in budget 2009.

First of all, our party will support the Liberal Party position. We are setting partisan politics aside, because the situation is critical. We are on the brink of an economic crisis and one good way to stimulate the economy is to invest in infrastructure.

When I say we are setting partisan politics aside, I am choosing my words carefully. That is not what the Liberals did when it came to the most recent budget. They have a political agenda and that is how they practice politics. They chose to support a budget that offered no real solutions for the forestry and manufacturing crisis that mainly affects the province of Quebec, but the Bloc Québécois has made a different choice.

Setting aside political partisanship, we can see that the needs are great. Every city in Quebec has infrastructure needs. That is why the Province of Quebec created the coalition on infrastructure, a huge coalition that includes more than just the cities and is headed by the mayor of Laval, Gilles Vaillancourt.

This coalition also includes contractors and engineers, all the infrastructure stakeholders in Quebec, who, when the coalition was formed in the early 2000s, said that Quebec already had an infrastructure shortfall of more than \$12 billion, just for upgrading existing infrastructure. I am talking about equipment and buildings, and also underground pipes such as water and sewer systems.

Quebec already had a \$12 billion shortfall. In the early 1990s, the federal Liberal government inherited the Conservatives' deficit and decided to achieve a zero deficit by reducing transfers to the provinces. The provinces could not pay their infrastructure costs on their own, because of rising health and education costs, so they

downloaded part of the cost to the municipalities. That is what happened. I was a member of the Union des municipalités du Québec at the time, and I even served as president of the organization from 1997 to 2000.

All across Canada, or at least in Quebec, the provincial shortfall was downloaded onto the municipalities and school boards. Obviously, the municipalities absorbed the costs, but that does not necessarily mean they invested in infrastructure.

Those who took part in discussions in 1992 about the municipalities in Quebec or who were following what was going on at the municipal level know that in the wake of the Ryan reform in Quebec in 1992, the Government of Quebec decided, with the stroke of a pen, to again transfer all local roads and some regional roads that came under the provincial government to the municipalities.

It transferred these roads directly to the cities and municipalities. The same thing happened with all types of works: bridges, culverts and all public construction. These public works and engineering works—municipal bridges and culverts—were transferred all at once and without a cent attached. The cities had to absorb the cost of repairs and maintenance. There was a reason why, last year, following the collapse of an overpass in Laval—a public engineering work belonging to the Government of Quebec—the government undertook a study.

• (1205)

Because the works ceded in 1992 were not being maintained, last fall the Government of Quebec decided to take back all the bridges and engineering works it downloaded in 1992. You can imagine the condition of the infrastructure it turned over in 1992—fairly important works such as bridges, overpasses and sewer and water systems—given that the municipalities had not invested any money in their maintenance.

Money was not invested because of the burden transferred in 1992 under the Ryan reform and in 1998 under the Trudel reform. I am not being partisan. This happened under both Liberal and Parti Québécois governments. The Quebec government had no choice because provincial transfer payments were cut. That is the reality. We have started to reinvest and to give.

There is a reason why the Bloc Québécois has been working hard to have the fiscal imbalance recognized. It has led to an imbalance in tax revenues that has had a domino effect on cities, and I will not even mention the school boards that were affected by this new transfer of the fiscal burden. This led to the creation of the Coalition pour le renouvellement des infrastructures du Québec chaired by the mayor of Laval, Mr. Vaillancourt, as I mentioned earlier.

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The idea was to try to address this infrastructure deficit and to restore and upgrade the equipment that already belonged to the cities. And I am not talking about developing new infrastructure. A great deal of pressure was brought to bear on the federal government, which bore the brunt of the responsibility. That is a fact. When it began slashing provincial transfers to try to achieve fiscal balance and a zero deficit, it created an imbalance at the municipal level. The governments, especially the federal government, realized this. Consequently, when it started generating surpluses, it began wanting to give some money back to the cities directly.

As I said earlier to the member for Parkdale—High Park, the Liberal critic who gave a speech on behalf of his party, the problem is that Quebec has a law that prohibits any direct federal transfers to municipalities. I am going to take the time to read section 3.11 of the Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif:

Except to the extent expressly provided for by law, no municipal body or school body may, without the prior authorization of the Government, enter into any agreement with another government in Canada or one of its departments or government agencies, or with a federal public agency.

Municipalities and school boards in Quebec are therefore prohibited from negotiating directly with the federal government. This is in keeping with the Canadian Constitution, because the cities come directly under the provinces. Some provinces do not have such requirements. That is why I want to tell all the members to be careful when taking action and making statements or even election promises.

I see that the Liberals analyzed the money invested in infrastructure programs. They found that 70% of the money spent to date has been spent in Conservative ridings, but not in Quebec. That stands to reason, because in Quebec, it is not the federal government that decides how the money will be invested, but the Province of Quebec. You have not seen us rise to say that there has been patronage in Quebec. There has been no patronage simply because the province decides how the money will be divided up. The Government of Quebec uses a formula involving representatives of the two municipal unions.

There are two main municipal unions in Quebec: the Union des municipalités du Québec, which includes most large and medium-sized cities, and the Fédération québécoise des municipalités, which represents small and medium-sized cities as well as regional municipalities. Both unions are represented on the selection committee.

Quebec already has a framework for distributing the funds, provided that the funds are part of a negotiated agreement. That was the case for the first agreement that the Liberal government at the time had negotiated. As our Liberal colleague showed earlier, agreements were signed concerning the gas tax, the municipal rural infrastructure fund and other funds. Each time there was federal money involved, an agreement was negotiated between the Quebec government and the federal government.

● (1210)

Until now, this has operated by means of agreements. One of those was the gas tax agreement: part of the envelope is distributed per capita, per municipality, with a minimum amount. It was very well received. I personally helped with the planning. At that time, it was

Liberal minister John Godfrey who undertook this work on the gas tax. He invited me, as the former president of the Union des municipalités du Québec, into his office and I had the opportunity to discuss it with him and his officials on two occasions. He wanted to know my opinion on how the money should be distributed. I felt, obviously, that the best way would be to ensure that each municipality benefited, since every municipality has needs.

Do not try to tell me that municipalities can receive money through this program even when they do not need it. On the contrary, every municipality has needs and requests. Since 1992, when the federal government decided to cut transfers, municipalities have had to take on extra burdens, for the equipment and infrastructure that was downloaded. Yet they had neither the time nor the money for upgrades.

Clearly, at this time, it would be best to take part of the money and continue to redistribute it equitably among municipalities, on a per capita basis. This will enable them to bring forward some plans. Indeed, each municipality in Quebec must produce a three-year infrastructure plan in its budget and submit it directly to the Government of Quebec. Each municipality therefore has its three-year plan. Under the agreement with the municipal union, the minister can ask the Government of Quebec to produce the three-year plan and he will very quickly learn the infrastructure needs of each municipality. Everything is already very well planned and structured

All municipalities have infrastructure needs. Why not use this opportunity to take 50% of the funds available? That is why we will support the Liberal motion here today, for the sake of fairness, and simply because if we can set party politics aside, it is once again the best way to ensure that work can begin and that the economy can be stimulated everywhere, in all the regions. Of course I will come back to this.

With this motion, the Liberals seem to be trying to address a patronage problem. I want to be honest here, since I said I would not play party politics. At present, since budget 2005, the Conservative government has spent very little, if any money in Quebec. They made a few investments, but they were not made in the context of any agreements.

For instance, the building Canada fund was proposed by the Conservative government in 2007 and the Bloc Québécois supported it. However there has yet to be any agreement reached with the Government of Quebec. We need to know why, and that is the problem. Is it because the Conservatives wanted to engage in patronage? Did they have a new way of presenting that? Time will tell, but so far, I would like to give them the benefit of the doubt, because the Quebec government has not shown any openness either, and will not tell us why it has not signed the agreement.

However, one thing is clear: the Conservative government has not spent one penny on any programs in Quebec, so there has not yet been any patronage. We can forget that. I want everyone to be very comfortable on that score.

Obviously, if this motion were adopted, it just might resolve the apparent impasse between the federal government and Quebec, with no agreement yet signed. Is it because they are completely at odds with one another? One way of resolving the impasse would be to send 50% of all infrastructure monies directly to each municipality, which is the current practice. SOFIL, a non-profit corporation, was established. Every municipality has its own amount of money. It negotiates with Quebec the work it has to do and Quebec outlines the main requirements. At present, in the first phase of the gas tax transfer, water and sewers are the priority. After that, investments will be made in roads. However, I know that municipal unions are asking that the process be more open and that additional new work be funded through these envelopes. That would surely allow recreational, cultural and other types of facilities to be built and that would create jobs.

• (1215)

I agree with the Conservative government that one way to create jobs is to invest in infrastructure. Our main point of contention about the last budget was not about infrastructure; we were asking for a different cost-sharing formula. That is why, today, with the sharing of the 50%, municipalities would not have to invest directly. We are asking for a new formula: 50% from the federal government, 35% from the provincial government and 15% from the cities.

As we all know, cities have reached their maximum debt loads. This is a little complicated because municipal debt loads are not the same throughout Canada. We have to be honest with all of the members and try to better understand the situation. In Quebec, the province's credit rating is excellent right now, and one of the main reasons for that is our cities' debt load. Historically, the province has always kept municipal spending in check to ensure a better credit rating. That is the reality. In Quebec, municipal debt loads are a lot lower, which helps the province maintain a better credit rating. That is how we have always done things. Other provinces allowed their cities to go deeper into debt. In Quebec, there is more oversight, and in some cases, to avoid accumulating debt, cities are not allowed to go ahead with certain projects. That is why we need more and more direct funding and less municipal participation because they have reached the maximum debt load allowed by the province.

That is the reality we have to deal with. The Liberals have suggested that, with this new program, if 50% of the money were to be allocated per capita with no obligation on the municipalities to invest, the government would be helping the vast majority of municipalities who have already reached the limit because every other program forces them to invest one-third. When the Liberals were in power, they had infrastructure programs and there was a gas tax, but even with the gas tax program, municipalities were required to participate. Now they understand and they are more open to municipalities, so they would not demand a contribution. We would be happy with that.

On the other hand, we also need to question the Liberals' will to solve this problem when they could have done it in their agreements with the Conservatives in the latest budget. It is a bit surprising that this comes along a few days after the budget was adopted. The Liberals have decided to find themselves a new vocation—saving the cities—when they could very well, when negotiating their support of the budget, have asked the government to include these

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standards in it. I still do not understand why they did not. Once again, they woke up too late. That is the Liberals' problem. They got kicked in the—pardon the expression, I will leave out the rest—in the last election and they are having trouble getting over it. That is the reality. They are always a month, a month and a half, or two months behind everybody else. One of these days they may catch up; that day will come. But it is still surprising that they did not take advantage of their negotiations with the Conservatives around the latest budget to get this included. The municipalities would, of course, have greatly appreciated that.

As I said at the start, this is serious. One good way to jump start the economy and create new jobs is to rebuild the infrastructures. We are very much aware of that. That is one reason we have always fought here in the House to get a fair shake for the forestry and the manufacturing sectors. The investments that can be made serve to protect existing jobs. We are well aware that, in the forestry sector, modernizing businesses in order to enhance their competitiveness will not increase the number of workers. One good approach is to stop the loss of workers in these industries—and the same thing goes for the auto industry. Investment is needed to stabilize the situation. An approach is needed that will create new jobs to offset the ones lost all over the country. The situation is not as the Minister of State (Transport) has described it. The forestry problem will not be solved with the infrastructure program. A program is needed to help the forest industry. One good way of doing so is what the Liberals are proposing, and we will be supporting this motion.

• (1220)

[*English*]

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to the speak to the motion. The NDP will be supporting the motion of the member for Parkdale—High Park.

I will be splitting my time today with the member for Trinity—Spadina. Her expertise as a city councillor for many years has given her a great understanding of municipal financing and the difficulty in bringing forward projects that can really benefit a municipality in a very short period of time.

As a former mayor for many years in a smaller community, I have the same understanding of this issue. I was involved in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' green fund for five years. This role gave me the understanding of how long it took to put forward projects that could turn the direction of a community toward more greener and environmental purposes.

The reason we will support the motion because in the finance committee our party has called for similar action from the Conservative government. We put forward amendments in committee. Unfortunately the Liberals sided with the government and those amendments were not brought forward. They were very similar to what we are dealing with today.

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Why do the Liberals think it is important today to take up an opposition day when they would not consider the time in committee, when proper amendments could have been brought forward that would have changed the nature of the budget bill?

The real reason is the Liberals need some cover on this issue. Therefore, today is spent to provide that cover for the Liberals to show they really do care about these issues. Their support of the Conservatives' attack on women, on collective bargaining and on the environment is really not their heartfelt desire. Rather they have moved forward with a motion today to show that they do have some differences from the Conservatives.

We cannot have it both ways. Either we support the Conservatives, like the Liberals, or we work, like the New Democratic Party, in opposition and speak up about the things that are not appropriate in the budget bill. The municipal infrastructure program, as a stimulus package, is simply not appropriate.

There is little difference right now between the new leader of the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister and his cohorts in the way that they think about issues. The coalition that has been established between the new Liberal leader and the Prime Minister is one based on similar thought.

In a 2007 study commissioned by the FCM, the municipal infrastructure deficit was found to be \$123 billion. Under the Conservative plan, this deficit will grow because municipalities will be unable to access the funding because they will be unable to come up with the kind of matching funds required under the building Canada plan.

In the last election we committed to increasing the gas tax fund and to creating new funding for municipalities. Fixing the infrastructure deficit must be a priority. However, I do not think it will solve all our economic woes.

The world's economy is in need of change. The current economic situation was created by governments' deregulation that was driven by one thing, and that was greed. Deregulation was carried out mostly by the Liberals and cheered on by the Conservatives. Look at the mess we have today.

The great recession of the 21st century is growing worse day by day. We cannot afford to sleepwalk any more and think that because somehow our banks have done okay, the rest of the country is okay. It is not.

We have had massive job losses in Canada and around the world. Businesses are failing and banks are going under all over the world. For example, just today one of the biggest banks in Britain, the Royal Bank of Scotland, reported the biggest loss in British history. Because of this, Britain has announced a bank bailout plan of over \$700 billion.

What we need right now is a vision of the long term to restructure our economy. The President of the United States is correct when he says that our current economic situation should be seen as a chance to rebuild and restructure, a chance to build a better economy, one that is sustainable. This is our vision for the economy.

●(1225)

What would this new economy look like? It would be greener, that is for sure. We should create a green collar jobs fund of approximately \$750 million a year to train new workers and retrain displaced workers. Moving people in the direction of the new economy is so important. It is not simply good enough to house them on EI or on make work programs. We need to see their skills move in the direction that will lead to energy efficient renewable energy technology.

We will fall behind the United States if we do not move in this direction. President Obama has committed \$150 billion over three years for renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. That is so much more than what we are putting in. We need to take hold of the new economy developing in the United States. The North American continent has an integrated economy. We need to invest in our country in the same types of projects and the same types of direction.

We also need to invest in Canadian production of low emission cars to ensure our auto industry remains viable. Aggressive incentives for manufacturers that develop and manufacture in Canada cars with low or zero greenhouse gas emissions should be a priority of the government. That is what is going to bring our car industry forward in a good and acceptable fashion.

All over the world industries, governments and workers are collaborating to build new opportunities for jobs in innovation. Canada has taken the opposite approach. Experts agree we need a proactive plan to keep our country, our industries and our workplace in leading global position. That should be our job here. This should be the direction that is provided by the budget, rather than the scatter gun approach to investing a little here and a little there, maintaining the status quote with some increased expenditures.

We need pan-Canadian sector based strategies. These sector based strategies will come through a systematic review of sector specific tax measures. We need to eliminate those that are economically or environmentally counterproductive. We need to add new measures to stimulate investment in the broader public interest. We need to commit to a better building retrofit and energy efficiency strategy, perhaps modelled on the city of Toronto. We need to undertake an immediate top to bottom review of how banks, insurance companies and other financial service providers are regulated in our country.

On a more local basis, in my own constituency in the Northwest Territories the federal Minister of the Environment has been pushing the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline as though that is all the Northwest Territories and Canada needs. This is an example of muddy thinking.

Yes, we need the pipeline. However, it needs to be thought out as a larger plan for the creation of a gas industry that will stretch up and down the Mackenzie Valley, a plan that should include the construction of a highway along the Mackenzie Valley as an equal or greater priority for the government than a pipeline. The highway will set the stage for proper development of a pipeline.

*Business of Supply*

We need forward thinking, not cynical political damage control as we have with the motion today, which really will not accomplish much and will not move us forward in the direction in which we need to go. We do not need the blind attachment to the past that we see from the Conservative Party, exhibited with its approach to energy where most of the expenditures it will make are simply not appropriate.

We have discussed those at great length in the House of Commons, but we have not brought that discussion out to the country yet. We need to have a discussion in the country about how our energy systems will develop and what direction we will take, and not enclosed in a special interest group around the Prime Minister and his Minister of the Environment, which will not solve the problem.

I look forward to questions and comments.

• (1230)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, based on what I heard, I am under the impression that the NDP is opposed to the motion presented by the Liberal Party. I am not sure if that is the case, but that was the indication. Based on all the comments the member made, the discussion was that this was the wrong approach and the motion was not accurate.

I hear the New Democratic Party asking how the Liberals can criticize the economic action plan and then support it. The NDP cannot criticize the motion, then support it and then complain about somebody else criticizing and supporting something else. It has to get it straight.

The member was a former municipal politician, a mayor of a community. I have great faith in the municipalities in Burlington and across the country, and so does FCM. In a statement about the budget of January 27, Jean Perrault, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the mayor of Sherbrooke, said, "Today the federal government took concrete action to create new jobs—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Western Arctic.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Mr. Speaker, if he is confused about my speech, I am a little confused about his question.

Quite clearly I said in my speech that the NDP supports the motion. We put similar motions forward in committee where the Liberals would not support them. I outlined in greater detail the reason why we were not very happy with the budget, because that is the larger issue.

I hope the hon. member now has a clearer understanding of what I said. I will have to get back to him later to get a clear understanding about the nature of his question.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from the Northwest Territories for his very cogent comments on the motion, which the NDP supports. What is regrettable, as the member has mentioned, is it was not in the original budget or brought forward by the Liberals as an amendment.

Would the member from the Northwest Territories talk a bit more about any problems the municipalities in Canada have faced in

receiving the funds under the building Canada fund and how having it through the gas tax might enable municipalities to access money?

Would he also speak to the issue of it being fine to provide the money to municipalities to repair roads and crumbling sidewalks, but what about money for energy conservation?

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Mr. Speaker, the gas tax idea for municipalities came out of a lot of work that the leader of the New Democratic Party did when he was president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We support the concept of consistent per capita funding to municipalities for the work they require on new projects. That is exactly what the gas tax does.

The Conservatives have chosen a different approach, which not only requires the municipality to identify the project, but to get the money together, complete the project and then apply to have the dollars reimbursed. This has caused municipalities a good deal of grief in getting the money out of the building Canada fund for the past number of years. We have seen evidence of this in terms of the 4% of dollars that have been released out of billions of dollars that were promised over the last few years.

The NDP agrees that the gas tax methodology is the one to follow to get money to communities.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. The NDP is not speaking out of both sides of its mouth, that it is in favour of this motion even though it does not like what the Liberals did when they supported the budget and that the Liberals should have moved this as an amendment to the budget.

• (1235)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party put amendments forward at the committee level, which followed the same general direction the motion today follows, and the Liberals did not support them. Now they have come forward with this motion as cover.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the transit system across Canada carries 1.76 billion passengers per year. Any investment in public transit dramatically affects the quality of life for millions of Canadians. Any investment impacts on their cost of living and it greatly impacts on the environment.

According to many sources, including CUTA, there are 167 transit infrastructure projects across Canada that would stimulate the local economy of various Canadian communities while improving local transit networks. They are shovel ready. They are ready to go. For many years, different transit commissions and different mayors have been saying that we need the investment now.

What is cruel about this budget and cruel about this motion in front of the House today is that the municipalities or the commissions have no money to match the federal dollars that are being dangled in front of them. Why? Well, let us look at some facts. Of all the G8 countries or even G20 countries, Canada is the only country that contributes nothing to the operation of public transit.

Last year the total operating costs of public transit was \$44.5 billion of which 60% was generated from fare revenue, 29% from municipal governments, and only 6% came from provincial contributions. What kind of money does the federal government contribute? Nothing. Zero. Not one penny.

*Business of Supply*

When we look at transit capital costs, in 2006 it was \$1.68 billion, and 37% came from the federal and provincial governments. Actually, to be precise, most of it, the majority of it comes from provincial contributions. In the city of Toronto, for example, what was the total federal grants to municipalities? It was 2% of Toronto's \$8.7 billion budget. So there is nothing there to be applauded. Twenty-three percent came from municipal governments.

Municipal governments are trapped in high property taxes and high debt because they, alone mostly, are carrying the operation of the transit system. In Toronto, for example, a budget that I am very familiar with, it already has a \$1.6 billion capital budget. This year the property tax increase is 4%, and 2% of that 4% is actually a direct result of the Conservative government not being able to change the employment insurance program so that not one extra unemployed worker is going to get employment insurance. They are going to go on the welfare system, therefore increasing the welfare roll in Toronto by 20,000 people. That will cost \$38 million, and guess where that money comes from? Property taxes. There is not a chance that many of the municipalities have the funds to cost share this budget proposal, the money that is in front of us.

What is happening across Canada is that there is real ridership growth. Canadians want to take public transit. They want to help Canada decrease its greenhouse gas emissions. They want to reduce their carbon footprint. If we look at transit systems across Canada, there has been a 15% increase in a five year period.

Interestingly enough, the biggest growth in ridership comes from Canada's smallest municipalities, such as Middleton, Charlottetown, Welland and Yellowknife. The greater Vancouver transit link saw an increase of 7 million new trips in the last year or two. Canadians want to take public transit. They want to do something for the environment. For municipalities, more riders means more costs. When a transit system has no funding and not a penny of operating costs from the federal government, municipalities have no choices.

• (1240)

If there are more riders, they either increase property taxes or transit fares. Neither of those are good things to do to stimulate the economy. Municipalities are stuck. In the meantime, there have been reports, including a groundbreaking economic study conducted by HDR Decision Economics, that said that Canada needs a 74% increase in more transit services to unclog roads, save on commuter time and increase productivity. In total, CUTA identified \$40 billion of investment needed for the period of 2008-12. This includes the expansion of subways, streetcars and buses, and the maintenance and upkeep of the current system to accommodate more riders.

Unfortunately, the motion in front of the House of Commons is meaningless. The Liberals have the opportunity to amend the budget that is being debated in Parliament right now, whether it is in committee or at report stage tomorrow, by inserting two small clauses. We should allow the funding to flow without cost sharing and have it come through using the gas tax formula so that it is not tied up with red tape, so it is block funding, and so that municipalities and provinces will know in a very assured way that the funding will flow. This instead of the building Canada formula of project-by-project approach, which ties it all up with different legal

agreements and various project negotiations that are totally unnecessary.

It reminds me of a short story. A young man, let us call him Mike, walked by and saw a boat sinking. There were 77 people drowning. He could have thrown some rope or helped out, but because he was wearing new shoes he refused to do anything. He refused to help the people who were drowning out there. He went on his laptop and wrote out a perfect plan of how to rescue the 77 drowning people, but he would not do anything. That is what we are facing today. There will be a budget debate tomorrow. The House is debating this right now and we have this motion in front of us. Why should it not be inserted into the budget debate tomorrow?

I move the following motion: That the Liberal opposition motion be inserted into the report stage of the budget implementation bill, Bill C-10, being debated currently in Parliament, and inserted as an amendment.

I hope the House will consider this amendment.

• (1245)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park if he consents to this amendment being moved.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am not in favour of the amendment.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** There is no consent. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

I will move to questions and comments and recognize the hon. member for Burlington.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the NDP member for her intervention on this motion. It is interesting that the member called the motion meaningless, yet the NDP still intends to vote for it. That tells me something about the credibility of that party on this issue.

Just last week on February 17, the Prime Minister and the Premier of Ontario announced a \$6 billion investment, shared between the province and the federal government, for improvements to the GO Transit system in the GTA, where the member who was speaking is from. Does she think that if the Liberal premier was not happy with the investment in transit that has happened currently, not considering what has happened in the past number of years, would he have shown up and supported a transit announcement worth \$6 billion?

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Mr. Speaker, the member will know that GO Transit is, by and large, funded by the province. The province can get into debt or into deficit. Municipalities across Canada cannot run a deficit budget. They have to balance their budgets.



*Business of Supply*

The province of Ontario can go into a deficit situation, fund GO Transit, and cost share with the federal government, but that is not available to most municipalities. As I said earlier, a lot of the funding for operating public transit is done by the local municipalities. They can run a debt but not a deficit.

It is really cruel to dangle money in front of mayors all across Canada and say to them that this is our offer, even though they are drowning in property tax increases. They cannot take any of the money, but we dangle it in front of them. That is a really cruel way to go.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was interested to read the Liberal motion today. Any criminal in this country would dream to have a parole officer like the Liberal Party. When it comes to holding the government to account, Liberal members once more brought their plastic bats in to do battle and then they will all go home. Meanwhile, the crisis in our communities across Canada continues. I am getting letters from communities in my riding asking how they can meet the requirements of the new funding model because they do not have the tax base in their communities.

The ability of many of these small and rural communities to raise taxes to meet their share is simply not possible. In the city of Sudbury, tax increases had to be turned down because of the downturn in the economy. The city could not meet its share. It is having to find other means.

However, much smaller communities are being heavily impacted and they are turning to us, believing that Parliament has to have a mechanism to allow small communities to meet the bar of this so-called stimulus package. Yet, it is clear it is not there. The government is really not all that fundamentally intent on getting the money out in any significant manner and it is setting the bar too high that it knows many municipalities cannot meet.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comments on that.

• (1250)

**Ms. Olivia Chow:** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely true. The sad part is that it is precisely the smaller communities that are demonstrating the fastest growth of transit riders. If we read the reports and the studies, people in small municipalities want to have public transit because it is a viable option for them.

Canada faces an aging population. More and more seniors feel it is not in their interest to continue to drive. They prefer to take the bus. Yet, they have to wait for a long time, the bus is just not available or not going to the places they want to go. Small municipalities do not have the property tax base. They cannot run a big debt. That is why they will not be able to access the federal dollars that are being offered to them.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be standing here today speaking in support of the motion put forward by my hon. colleague from Parkdale—High Park regarding municipal infrastructure.

The general theme I would like to present to the House today deals with the situation of rural Canada and I would like to focus on that for an important reason.

The vulnerability of rural Canada right now is one that I would put in the category of high stakes. Some statistics show that over 80% of the people live primarily in urban settings and that rural areas are diminishing. As a result, many of the measures put forward in the economic stimulus package disfavour many of the over 200 rural communities that I represent. Members can well imagine how far apart we live and how spaced out we are as far as geographical regions are concerned.

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** I notice my hon. colleague finds this particularly funny but I am dealing with my own riding and not his.

I am honoured to be splitting my time with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming who will be following me today.

To put this in historical context, I would like to talk about the Canada infrastructure works program that was introduced by the federal government in 1994. As a \$6 billion temporary cost-shared initiative, it was a program that went particularly well for us in our region back in the early part of the 1990s because a lot of the infrastructure that was done in the 1960s had upgrades.

One of the biggest issues in my riding is drinking water. Many of the communities, far above the average, I might add, are currently on a boil water order. This is a major issue for reasons that are obvious. It is a universal right for everyone to have clean drinking water. My hon. colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis spoke eloquently about that and I commend him for that.

One of the things we need to talk about here is that we need the infrastructure in place, even in smaller communities, and this is not cheap. It is not inexpensive to bring the facilities up to par to allow people to have clean drinking water. I am talking about small towns with populations of 200, 400 or 500 people. The majority of the communities in my riding have 2,000 or 3,000 people. Of the over 200 towns in my riding, the largest town, Grand Falls-Windsor, has 13,000 people. To say that the delivery of infrastructure in my riding is a challenge might be considered by some as an understatement.

The municipalities of Newfoundland and Labrador have many smaller communities that are struggling to provide the services they need because of the structure we have today. In 1997, the government announced an extension of what it called phase 2, which provided an additional \$425 million and a further \$850 million. I add these numbers simply because what we are talking about here is an incredible amount of money. This, in turn, creates work beyond that. The local economy is stimulated by the construction jobs that are created. We also provide services for businesses when we want to attract business.

I talked about the water supply. If a particular fish plant closes down in my riding and another company wants to take over that fish plant, which probably employs somewhere in the vicinity of 200 to 300 workers, in order for it to do that it needs to have a good, clean, reliable water supply. Otherwise, 300 jobs or more are gone all because of the lack of infrastructure.

*Business of Supply*

Plants that rely on natural resources usually require a huge workforce. These plants are usually the only game in town, the only employer and, therefore, municipal infrastructure is incredibly important

It was expected that infrastructure funding at the time would be matched fully at the municipal level because of difficulty in raising their one-third share as a prerequisite. This is the quintessential point for me to raise today and the challenges that we have with rural infrastructure. We are talking about one-third, one-third and one-third. I will focus on the last one-third, which is the municipality's responsibility to raise that money. When we are talking about a multi-million dollar upgrade on infrastructure, that is a tremendous burden and responsibility for the municipality.

• (1255)

I would like to go back to the point I made earlier about fish plants and saw mills needing reliable municipal infrastructure in order to survive. If that game leaves town, what kind of business tax or revenue can a small municipality maintain? It needs to seek out financing from the bank but that becomes very difficult to do when its credit rating and tax base are not there.

I understand and acknowledge that there is some talk in the budget about financing but where is it and how does this work? If this is to be shovel ready, then the financing option needs to be really quick or the situation will crumble.

I would also like to talk about recreation in the sense of community centres that mostly consist of stadiums. In Newfoundland we call hockey arenas stadiums and everywhere else they are called arenas, but I will preface that and call them stadiums.

Back in 1967, we had a centennial fund that went toward building many of the stadiums in smaller communities. It was not so much an economic boom, obviously, because the revenues were somewhat limited, but these stadiums became a social centrepiece of every small community. In 1967, in the last campaign, the Liberal Party put forward a proposal that allowed the stadiums or the arenas, to be refurbished and brought up to a standard whereby the community could survive.

The plan here today is to provide money for recreation in smaller communities. It is a great idea but the nub of the issue is that it wants it cost shared fifty-fifty.

Some of my hon. colleagues over there have said that we cannot just give the municipalities a blank cheque. They are not getting a cheque at all, nothing, blank or any other kind. What we are doing is telling them that they will have a certain amount of stimulus money so their community or recreation facility can provide services, but not quite so. We need their cheque.

How will I be able to go to a place like Bishop's Falls, Botwood or Buchans and tell the people that the \$1 million they need for their stadium, that we need their \$500,000? These are towns of about 600 or 700 people. Is this financing? Will this provide them with the money they need? I really have my doubts, which is why we are debating here today. This is the issue that is repeated. People from many of the towns in my riding are calling and asking me how this will work and why they need to put up money.

My hon. colleague talked about the process by which the gas tax funding flows. The gas tax and the incremental funding is what we are looking at because it provides that money and hooks the municipalities up to an immediate investment. That is shovel ready, if that is the term we would like to throw out. I would not want to think that the only way we are applying shovel ready is when anybody in the ministry actually speaks. That would be very sad.

I spoke earlier about basic facilities like drinking water. Many towns in my riding, such as Bonavista and New West Valley, drinking water has been a problem on and off. Broadband Internet is also an issue that has not been included enough in the infrastructure spending. I acknowledge the fact that there is money in the budget, so I would like to see more detail on that as well.

I want to talk about towns like Bonavista. I have heard from New West Valley, Trinity Bay North, Little Catalina, Elliston, Botwood, and Buchans. These are the towns that are the lifeblood of what we know as rural Canada but the challenges and the bar that the government has set is so high that this will prove to be insurmountable for most of the small communities. They are the lifeblood and that is the point I wanted to make today.

• (1300)

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's comments and I, like him, have a lot of small communities in my constituency.

One of the things we talked about when we were discussing the plan and how it would work was the very fact that smaller communities have a smaller tax base. Nonetheless, since the announcement of the building Canada fund, my communities, I suspect like his, have stepped up to the plate and have made decisions, but they were not easy decisions. I have sat on a small municipal council and I know how tough it is for those councillors to make a decision to invest a small tax base in a specific project, be it a recreation complex or a water or sewer project.

Nonetheless, there are ways to do things. I think of my own experience growing up in a small community of 100 people. We were able to put sewers and water into that community by being a little creative. We had a little help from the government, but also the will of the people dictated to us that it needed to be done and therefore it was.

In the member's comments, he talked about the gas tax. It is important for him to know, and perhaps he does not, but this year the province that he represents will see their gas tax go from \$16 million last year to \$32.9 million, more than double. I suspect that his communities will tap into this and take great advantage of it. I would ask the member to comment on that.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his suggestion and I do empathize with the situation when it comes to smaller communities.

The question of the dollar values that he mentions is not in question here. The question is the method by which the money is delivered. I am hearing that apparently there will be a lot more money than that going to my province if it is being matched at that one-third, one-third, one-third level. That is the problem with the building Canada fund.

*Business of Supply*

What the member needs to understand is that the building Canada mechanism is one that will set them back. Only 4% of it will go out the door. I am talking about the insurmountable ways in which these people need to come up with the money. The fifty-fifty on recreation is a situation as well. That is what we are trying to come up with here. If the total pot of money is one that can be directly accessed, then great, but we are not talking about that.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate where the hon. member is coming from. My grandfather emigrated from his province at the turn of the century to Canada.

I support the opinions the member has put forward but I would put forward that it is equally important that the larger municipalities gain the benefit of this gas tax mechanism as well as the smaller communities.

In my province, both small and large communities have borne the brunt of the boom from the tar sands, which both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party are apparently supporting to be expedited even further than it has been in the past. As a result of that, we have burgeoning populations in both the larger municipalities and in the smaller municipalities stretching between my city and the town of Fort McMurray.

I am wondering if the member will speak to whether or not, when we have a booming economy, we should be putting pressure on the municipalities to come up with half the money.

• (1305)

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the NDP who represents the Edmonton area. Her point is very valid. We received correspondence from the largest city in our province, St. John's. Councillor Tom Hann said that the availability of and access to that transit money needed to be done in a quick fashion.

I do sympathize with her in the sense of the economic boom situation. A lot of people from my province are actually contributing greatly to the particular boom situation that she is talking about. In the last little while, it has taken a few hits, obviously, with the price of oil, but, nonetheless, I do empathize with her. I see the need regarding that particular situation because I also see that need in our situation, where we do have a burgeoning economy on the east coast of my province.

For that very reason, the growth that is involved in this particular situation is one that will dictate that the facilities and the channels by which these local governments receive that money, such as the gas tax transfer, will be that much more essential and things like the building Canada fund need to subscribe to that way of thinking.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before we resume debate, I would like to remind members that in terms of the question and answer period, most of the speeches today are 10 minutes. That means there is a five minute question and answer period. The Chair is trying to get two questions and answers in. I am reluctant to cut people off, but if members do not look at me for a cue, or are not mindful of the time, I will begin to cut both questioners and respondents off in order to have a fair allocation of time.

I ask the indulgence and cooperation of all hon. members as I try to give everyone a fair chance to ask questions and the members to have an opportunity to respond to them.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor. I come from northeastern Ontario. I have often said that rural northern Ontario and Newfoundland have a lot in common. Funding is one of the big issues, especially in the rural areas when we want to build infrastructure.

Today I stand in the House not only as a member of Parliament but also as a former municipal councillor, one who understands what happens with infrastructure and what exists right now in the aging infrastructure that Canadian municipalities are faced with.

It is aging in that the road surface looks okay. We have a lot of frost driving in potholes and making it difficult, and that is something that is apparent, but the average Canadian who drives over those roads does not realize what is underneath, especially in older communities where the average age of the infrastructure underground is between 80 and 100 years. That is old material that has been buried there for a long time. We never know where it is going to break and when it is going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, you are from a rural setting as well, so you can understand what kind of infrastructure work the smaller communities actually look forward to and have to put in place just to keep the same standard that exists at this time.

The motion today states that at least half of the proposed infrastructure funding be distributed on a per capita basis over the next two years. That is using the gas tax model. That is probably one of the most important things out there.

This will allow municipalities of all sizes to participate in this program in a quick and effective manner. This will allow funding to be injected directly into the economy. It will invest in infrastructure and allow for infrastructure to take place. More important, it will create jobs evenly in all the communities across Canada.

We only have one chance at this stimulus. We are in for tough times and we want to make sure that it is done right and that it is done effectively. More important, one thing we really have to look at is that it is timely. It is how we get it out there.

One of the complaints I hear from many municipalities in my riding is that there is just too much red tape that exists within the program. There are long bureaucratic delays. Municipalities are also trying to work the program into their budgets. They are already three-quarters of the way into their budgets and they are having to reshuffle things in order to take advantage of the existing program. That is reshuffling things for the possibility of getting in on that program. That causes a lot of problems and a lot of delays. They put the money there and then find out they did not qualify. We want to see a constant flow of money that is going to help the communities plan for their infrastructure and be able to come up with it.

*Business of Supply*

Many members of the House have mentioned the concept of one-third, one-third, one-third. A large municipality can put a certain amount aside or reshift things and that is fine, but when it is a community with a population of 300 or 1,000, one-third of a project is a lot. It really bites into the infrastructure and causes a lot of problems with the infrastructure that exists in smaller communities.

When we make it a flat amount, such as the gas tax, on a per capita basis, the model not only gets rid of delays, but it is not influenced by politics. It promotes fairness. This is not about allowing the government or the party in power, regardless of which party it is, to go to the trough and help themselves to it. Other parties have done it in the past, regardless of colour, but what I am saying is that this makes it fair for everyone. All communities are treated equally.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has cited the gas tax model as the best way to flow money into projects quickly and it affects, as I said earlier, new infrastructure and it stimulates the economy.

The Conservative government has a reputation of offering money through announcement and it looks good, but once the press release expires, unfortunately so does the money. It has been mentioned earlier and I will mention it again, that in 2007 the Conservatives launched the \$8.8 billion building Canada fund. The first year zero dollars flowed. We do not want to see history repeat itself.

• (1310)

The gas tax model would get the money where it is needed right away, and that is in the hands of Canadian municipalities. Mayors are saying that the Conservative model does not allow access to funds in a timely manner. As I mentioned earlier, it is the bureaucratic red tape that really slows things down. The gas tax model not only gets the money out there, it allows municipalities to plan on it.

I had the chance to speak to a number of mayors in my riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming in northeastern Ontario. If we made the changes, this would allow them to take on projects that they would otherwise be unable to undertake. It is not the huge projects they were looking at; it is the day-to-day projects, the capital projects that have been put off because they need that amount of money up front. By allowing them to have all the money, they can budget and they can put money in. Otherwise they would be shut out completely. That is one of the problems with the one-third, one-third, one-third model.

It allows smaller communities to go forward with urgent upgrades. This plan guarantees funding to municipalities. One thing that is very important is it removes the use it or lose it approach which is strongly used by the Conservative government. It allows smaller communities to put the money aside for multi-year projects. Yes, we will hear the argument that if we give them the money they are going to bank it and wait until next year and the stimulus is needed now. That is a possibility, but it allows them to plan ahead and put other money aside so they can get started with some spending on the planning and then have the major project, or even the smaller project, go ahead in a timely and effective manner.

Communities make up the foundation of this great country. What happens so often is that foundations start to crumble and we just stand back and watch them fall because different levels of government say it is not theirs to take care of and they do not want to be bothered with it and it is not their responsibility. We have heard it from the finance minister in the past about municipalities and we will probably hear it in the future, but what we have to do is look at the bigger picture.

The municipalities are the foundation of this country. If we do not have a strong foundation, it crumbles and the house above it falls as well, it is just a matter of time. In order to keep this country strong, we have to keep that strong foundation and keep our municipalities operating in a strong and effective way.

• (1315)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming for his remarks. One of the things we have heard a lot from across the floor is the per capita sum of the gas tax. If we did per capita by municipality, and I do not know how many thousands of municipalities there are in Canada, it does get diluted. As I pointed out earlier, just because a project goes to one municipality, it does not mean the jobs all go to the people in that municipality. It does not mean the benefit goes just to the people in that municipality; it goes to everyone in that region.

It is a bit fallacious. If we are going to follow that per capita idea, we might as well divide up the money and send everyone a cheque and nothing would get done. We need to put common sense in this.

What the member says has some reasonable aspects to it, but it is not the most practical way to go. I would remind him there is a \$2 billion credit facility to borrow from. For municipalities that do not have the money to get the project done, they submit the bill, get the money, and pay it back. It is a great process. As soon as the budget bill is passed, we can get on with it. I would like the member's comments on some of those aspects.

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question about per capita. I will be honest that it was a concern I had as well for smaller communities and smaller municipalities, but the motion states that half of the money would be spread out that way and the other half would continue on the larger projects. That is the best of both worlds.

It allows for smaller communities to get money injected right away. What happens all too often, especially with some of the applications, is that some communities are left out. They do not have the money to put up to fund the projects. By allowing the money to flow directly into those municipalities, there is no delay or wait. The money is directly injected at the municipal level to get projects up and going. The people of Canada benefit right away. The municipalities do not have to wait. They do not have to apply. More important, they do not have to get bogged down by red tape.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I both share vast sections in northern Ontario and I think we understand the problems that many of our smaller communities are facing. In the past, when we have had these one-third, one-third, one-third programs, there were a few winners in every round and there were many losers. The backlog of infrastructure projects continued to grow, and especially the small communities tended to be left out.

What we are seeing with this announcement is that it is not an economic stimulus because it will be at least a year before the money flows. We saw that with the building Canada fund. Meanwhile, there are communities that are unable to access the money because they do not have the tax base to participate. It is a process that will create winners and losers, and that will happen right across Canada.

I think my hon. colleague would agree that in northern Ontario, especially with the aging populations and rural regions that we represent, our communities are going to suffer in some ways much more than larger areas that have the infrastructure dollars already and have the kind of tax base that can support this.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague's opinion on this.

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has made a very good point. As I said in my discourse, smaller communities do need that funding. It would be great to have the full amount go out to them, but by having the money go out now, it allows them to act, it allows them at least to get going with existing projects. So many small communities across northern Ontario are left out when it comes to the building Canada program. It is just not done in a timely manner and, more important, it costs money. It cuts into the money they have to run their organization. To put the capital into infrastructure, they have to take it out of operations or plan for it.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre talked about borrowing money. It is nice to say that the communities can borrow money, but if they do not have the tax base or the credit rating and they are small communities, it really does not help. It does not take into account small municipalities in northern Ontario and much of rural Canada.

What is nice about this program is that on a per capita basis, the money is put into the community. It can upgrade, and if it wants, and if it is fortunate enough to have a certain amount of money put aside, it can still go the next step and apply for the other half and get the larger projects done. However, it is the day-to-day infrastructure that needs to be done. Especially nowadays, as we drive through a lot of the smaller communities in northern Ontario, as the frost comes out of the ground, we start seeing more and more potholes, bumps that we know were not there when the frost was in, and that creates some permanent damage. If they are not taken care of right away, they end up causing a problem. The important thing is that we get that money right out into the community and get that infrastructure in place so that Canadians can benefit from it.

• (1320)

**Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to some of the recent first nations infrastructure investments our government has taken through budget 2009, Canada's economic action plan.

Of course the action plan includes spending for other aboriginal groups in the north and elsewhere, but I only have ten minutes. I will be splitting my time with the member for Portage—Lisgar, so I will restrict my comments to first nations.

It is no secret that improved infrastructure lies at the core of healthy and productive first nation communities. Ultimately, improvements to infrastructure help stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life on-reserve. The government is committed to doing just that, as it has shown over the last three years.

With Canada's economic action plan, the government provides \$1.4 billion over two years for specific initiatives aimed at improving the well-being and prosperity of aboriginal people in Canada. These new investments include \$515 million to accelerate ready-to-go first nations infrastructure projects, focusing on schools, water, and critical community services such as health clinics, nurses' residences and policing infrastructure, to name just a few.

These investments include \$200 million over the next two years for building ten new schools on reserves and three major school renovations. I might add that the minister announced the new school in Burnt Church, New Brunswick, just today. Our government recognizes that first nations children need the best possible learning facilities to help them succeed in their studies and to start building a solid foundation for realizing their dreams.

Another \$165 million will be invested in initiatives to accelerate water and waste water infrastructure projects. We all know that access to clean, safe and reliable drinking water is an essential requirement for the health and well-being of first nations communities and is vital to improving the quality of life for first nations on-reserve.

Our government recognizes it has specific responsibilities in regard to aboriginal issues such as housing, and we are determined to fulfill them. The hard truth is that too many residents of first nations communities live in substandard housing.

The causes are complex and varied. Many communities and individuals cannot access enough capital to build and renovate homes, while other communities lack the capacity to manage housing stock effectively. That is why we also announced \$400 million over the next two years to support on-reserve housing. It is dedicated to new housing projects, remediation of existing housing stock and complementary housing activities.

Last week in British Columbia, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development announced that up to \$50 million will be invested in on-reserve housing within that province.

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These investments are in addition to the \$1 billion annually invested in first nations community infrastructure, which includes housing, water and waste water systems, education facilities, and other infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

More specifically, planned expenditures for 2008-09 include \$236 million to support a wide range of school infrastructure projects, including operation and maintenance, study and design, renovations, minor repairs and new construction; \$368 million to address water issues in first nations communities, including upgrading water and waste water facilities, on-reserve maintenance in the operation of the facilities, training, and moving forward with initiatives under a first nations water and waste water action plan; and \$276 million for on-reserve housing needs. A portion of this annual investment provides an average of 2,300 new housing units and 3,300 renovations in first nations communities across the country. Finally, there is \$442 million to support ongoing projects such as roads and bridges, electrification, and infrastructure in first nations communities across the country.

• (1325)

All these investments to support infrastructure in first nations communities focus on mitigating health and safety risks, maximizing the lifespan of a physical asset, ensuring infrastructure meets applicable codes and standards, and ensuring community infrastructure is managed in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Our government is taking action to create change through strong partnerships and constructive leadership. We are helping to improve learning environments for first nations students, increasing access to safe drinking water and improving the quality of life on reserve with new housing projects. We are investing in projects that will provide lasting, sustainable benefits for first nations communities and we are doing all of this in partnership with first nations, other levels of government and ultimately all Canadians.

We believe that for real change, there is no other way to operate. We must do things and act together. No person, group, government or single level of government has all the answers. The answer to our shared challenges does not rest on having one level of government take action. That only sustains the status quo. Instead, we reach our goals through genuine partnership, and the potential life-altering results of this approach are evident all around us. Our partnerships are working.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the comments from the hon. member across the way. It is good to hear that there might be new funding coming to the first nations of Canada, particularly in the area of safe drinking water.

However, I would ask the member if he could perhaps clarify. It is one thing to keep promising more money to resolve a problem attested to by hundreds of boil-water advisories; it is another thing to come forward with the actual legislation that was promised last year. In addition, it is my understanding that when these moneys are passed over for safe drinking water and waste water facilities, by a contribution agreement the liability passes to the first nations.

I understand that is a concern for the first nations. Could the member please address those matters?

**Mr. John Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I know that when we formed the government three years ago, we inherited a priority list of water systems that needed to be fixed. That list was something like 180 communities long. We have reduced the list to under 60 communities. We have an action plan to further reduce it over the next fiscal year. That is major progress. We are getting it done. Governments before us did not get it done.

In terms of putting those systems in place, there is also a training component, and the community is involved. We are creating a sustainable situation so that these systems do not fall into disrepair.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like clarifications from my colleague on certain points. He speaks of hundreds of millions of dollars invested by his government in various projects. On the other hand, there are some specific projects in my riding. The people of the Eel River Bar First Nation have been waiting for two major things for years, ever since this Conservative government has been in place. There has been absolutely no movement on them. They are waiting for the water supply for their aboriginal heritage garden. There have been no announcements, no work has started. They are waiting for the rest of the funding to be able to go ahead.

It is all very well to talk of money here and money there, but where is that money? When will the work start? Or rather, when will they have permission to start on it, and when will the federal government give them the necessary money to finish the project?

The truth is that the Conservatives are giving absolutely nothing concrete. There are lots of fine promises, lots of fancy words, but when it comes right down to it, nothing is being done.

When will all this materialize into concrete actual projects?

• (1330)

[*English*]

**Mr. John Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of the specifics of the question from the member opposite, but I will say that we have been delivering. We have been auditing. We have announced some real results and reductions in unsafe water systems. We have been delivering on other infrastructure needs in first nations communities.

Perhaps the member opposite does not want to hear it. He can talk quite loudly. However, I will say that we will take his question under advisement. If I can let him know anything specific, I will, but I can tell him that we are making announcements routinely. There will be a lot of school announcements upcoming. There will be water system announcements upcoming. As recently as today, the minister is in New Brunswick announcing a new school.

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**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member dealt to a great extent with aboriginal questions in his speech. That is not the angle I am going to take with respect to my question to him.

We are discussing infrastructure because it is part of a stimulus package. A lot of people believe that it is government's role, and government's role only, to stimulate a comeback in this global recession. That member is a good Conservative who believes the market has a role to play.

Certainly governments in some places also have a role to play, but there are some things the government has not done. Our government has not stepped forward to nationalize corporations. We have not stepped forward with protectionist legislation. We are trying to stay away from nationalization and protectionism. We are also trying to stay away from overregulation, but we have gone into deficit.

Does the member believe that the infrastructure spending we are bringing forward is the approach to take, rather than taking the approach of putting forward long, ongoing programs?

**Mr. John Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely do believe in these kinds of stimulus packages that deal with shovel-ready infrastructure.

For example, in order for the money in budget 2009 to go to the 10 new schools, the qualification is that they must be ready-to-go schools. This will help clear up some of the backlog and achieve the stimulus goal, while at the same time addressing a real need. That is obviously complementary to the question.

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the motion before us. The government has delivered unprecedented investments to Canada's economy through infrastructure programs. This fact is undeniable.

Back in November 2007, we announced the historic building Canada plan. This plan invests \$33 billion in long-term predictable funding to help provinces, territories and communities of all sizes. It was a necessary boost to our cities, towns and municipalities, and will help modernize our roads, bridges, water systems and other infrastructure developments.

After 13 long years of inaction from the previous Liberal governments, we made critical choices to help benefit the quality of life for all Canadians. This is infrastructure money put towards the foundation of our country to create key investments to benefit future generations.

Earlier this year Canada's finance minister delivered Canada's economic action plan in this very chamber. It addressed the current economic uncertainty affecting Canadians, as well as people around the globe. This plan will stimulate economic growth, create jobs and support Canadian families.

By accelerating key infrastructure investments, this government will provide almost \$12 billion additional stimulus for our economy, above and beyond our \$33 billion building Canada plan.

Our economic action plan clearly lays out the framework that our government is taking to invest in our economy, create jobs and

support Canadian families through sound investment in infrastructure.

This \$12 billion boost to our economy is an accelerated infrastructure investment and it includes a \$4 billion infrastructure stimulus fund, \$2 billion to accelerate construction at colleges and universities, \$1 billion to create a new green infrastructure fund, \$500 million to support construction of new community recreation facilities and upgrades to existing facilities, and accelerating existing provincial, territorial-based funding, \$25 million to all provinces.

We are committed to providing funding to the priority projects Canadian families can use most. We have shown this through these programs. Our prudent investments and responsible decisions made before this global crisis hit Canada seem even more critical with the benefit of hindsight.

While some in the benches opposite still refuse to vote to support our action plan and to help Canadian families now, we are proposing immediate action to better our economy, to improve the quality of life for Canadians, and to seek ways to build a better country for our children and our grandchildren.

Although we have taken many great strides, we cannot act alone. No single level of government can address this country's infrastructure needs. Our ability to fund projects is dependent on our partners and we will work closely with these partners, with provinces, territories and municipalities to ensure the greatest results.

My colleague, the transport and infrastructure minister, showed this commitment through the consultations he held with the leaders in provinces, territories and municipalities across Canada. This minister consulted community leaders, stakeholders and other respective groups.

My hon. colleague worked hand in hand to find ways that all levels of government can work together to highlight priority projects and discover areas where the acceleration of funding was possible, as well as determining additional steps necessary to ensure that this progress was possible. We will continue to work with all levels of government in order to get projects moving and provide a much-needed shot in the arm to our economy.

As a further result of these consultations, the minister was able to develop our government's five point action plan as touched on by my colleague earlier to further guide our efforts towards accelerating infrastructure investments.

The first point in this action plan is working with provinces and territories to put key major infrastructure projects on the fast track through the building Canada fund major infrastructure component. We are also accelerating funding for projects in smaller communities through the building Canada fund communities component.

This acceleration requires the collaborative input of all levels of government to see success. Partnerships are necessary from all levels of government for this process to succeed. Our government is committed to ensuring this is possible.

For Canada's future we are working together with our counterparts from across the country to improve the lives of all Canadians.

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•(1335)

We are putting people to work. We are creating new jobs, putting shovels in the ground, helping construction sectors across the country, and spending money in key development projects which will help future generations.

While different funds under our overarching infrastructure plan operate differently, each one of them is based on partnership. These partnerships are the key elements in the successful delivery of our government's economic action plan.

We have worked and we are continuing to work with our partners to cut red tape, streamline approvals, and get shovels in the ground faster. We want to see Canadians at work in their communities and benefiting from our investments. We are looking forward to new cultural and sports facilities opening across the country, and being able to drive on safer and improved roads and bridges.

We have consulted with our provincial and territorial partners through this entire process. We have listened to municipal leaders and municipal associations, and we have responded. We established programs that will lead to targeted infrastructure investments and will lay the foundation for a stronger economy and a better Canada.

While others choose to sit back and do nothing, we are standing up for Canadians. We are forming partnerships to work in collaboration with our colleagues across this country to identify projects which will get shovels in the ground tomorrow, put people to work, and boost our economy to benefit the quality of life for all Canadians.

•(1340)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her speech. However, I feel that I must clarify certain things.

She says that her government wants to speed things up, that it wants shovels in the ground so that projects can go ahead. That certainly sounds good. If that is all there is to it, then why has the City of Edmundston's sewer division project not yet been approved? Why can the city not get an answer, and why is it being told that it might be included in the next round of funding? The money is available right now. The member says that her government wants shovels in the ground, so why is the City of Edmundston being told, "We will see"?

The truth is that it is not yet in a position to deliver the goods to the various communities, towns and cities. If it were, then the City of Edmundston would certainly not be hearing that it will have to wait until later. Instead, it would be told, "Yes, we are going ahead with it now". Why have these projects not been approved, and why is the work not getting underway right now? Why?

[English]

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, it is a priority for this government, and I believe for all members who support this economic plan, that we do get the funding to municipalities, to cities and to towns as soon as we can. We want to work together with our partners, but we cannot do it unless we listen to municipalities.

I know that as I travelled across my riding, municipalities were saying to me that they were pleased with this government, the progress that we have made, and the increases that we have made in the gas tax transfers to the municipalities. They are recognizing the work that we are doing. That is why they are very excited about our plan and we are moving forward on that.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague. I guess there is a fundamental problem with credibility here because we know that the present finance minister is pretty much the Mr. Magoo of the economic meltdown. First there was no recession, then we missed the recession, and then there was a technical recession. Now we are in a synchronized recession. All the way along, everything was fine. Now we hear the member telling us that the government is going to get the money out immediately when it took the government a year—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance on a point of order.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely inappropriate and intolerant language to be used in this House. We have respected individuals, and especially the minister should be respected. The least he could do is show a little bit of respect.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I am not sure if that is a point of order. I would ask the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay to use respectful parliamentary language in his discourse in this House.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly support that. I would think though, if you check the record, Mr. Speaker, that the question of Mr. Magoo has been raised and it has been deemed appropriate because it is actually a term of endearment. It is not an attack.

Nonetheless I was interrupted, so I hope that does not take away from my time.

The question I am asking my hon. colleague is whether she is asking this House to believe that this money is going to move immediately because we have seen that it took them over a year to get the building Canada fund out? She tells us that she has talked to municipalities. All the municipalities we have spoken to say that this will slow down projects. It will not help the smaller communities that cannot meet their one-third—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, Canadians spoke in the last election on which Minister of Finance they respect, which Minister of Finance they want to lead this country in a time of economic crisis, and that is the current Minister of Finance. I am very proud and pleased to be able to work together with him.



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I would like to add, if I may, that if the member truly cares about Canadians and municipalities, he would support the budget and he would work together with us to get this money moving out. He would not be denigrating people in the House. He would be working in a positive manner.

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know members across the way keep asking: What about this project and what about that project? In my community there are many projects coming forward. Communities are excited about this kind of a plan and we have consulted with them. We have not gone out and said this is what they are going to do.

Would the member for Portage—Lisgar please comment on some of her priorities?

• (1345)

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner:** Mr. Speaker, indeed, we are receiving calls and input every day from mayors, like Mayor Martin Harder from Winkler, Mayor Ken Brennan from Portage la Prairie. They are excited about what we are doing. They are asking questions and we are providing answers. We are working together with our partners to get this money moving out quickly and to see communities built.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to stand and debate the motion today. What concerns us most about the budget is that many small municipalities throughout the country are unable to get involved in the infrastructure program because they do not have the entry level dollars with which to play.

As far as a stimulus package goes, we see infrastructure as a very important and worthwhile investment to help the economy get going, to help with our environment, to deal with water, sewage treatment problems and whatnot across the land. We know that construction jobs and projects that are shovel-ready will provide benefits to many communities and contractors within smaller communities. Therefore, we see it as a very worthwhile stimulus package.

However, what we have trouble with and what we have heard from various communities over the last number of months is that some communities are so stretched currently they cannot come up with those 30¢ dollars to play in this market. If the federal government is there, that is great. If the provincial governments are there, that is great.

I look at my own constituency. The regional municipality of Cape Breton, which has a population of about 116,000 people, is currently carrying a debt load of about \$115 million, and that is of great concern. Unless we make this amendment and change the way the money is delivered, it is not certain it can seize those opportunities.

That is probably one of the greatest concerns and is probably the greatest rationale for advancing the opposition motion today.

I should also identify the fact, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

Another municipal unit within my riding is the town of Canso. Many members in the House have heard a fair amount about Canso over the last number of years. The community has been very much challenged since the closure in the offshore fishery and the depletion of its cod stocks. We have not seen any kind of resurgence in the cod stocks. People have left the community and moved on and industries

have left. When that happens, the tax base shrinks and with the shrinking tax base, we see fewer revenues. When we handcuff communities like that, each year it gets tougher, debt is accrued and it becomes more of a challenge for them to get by.

As well, these communities are further burdened by constraints and by regulations that are put forward by provincial governments. We want to move to greener, more sustainable communities. However, when these regulations are placed on these communities, we know there is a greater degree of burden.

• (1350)

We know that towns, villages and municipal units are really the children of the provinces. They are created by the provinces and serve the functions delegated by each province. We all understand that. The provincial governments have various programs from province to province to help out. I believe, as do most people who are involved in the administration of municipal affairs, that the federal government has a role. Through the development of the infrastructure program, there are some benefits, and we support those benefits and the opportunities for the municipalities that can take part in this program. However, there still remains a group of municipalities, towns and cities that are unable to seize these opportunities.

This is the essence and thrust of our motion today.

I am willing to take some questions on this. I am sure the members of the government would like to know more about this.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I suppose I am kind of concerned about today's opposition day motion. While I think it might be anchored in good sentiment, it is very poorly founded.

I had the pleasure of attending the National Governors Association meetings in Washington, DC this past weekend. Its whole theme was infrastructure. A number of the experts who came forward specifically praised the building Canada approach as it pertained to infrastructure. They talked about the importance of ensuring there was a state match and a municipal match to projects. This would ensure the projects were indeed in the best interests of the community as well as amplify the amount of investment that the federal government made.

We are talking about \$12 billion in total infrastructure funding that will lead to \$36 billion worth of projects being completed. This is great news for Canadians. It will employ a lot of Canadians. The member should support it.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, our amendment to the budget made perfect sense to most Canadians. We wanted to ensure that the moneys was being spent, that the stimulus package was getting out the door and having some kind of impact. Through the distribution of the gas tax, we have seen a template that has been effective, that has worked, that has brought benefit to many communities. It was one that was brought forward by the previous Liberal government.

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All we are saying is put more money into that template, into that program. That is where we will get the benefit, not just for those communities but for the economy. That is how to get this economy going again.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I always love to hear my colleague from Cape Breton speak. Even though he is not always prepared, being a Cape Bretoner, he is ready to speak.

Being from Cape Breton, he has the smaller communities just like I have in northern Ontario. We know how these small communities have benefited from the gas tax. They are left out time and time again from the bigger infrastructure projects. They do not have a tax base to compete against bigger municipalities.

If this is an economic stimulus package, do we need to have, as the Conservatives are insinuating, proof of buy-ins so that the projects are worthy? Does he not think any small town in Cape Breton has enough infrastructure projects that if they were given the money immediately, just like any small community in northern Ontario, they would put it to good and immediate use rather than drag out—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, I totally concur with my colleague for Timmins—James Bay in his concern that size should not matter. Smaller communities should certainly qualify. That was the fairness in the gas tax plan. That is why we thought all communities would benefit from the initiative put forward by the previous government, and it has proven successful.

This is why we would like to see the government move in that direction. It would be much to the benefit of all Canadians.

• (1355)

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, those of us who have been in municipal government, and there are a considerable number of us in the House, have gone through the difficulty that municipalities have in raising money for capital programs and projects through debentures. At this time, the credit crunch affecting consumers is also affecting municipalities.

Could the member apply himself to the concept of the federal government working with the provinces to front-end load a revolving account through CMHC that would allow, on the basis of those projects that contribute substantively to the reduction of carbon, work on retrofitting housing, building transit systems and so on?

Would the member give some consideration, especially when we are getting quarterly reports, that—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, we are very fortunate on this side of the House to have members in our caucus who have vast experience with municipal administration, like my hon. colleague. He has made a huge contribution toward past legislation developed by this caucus.

That is an idea that merits investigation. I would hope the government would seize on that potential suggestion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this Liberal opposition motion. As you know, I served two terms, six years, as a municipal councillor in Edmundston, where I was born. It was an extraordinary experience. You should see all the infrastructure projects a municipality may have to carry out during the life of the municipal government in order to provide quality service and give people a better quality of life. The municipalities must provide these services. And we must never forget that the mayor and municipal councillors form the level of government that is closest to the people, and they know best what the people need.

Today, the Liberal motion is relatively simple. It asks that the Conservative government agree to take a portion of the money that should be invested in the infrastructure program to stimulate the economy and transfer that portion to the wonderful gasoline tax rebate program that we, the Liberals, put in place.

Today, municipalities, cities and towns of all sizes are realizing that they need to carry out their infrastructure projects now. If we want to help our communities and stimulate local economies, we must put people to work, and the infrastructure programs are certainly a good way to do that. But money is not flowing to communities at present. They have infrastructure projects and they are waiting. This government is telling cities and towns that their turn will come and that they will be able to go ahead with their projects at some point.

In fact, according to the Conservative government, there is money in the budget for infrastructure. This means that there should be shovels in the ground right away, and people should be working now. But these cities and towns are being told that their projects will have to wait. We have to wonder why there is a pressing need, yet they are being told to wait.

These municipalities need appropriate infrastructure so that they can serve residents appropriately. If we want to make sure that these services are available and these municipalities continue to develop, if we want to stimulate the economy by funding infrastructure, then we also have to make sure that the municipalities can have the money not in one year, two years, three years or 10 years, but right now—

• (1400)

**The Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, but as it is 2 o'clock, we must move on to statements by members. The member will have seven minutes to continue his remarks when debate resumes.

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### ROBERT HORNER

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in memoriam of a superb parliamentarian, the late Dr. Bob Horner, who served as the member of Parliament for Mississauga North and Mississauga West from 1984 to 1993.

Sadly for all who knew him, Dr. Bob passed away last June and the people of Mississauga bid their farewell to him, most fittingly, on Canada Day 2008.

Dr. Bob was born in Shawville, Quebec and graduated from the University of Guelph. He served first as a member of the RCMP and subsequently as a veterinarian for 25 years in Mississauga. As a member of Parliament, he chaired the parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General.

During his professional and political career, Dr. Bob saw Mississauga grow from a largely rural community to the vibrant, diverse and prosperous city of over 700,000 people that it is today.

Dr. Bob reached out to and connected with Canadians of all backgrounds, made them feel welcome and represented their views with passion in the House of Commons. He was always ready with a helping hand and a generous sense of humour. He is survived by his lovely wife Elayne, daughter Catherine, sons Christopher and Mark, and five grandchildren.

I thank Dr. Bob. May my friend rest. He served his family, his community and his country well.

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### RICHMOND HILL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce the official opening of the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts which will occur on February 28. The centre will be a home for Richmond Hill's diverse arts community and will present an array of artists from across Canada and around the world.

A strong economy must be strong in arts and culture, which is why I continuously supported this important endeavour.

Opening night will feature Canadian superstar, Louise Pitre, the debut of the Richmond Hill Philharmonic Orchestra and the 130 voice choir from the Bayview Secondary School.

Planning for the 2009-2010 season is already under way and will include touring Broadway productions, internationally renowned performers and the world premier of a new work from Modern Times Stage Company.

The centre will be a great addition to Richmond Hill and will also be the largest and the most technologically sophisticated performance venue in York region.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the mayor and council and Michael Grit, the theatre manager.

### Statements by Members

As Canada's former prima ballerina, Karen Kain, put it well: "Where the arts flourish, life flourishes, where the arts are ignored, life is impoverished".

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### L'ARRIÈRE SCÈNE THEATRE

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the economic strength of culture in Montérégie is undeniable. It represents thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic benefits.

The L'Arrière Scène theatre in Beloeil is part of this economic force. It is a concrete example of the devastating impact of cuts to two programs, namely PromArt and Trade Routes. Since 1980, this dramatic arts centre for children and youth has gone on eight European tours, in Scandinavia to be exact. This year they cannot go.

By voting for this budget, the Liberals and the Conservatives have voted against promoting Quebec and Canadian culture abroad.

According to a study, 59% of tours scheduled for 2009-10 are threatened by the cuts to these programs. For the following seasons, 90% of tours are jeopardized. This is the result of a Conservative-Liberal coalition. Good work.

\* \* \*

[English]

### SHAUGHNESSY PARK SCHOOL

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, remarkable is the only word that can describe the students at Shaughnessy Park School in my constituency of Winnipeg North who won the National Stop Racism Video Competition.

It is remarkable especially since this marks the ninth time out of ten years the competition has been in existence that Shaughnessy Park School students under the direction of Mitchell Rygiel have won, this time with two commercials entitled "We're all Wieners!" and "Racism: Inappropriate for All Ages".

Fighting racism is important and this award highlights how it can be done in a positive way.

In recent weeks we have seen flashes of racism and anti-Semitism in Canada, particularly on some campuses.

Shaughnessy Park School students offer us a model for vigilance and persistence in speaking out against hatred, racism and anti-Semitism and raising important issues in the context of democratic debate, tolerance and respect.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

### TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME

**Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to talk about violent crime in Calgary.

*Statements by Members*

While crime is growing in our city, we are fortunate to have the leadership of police chief, Rick Hansen, Alberta justice minister, Allison Redford, and our federal government working together in a positive, coordinated way to combat this scourge.

Last spring, Parliament passed Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act. Among other things, this legislation implemented new bail provisions that will keep those accused of serious gun crimes off the streets while awaiting trial.

This government is continuing to move forward on its anti-crime agenda. Earlier today, the Minister of Justice introduced Bill C-14, the next step in our anti-crime agenda.

The new law will target gang violence and organized crime, including gang murders, drive-by shootings and additional protection for police and peace officers.

Calgarians want action on crime now and that is what we intend to deliver.

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[Translation]

**HOCKEY**

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, February 21, 2009, will no doubt remain forever etched in the memories of the citizens of Campbellton and Restigouche for it was on that date that the 9th annual Hockey Day in Canada was broadcast live from Campbellton.

Every year, two famous CBC personalities, Ron MacLean and Don Cherry, move their studio to a Canadian community located away from the major centres.

The hosts used the day as an opportunity to talk about those who actively contribute to the region's vitality and economic prosperity through hockey. They paid tribute to the players, the parents, and the volunteers.

Hockey clinics were held throughout the day, attended by former players of the National Hockey League, and local teams played against one another.

Another popular attraction of this event was of course the presence of the Stanley Cup at the Civic Centre in Campbellton. For several hours, fans were able to have their picture taken with the famous NHL trophy.

The event's organizing committee made the day a great success both regionally and nationally. We owe a vote of thanks to them for working so hard for the people of Restigouche.

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[English]

**ROBERT THOMAS JAMES MITCHELL**

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to remember Corporal Robert Thomas James Mitchell, a son, a soldier, a husband and a father of three. He was also a member of Canada's Forces in Afghanistan.

Corporal Mitchell was killed on October 3, 2006 when Taliban insurgents attacked Canadian soldiers assisting in road construction near Kandahar.

His mother, Carol, recently delivered a message to newly trained soldiers in Meaford while accepting a Canadian flag from Parliament Hill's Peace Tower. She stated that her son wanted everyone to know that he believed in the mission, was proud to serve in Afghanistan and that he had the best training and equipment possible.

I want to thank the Mitchell family for their continued support for Canada's armed forces.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to his parents, Bob and Carol, his wife, Leanne, and children, Cameron, Ryan and Jaylyn. His family and, indeed, all Canadians, can be very proud of his service and dedication.

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[Translation]

**TALKING BOOKS**

**Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to present Magnétothèque, a unique organization dedicated to making the written word accessible in audio format to clients who are visually impaired. It is the only centre providing this service in Quebec. It records more than 600 books per year.

From its founding, in 1976, until 1985, Magnétothèque helped visually impaired children by providing recordings of educational documents. In 1986, it changed its mission to include the recording of pleasure reading books. In 2001, it developed the Service québécois du livre adapté and, in 2005, it became a production centre for talking books. It recently added a sales arm for talking books and its radio station broadcasts a six-hour loop.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I wish Magnétothèque a long life.

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[English]

**ISRAEL**

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in another attack on Jewish people worldwide, anti-Israeli groups on university campuses today are marking the beginning of what they have dubbed infamously as "Israeli Apartheid Week". They must not have a clear understanding of apartheid itself.

Unlike blacks in apartheid South Africa, Arab citizens of Israel have full political rights. They vote and participate in the political process. Arab Knesset representatives cross the spectrum, from the Communist and Arab nationalist parties through to the Likud. Salim Jubran, an Israeli Arab, is a judge on Israel's supreme court.

Acts of ignorance such as these protests should offend not only all Canadians, but Parliament as well. Why? Because an NDP student union is a co-sponsor. The very notion of a political party's connection to this brings shame to this chamber. These protests have become a haven for thugs who practice bully tactics and promote intolerance of the Jewish people.

I implore both the NDP and misguided campus groups everywhere to stand down from this week's long attack and recognize Israel for the vibrant democratic society that it is.

\* \* \*

●(1410)

### BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month, a time when we recognize the many achievements and contributions of black Canadians who have done so much to make Canada such a culturally diverse, compassionate and prosperous nation.

We celebrate their great contribution to Canada's cultural, social and political development.

Black History Month is an excellent opportunity for all Canadians to get to know the richness of our past and to celebrate our diversity.

I would like to acknowledge Rick Gosling, the former chair of the Race Relations Committee in Toronto, who is in Ottawa today with young guests from the Children's Breakfast Clubs.

After question period today, all members are invited to a reception with the children in the Commonwealth Room where this year's Black History Month poster will be presented.

All members are welcome and we look forward to seeing them there.

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### RACISM

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the editor of *Le Québécois*, a French language newspaper, has threatened violence against Quebecers. The editor has advocated that a Quebec radio station be burned down, and yet the Bloc continues to finance this racist newspaper.

The same newspaper has also made unfounded allegations that Jean Charest wants to increase immigration in order to turn francophone Quebecers into a minority, thereby hurting the cause of separatism in Quebec. This newspaper even made racist remarks against President Obama. In its last edition, Pierre Falardeau wondered why everyone compares Barack Obama to JFK. He instead proposed that the president be compared to Lassie the dog, and yet the Bloc continues to finance this bigoted newspaper.

The Bloc only cut its ties to this newspaper after it was exposed by the courageous work of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Racism and extremism of this kind have no place in our country. I ask the House to condemn these Bloc-funded extremists.

### Statements by Members

#### JAMES REANEY

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this past summer our nation lost a literary icon of remarkable stature.

James Reaney, celebrated author, playwright, opera librettist, painter, poet, teacher and community activist, died at age 81. Professor Reaney was a great humanitarian and a great Canadian in the eyes of all who knew him. His contribution to Canadian art and culture was a gift to us all. He was the winner of the Chambers Award for best Canadian play, a three time winner of the Governor General's Award and in 1975 the recipient of the Order of Canada.

Among his most famous works was the trilogy dramatizing the story of the legendary Donnelly family of Lucan, Ontario.

Londoners are proud to claim James Reaney as one of our own. His was a life of great achievement and compassion. He was no less than an artistic giant. We will miss his generous spirit and dedication to telling the stories of Canada.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has been feeling the effects of the global economic crisis. While this government has been working to help the hardest-hit Canadians and to implement economic stimulus measures, what has the Bloc been doing?

The Bloc has been trying to win political points by reviving a 250-year-old battle. It has been trying to divide Quebecers. The Bloc is using artists as pawns in its "operation division" by systematically failing to acknowledge the economic action plan's significant investments in culture.

This is in addition to the intolerance of the Bloc's allies, who condone the use of violence to achieve their agenda. All the Bloc's actions do is show just how out of touch the party is with the Quebec values it claims to be defending.

Quebeckers want a government that will work tirelessly to get through the economic crisis, but the Bloc has only one goal: divide the people to promote its sovereignist agenda. I vow to defend the Quebec nation against the Bloc's antagonism.

\* \* \*

#### MINISTER OF FINANCE

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance set up an economic advisory committee to provide him with periodic advice on overall economic strategy during prebudget consultations. The minister chose to have only finance and business representatives sit on this committee.

As for representatives of unions, women, the unemployed, seniors, aboriginals, artists, the poor, environmental groups, community groups, and consumer advocacy groups, none were to be found in the minister's committee.

*Oral Questions*

By choosing to have only the business point of view in his advisory committee, the Minister of Finance has proven once again that, in order to be heard by this Conservative government, what counts is not good ideas but money.

\* \* \*

•(1415)

[English]

**COAST GUARD**

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burrin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the crew of the Coast Guard ship, *Leonard J. Cowley*. If there were ever any doubt of the need for the government to invest in the Coast Guard, the activities of this week, which saw the loss of a Spanish fishing vessel and the rescue of its crew, should put any such doubt to rest.

Because of the actions of the Canadian Coast Guard, the lives of 22 fishermen were saved in a quick and dramatic rescue off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Once again the Canadian Coast Guard demonstrated their competence and professionalism in carrying out this rescue.

The crew of the *Leonard J. Cowley* dispatched two boats to rescue the crew. Medical treatment was provided on board for several men who were suffering from hypothermia and smoke inhalation and later a man was airlifted by a search and rescue helicopter to a hospital in St. John's.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador who earn their living from the sea know only too well how important it is to have the services of the Coast Guard readily available in the event of a disaster at sea.

I ask members of the House to join me in expressing our appreciation to the Canadian Coast Guard and, in this case, the captain and crew of the *Leonard J. Cowley*.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS**

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the editor of *Le Québécois* made threats of violence against Quebecers when he stated that he would applaud anyone who set fire to Quebec radio stations.

The Bloc Québécois continued to fund this newspaper in spite of such remarks. This radical newspaper has accused Quebec immigrants of placing francophones in the minority in the province and of harming the sovereignist movement. This newspaper made racist remarks about President Barack Obama. Its columnist, Pierre Falardeau, compared the president to Lassie, a dog.

Yet the Bloc continued to support this racist newspaper. Its funding was cut only after pressure was exerted by the courageous Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. We must all condemn the racism and the extremism funded by the Bloc Québécois.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the finance minister said he would make many, many mistakes in getting his stimulus package out the door.

Will the government commit to proactively disclose these future mistakes as they happen, or will we have to submit access to information requests and then wait forever for that deeply secretive government to come clean?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not think there were quite that many manys in the minister's statement, but it was a fact that the minister did state, and it was only in repetition to what the Auditor General has said, that under these extraordinary circumstances, we are asking our public servants to deliver money to Canadians as quickly as possible. We need to admit that there may be minimal mistakes, not the many, many, many mistakes that the hon. member mentioned.

We need to make sure that we get this out the door, but we cannot get it out the door unless we can get that budget out the door.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one would think that lazy government would have gotten the work done on time.

[Translation]

Will the minister admit his mistakes in the future, as when he gave an illegal contract to his friend, or will he hide them, as in the case of the broken promise on income trusts and the famous 22 pages of censored documents? As regards his future mistakes, how much transparency can we expect?

•(1420)

[English]

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is all about transparency. In fact, if we recall, this government is the one that brought forward an incredible Federal Accountability Act. I do not think I need to remind the hon. Liberal member why we had to bring in an accountability act. That is still very fresh in our memories.

Let me quote the Liberal leader:

We're in a crisis. We're in a serious crisis and I would rather err by doing it fast and making the occasional mistake - which then...the voters...punish us for later.

The Liberal leader made that statement.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with small businesses desperate for credit, business people have told us that the Business Development Bank of Canada will take its own sweet time, measured in many months, before getting credit out the door, and if one is not already a BDC client, one need not apply.

Will the minister force the BDC and EDC to flow credit quickly, or will it be one of his many, many, many mistakes that he lets this money stay under a mattress in Ottawa?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we have already infused credit to the BDC. It is already actively making loans to small and medium size enterprises. We have a new \$12 billion credit facility that the finance minister and I announced.

We are undergoing a few consultations to make sure we get it right, that we cross those *t*'s and dot those *i*'s. We are there for the small business person and we are there for medium size enterprises, because we care about the future of business in this country.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. speaker, our national broadcaster has a special role to play. The CBC and Radio-Canada are real showcases for Canadian content. They are a key instrument of support for diversity of sources of information and one of the pillars of our system of democracy. They also provide an income for thousands of artists, craftspeople, technicians and journalists across the country.

What specific action will the minister take so Radio-Canada and the CBC may continue to provide Canadians with quality content?

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as we all know, all broadcasters, private sector and the CBC, are currently facing some challenges, but this government has stepped up. We are providing over \$1 billion in taxpayers' money in support. We fully expect that the CBC will continue to deliver the quality programming that Canadians have come to expect of it.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I hope that the \$1 billion the parliamentary secretary has just mentioned is not just a promise in the wind but that CBC and Radio-Canada will actually see the money.

The economic crisis has not spared the media. Advertisers face sharply lower revenue. They are reducing their advertising budgets and this translates into revenue shortfalls for networks. The CBC and Radio-Canada are also affected by this situation. The decrease of ad revenue increases the risk of service cuts.

I want a promise from the parliamentary secretary that the money will effectively flow very quickly.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** I promise, Mr. Speaker. I have just indicated that the government is providing almost \$1.1 billion to the CBC. To give some scope, that is almost one thousand one hundred million dollars of taxpayers' money to the CBC, because we believe in that valuable Canadian institution.

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[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, thanks to an article in the *National Geographic*, the whole world can now see, with pictures to prove it, that operations in the Alberta

tar sands are a real disaster for the environment. Just yesterday, however, the Minister of the Environment and the Liberal leader were refusing to recognize the responsibility of the oil companies in this environmental catastrophe.

Will the Prime Minister assume his responsibilities and force the oil companies to do their part and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions?

• (1425)

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Bloc to do its homework. In Canada, 73% of our electricity and energy is produced from sources that do not emit greenhouse gases. In the States, on the other hand, 73% of the country's energy is produced by sources that pollute. The Bloc does not want to admit it, but we have a good reputation in the area of green energies, and the member should be congratulating us.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have seen better stand-up comics.

That said, homework will reveal that Quebec has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 2.8%, while Alberta has raised its by 36.6% and Saskatchewan has raised its by 63%. That is what doing homework is about, rather than acting as a lobbyist for the oil companies. If he is serious, let him make 1990 the reference year and set absolute targets. Otherwise, we will conclude that he is not the environment minister, but a lobbyist for the oil companies—period.

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we disagree. As I said, the Bloc needs to do its homework. Unfortunately, it is trying to fool the public with its questions and its partisan accusations.

We are committed to reducing our emissions by 20% by 2020. Those targets are higher than the Americans'.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is going off to the United States on a campaign to defend the oil sands, and what is more, with the support of the Liberal party. It is a disgrace. Now we have an environment minister working for polluters, with the backing of the Liberals. It is a good thing ridicule never killed anyone.

Can the minister explain to me what his role is: defender of the environment, or defender of the oil companies?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is not so. I disagree with the Bloc. It needs to acknowledge that Canada has put a great deal of effort into producing green energies such as hydroelectricity and cleaner gas. We have invested a great deal of money from the budget into the carbon capture and storage system in order to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if the minister and the Liberal leader had not become lobbyists for the oil patch, they would understand that what needs defending is not the oil sands but 1990 as the reference year, absolute targets, a territorial approach, and a real carbon exchange. That is what defending the environment is all about.

When are we going to be entitled to a real minister who will defend common sense and not the polluters?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, criticism and more criticism, that is the good old Bloc recipe.

[English]

The clean energy dialogue that we have commenced, which the Prime Minister and the President agreed to last week, will announce and lead to co-operation on many fronts between our two countries with respect to clean energy. We will expand clean energy research. We will develop clean energy technology. We will build a more efficient electricity grid across North America. We will harmonize the eco-centres. All of this will lead to a cleaner environment and reduce greenhouse gases.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, now that the Conservatives and the Liberals are in bed together, they have been teaching each other their tricks. How does one create a slush fund like the sponsorship scandal? Just say that there is an emergency, that it is serving a higher purpose and therefore the normal rules will not apply.

For the Liberals, the emergency was national unity. For the Conservatives, it will be the economic crisis. Millions were stolen by the Liberals, billions are in the trough for the Conservatives. Exactly what types of mistakes was the Minister of Finance predicting yesterday?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the only mistake we have seen in the House of Commons is that the Bloc and the NDP voted against Canadians.

This party recognized that we needed to stimulate the economy. We put an economic action plan on the floor of the House. The Liberals recognized that we needed to put this forward. Unfortunately, the Bloc and the NDP voted against Canadians.

• (1430)

[Translation]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us imagine a scrum with Alfonso Gagliano before the sponsorship scandal broke, in which he announces: "There is an emergency, you know, and national unity is at stake. There will be mistakes made." We know the rest of the story.

The Minister of Finance announces his own mistakes, and his own scandals, in advance. Today, we learn of the creation of a hidden \$3 billion fund at Treasury Board for Conservative cronies.

Is the minister going to follow the American model of transparency for these funds, or the Liberal model of the sponsorship scandal?

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last month this government set out an ambitious multi-year action plan to stimulate the economy and support Canadians during these difficult global economic times. I am thankful the Liberals are supporting the budget in order to help Canadians.

What disturbs Canadians is the fact that NDP members said no to helping Canadians even before they saw the budget. They have been fully briefed on what this stimulus package means. They are simply playing politics with the lives of Canadians.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General and the Gomery commission were extremely critical of this type of secret Treasury Board controlled fund. This time it is even worse. A whole year's carte blanche to spend and to reward people just as they please. We are talking of \$3 billion.

Are these Conservatives, with their tendency to moral outrage, prepared to produce the investment plan for this \$3 billion? Will they make public the objectives and conditions? Or will they follow the Liberal model three years down the line?

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is another classic example of that member speaking out of both sides of his mouth. In fact, what all opposition members have said is that we need the stimulus package in place in a hurry. What did that member say? He said that the NDP favoured a significant spending program for shovel-ready infrastructure projects. Those members say that on the one hand. On the other hand, they are doing everything they can to stop the implementation of the plan.

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**ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today the information commissioner tabled a damning report that cites the lack of leadership at the highest levels as the root cause of the pathetic state of access to information in our country. Four out of ten departments are on red alert in a system that the Conservative government has driven to crisis, and Canadians access to information is being held hostage as a result.

Why has Canada, once a beacon of information to the rest of this world, had its light snuffed out by this Prime Minister?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member knows well that it is the public service that makes the decisions in respect of the release of the information.

We know that under the prior government, it had the CAIRS program, which in fact was a mechanism to manipulate the release of information.

This government got rid of the political interference in the release of information. Furthermore, this government opened up the crown corporations. The CBC, the Wheat Board and others are now directly accountable to the people who pay the bill, the taxpayers.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, nice try, but under the government's watch, the increases in the number of access to information requests have been denied and prolonged. That is why the information commissioner has cited the government with contempt.



The Prime Minister campaigned on a false promise to open the windows on government. Instead, he has closed the blinds, locked the doors and turned out the lights. His government now operates in darkness not seen since the days of Brian Mulroney.

President Obama began making his government more accountable to Americans on day one.

In Canada it is three years, and access to information continues to be stifled.

When will the government end its practice of systematic cover-ups?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, that member is misleading the public.

In fact, in 2007-08 the government processed a record number of requests, an increase of 38% over the last five years. The reason is we have opened up the books. We have opened up the Wheat Board, despite the fact that members like the member for Wascana or the member for Malpeque opposed the opening up of the Wheat Board. They wanted that money spent in private. We want farmers and others to know how their money is being spent.

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• (1435)

[Translation]

#### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last December, the Minister of National Defence decided to recommend to cabinet that Canada purchase 17 C-27J search and rescue aircraft from the Italian firm Alenia. He promised that the official announcement would be made early in the new year. However, it seems the minister does not have his colleagues' approval. Several reporters on the Hill and elsewhere already know that his colleagues are pressuring him to change his recommendation.

Why is the minister stubbornly recommending an aircraft that the Minister of Industry rejects? Why are the criteria his department set being questioned?

[English]

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as is sadly so often the case with the defence critic, that is patently false.

This need, the mission-specific aircraft for search and rescue in the country, is not determined by myself as a minister. It is determined in a full, open and transparent process where companies, Canadian and otherwise, can offer on this contract. It is done in conjunction with the Department of Public Works as well as the Department of Industry. We want the best aircraft so we can supply that equipment to the best people to do the job to save the lives of Canadians.

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, he needs to work on his French.

[English]

We know there is a delay caused by the industry minister. We already know the former minister of defence worked for Hill &

#### Oral Questions

Knowlton, the lobby firm that promoted the EADS CASA C-295, a competitor of Alenia's C-27J.

Interestingly enough, the current chief of staff of the minister, William King, has been senior vice-president for the very same firm.

Would the Minister of Industry assure the House that his chief of staff was not involved in any meetings with the Departments of Public Works and National Defence for that bid and that he recused himself from that file?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have only been in the House for just over three years. That is the lowest of the low. That is outrageous. I demand he retract it and apologize. He is skimming the bottom of the barrel.

The member should say that outside the House and then we will talk about the lawsuit that will prevail, I am sure.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### FINANCE

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has admitted that there will be mistakes in the way the money earmarked for tackling the economic crisis will be used.

Does the minister not understand that he has already made serious mistakes in his budget by offering mere crumbs to the manufacturing and forestry sectors as well as to the unemployed and by not reinstating the funding cut from culture?

[English]

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think we had a discussion a few minutes ago about mistakes. Need I remind all hon. members of the two mistakes, one being the Bloc, the other one being the NDP. They do not care about Canadians?

We have put a stimulus package in place, an economic action plan that over two years will stimulate 3.2% of GDP. The hon. member has the audacity to suggest that this will not help Canadians.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it was the Minister of Finance himself who said that there would be mistakes.

And while he was saying there will be mistakes, the President of the Treasury Board tabled the Main Estimates, which contain a special credit of \$3 billion that he can distribute as he sees fit.

How can the government have the gall to ask for a blank cheque from Parliament when it is admitting it is incapable of being truly accountable?

*Oral Questions*

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first, let us put the statement of the Minister of Finance in context. He was referring to the comments of the Auditor General, who acknowledged that in these kinds of exceptional situations there may well be mistakes.

However, I can reassure Canadians that we have a plan in place to ensure the money is followed closely and yet is in the hands of Canadians so there is a real stimulus to our economy, no thanks to the Bloc and NDP, who are voting against these initiatives.

\* \* \*

• (1440)

[Translation]

**NATIONAL BATTLEFIELDS COMMISSION**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the controversy surrounding the re-enactment of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham is entirely due to the lack of judgment by André Juneau, chair of the National Battlefields Commission, and the complicity of Conservatives blinded by their ideology.

Will the minister fire André Juneau or continue to sanction the Liberal sponsorship legacy?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the answer is obvious. The answer is no, especially not after the threats and calls to violence that we have witnessed in the Quebec City region since the Bloc and the Parti Québécois stirred up controversy about the situation.

Everyone knows full well that threats and calls to violence are not part of Quebec's values. That is more like the Bloc's ideology.

\* \* \*

**ELECTIONS CANADA**

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, just one minute. The truth must be told. I want to set the record straight. The Bloc Québécois has always denounced all calls for violence of any kind. Is that clear?

And in case the minister did not understand, I repeat: denounced and condemned. Is that clear?

We know the Conservatives are very quick to condemn others, but they were less quick when it came to shedding some light on the in and out scandal denounced by the Chief Electoral Officer—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, clearly, we do not have the same notion of denunciation. Here is an advertisement from the hon. member for Québec and the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord—

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

**Hon. Josée Verner:** I would ask the leader of the Bloc Québécois to be quiet, Mr. Speaker, so I can reply. We live in a democracy here.

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

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

\* \* \*

[English]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for several years in British Columbia, we have been waiting desperately for federal action on gang violence and gun crime. The record for the government has so far been cuts to the community crime prevention programs and three years to put more RCMP officers on the ground.

Is the government prepared to put more RCMP officers on the ground right now in metro Vancouver to deal with this emergency?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when we became government, we said that tackling crime was one of our major priorities, and we have delivered. We have delivered more police officers because that had been neglected too long by the previous government. We committed 1,000 new RCMP officers and we delivered over 1,500. We have provided money to the provinces for more municipal and provincial police officers.

As a result, the solicitor general of British Columbia and his premier were able to announce last week more police on the street to fight crime. We are getting the job done where it was not done before.

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is obviously strong on spin, though weak on crime.

At a time of escalating gang violence in B.C., unfortunately we do have a Conservative government that is weak on crime. On the Conservatives' watch, the situation has become worse. They have been three years in power and communities are experiencing the reeling from their failure.

The Conservatives have weakened prevention programs, weakened the gun registry and killed a number of important crime bills that the Liberals were supporting.

Why is the minister not giving my community of Vancouver and all Canadians the tools and the resources they—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, today the Minister of Justice had to stand in the House and introduce a bill to combat gang crime with new penalties precisely because it had not been done by the previous government.

In the previous House, he had to press for mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, and as House leader, I had to make that a confidence matter three times before the Liberals would agree to allow it to pass.

We have taken action to fight crime. We have been doing it on the prevention side with new programs. I did not see the hon. member there when I announced five of them in Vancouver in January. Where were the Liberals? They were in the same place they have been for 13 years in government: ignoring the problem. We are taking action.

\* \* \*

• (1445)

#### ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the natural resources minister said in a speech last night that we need more “transparent public communication” on the nuclear energy file. However, she prefers to keep Canadians in the dark about the government's plans to sell off AECL.

Will the minister follow her own advice? Will she tell Canadians the government has put a “for sale” sign on AECL?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are always looking at options to strengthen this great nuclear industry we have here in Canada.

One of the options we took on last year was to start the process of looking at better ways to deliver this great Canadian nuclear industry to the rest of the world. We have commissioned a report from National Bank to look at options. We are in the process and we are looking forward to studying it and making good sound decisions for the Canadian public.

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's commitment to openness and transparency to Canadians had a half-life of 24 hours. There should be a full public debate on our future nuclear policy, not some backroom deal shrouded in a veil of secrecy.

The minister's department has had the report on AECL's future since August 2008, over six months ago. Will the minister table that report now, or does “transparent public communication” only apply to others?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we commissioned a study from the National Bank as one piece of an entire process of looking at AECL and what the best options are to strengthen our nuclear industry.

We have received the report. Our officials are studying it. I just want to make sure that we understand. It is just one part of the entire process in order to strengthen Canada's nuclear industry.

\* \* \*

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, despite the Liberals' best efforts to convince Canadians otherwise, Canadians know it is our party that is the party of law and order.

While British Columbians are demanding tougher legislation, including stronger firearms laws, it was the Liberals who tried to

defeat our legislation that enacted in May of last year mandatory minimum prison sentences for serious firearms offences.

Will the justice minister tell the House what the government is doing to advance our justice agenda to deal with the violence erupting in B.C. and across Canada?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, earlier today I tabled organized crime legislation. It sends a very clear message to those involved in illegal activities.

People involved with gang-related murders, drive-by shootings and assaulting police officers will get the prison time they so richly deserve.

This is what is necessary to interrupt and disrupt gang activity in this country, and this is why Canadians know they can count on the Conservative government to get the job done.

\* \* \*

#### ACCESS TO INFORMATION

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today's report from the Information Commissioner is a scathing indictment of the government's addiction to secrecy and contempt for accountability.

He said there was a lack of leadership at the highest levels of government. He gave the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the RCMP failing grades of “F”. That is a red alert. He gave the Ministers of Health and National Defence “D” grades.

Has the Prime Minister called these ministers on the carpet for their falling grades, or is he the highest-level barrier to open government and leadership on this issue?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are the ones who fought for the rights of Canadians to know how their government operates, opening up the Canadian Wheat Board, the CBC, and dozens of other institutions to the Access to Information Act.

Where was that individual? He was opposed to those openings.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, three long years after the Conservatives promised to table a bill to implement the former Information Commissioner's recommendations to reform access to information, they have failed to act, but New Democrats are getting the job done.

Yesterday, for the fourth time, the member for Winnipeg Centre tabled a bill drafted by the former commissioner.

Will the Conservatives support our bill, or does the government want to move our bill as its own to ensure it finally fulfills its election promise to open up access to information?

*Oral Questions*

•(1450)

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Federal Accountability Act contains the most extensive amendments to the Access to Information Act since its introduction in 1983.

Sixty-nine new institutions are now accountable to Canadians through that act. For the first time, Canadians can see how these institutions spend tax dollars.

As for that individual getting the job done, the only thing he has been is in the way of ensuring that Canadians get to see the economy working and get to see the stimulus package we have introduced in the House.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Information Commissioner has criticized the government in matters of access to information and spoken of a disappointing record. The time it takes to process a request continues to lengthen and can take up to 300 days in some cases. The commissioner himself acknowledges that the current legislation lacks teeth.

In light of such a poor record, what is the government waiting for to strengthen the Access to Information Act, as it promised during the 2006 election?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what about the lousy record of the Bloc standing in the way of the economic stimulus package that Canadians are expecting this Parliament to deliver? Bloc members have consistently stood in the way of ensuring that Canadians are assured of their economic future.

With respect to the information act, this government has taken more steps than any government has in the past.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**PAY EQUITY**

**Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, contempt, slander and falsehoods are the hallmarks of the mediocre.

The President of the Treasury Board tells us that pay equity is not just about women's rights but also about family rights. The minister is so blinded by his ideology that he cannot fathom that women can have lives outside their families.

Can the President of the Treasury Board get it into his head that pay equity is not a family policy but a means of ensuring that women get equal pay for work of equal value?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is amazing having that member lecture me in respect of how we ensure that Canadians, whether they are women, men, families, or children, get to have a secure economic future when that individual stands up and votes against the economic stimulus package.

We are very concerned about the rights of women, the rights of children, the rights of men, and the rights of families in order to ensure that their economic future is secure. One of those mechanisms is the pay equity legislation that we stand behind.

\* \* \*

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday I asked the Minister of State for the Status of Women what files of importance to women she was the lead minister on. She responded with how much money her department had.

Yesterday I asked the minister what gender-based analysis was done on the budget, and the reply was personal invective.

Today I am trying again. Can the minister tell Canadian women what she and her department did to ensure a gender-based analysis was done on the budget? What did she and her department do, in concrete terms, to ensure gender equity in the budget?

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member will know, as I have already answered this question in committee not too long ago, that the Department of Finance has actually been conducting gender-based analysis on its tax measures since budget 2006.

I note for the record that it is not a coincidence that it happened when a Conservative government came into office.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that has been happening since 2004.

When the Minister of State (Status of Women) appeared before the committee, she spoke of the importance of women in the work force in non-traditional jobs.

The Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail, or CIAFT, had received indications that one of its applications would be approved. Yet, when it published a press release criticizing the government's approach to pay equity, the project was turned down.

Why are the Conservatives punishing CIAFT? Is it because it denounced their position on pay equity?

•(1455)

[*English*]

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member will know that all organizations that applied for funding that have been approved or declined are in the process of being notified.

The member will also know that I rely on my officials because I believe that they are highly professional and highly skilled. They understand what the terms and the criteria are in terms of who will receive funding from either the community fund or partnerships fund, and I respect the decisions that they brought to me for my approval.

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board.

The allegations against the Department of Indian Affairs are very serious, because the documents are showing that they are identifying school priorities not on the issues of health and safety but on whether or not they are in opposition ridings. This would constitute a serious breach of public trust.

What steps will Treasury Board take to ensure that children who are at risk on isolated reserves are not penalized for the partisan political gain of the Conservative Party?

**Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised that the member opposite would ask that inflammatory question.

We had a committee meeting this morning. We talked about this very subject. It is very clear in the response from the department that the priorities are set by the department. It does not consider political situations. Whether they are in opposition ridings or Conservative ridings makes no difference at all. However, the fact is that we do represent most of those areas.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the documents completely contradict him. This issue is not about me. It is about children at risk in Attawapiskat who were involved in a project that was in an advanced state of negotiations when the minister killed it.

This House has seen a long litany of notorious pork-barrel ministers, but it has never seen a minister who would use his office to punish children in substandard schools for how their parents voted.

What steps will the government take to rein in that rogue minister so that accountability is based on health and safety and the rights of children and not on the gain of the Conservative Party of Canada?

**Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we understand that the member opposite has an interpretation that is far different from reality. We also understand the concerns of aboriginal children. We have expanded school construction and other spending because we do understand.

Since 2000, the department has invested over \$5 million in Attawapiskat for expansion of the high school and temporary classrooms, and approximately \$1 million a year for operations and upkeep of the schools.

We are working with the community. Health Canada inspections in June demonstrated there are no health and safety concerns.

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### LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

**Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Palliser livestock producers are having a tough time. The government's economic action plan will help cut taxes for small business and build the infrastructure that is so vital to our rural communities,

### Oral Questions

but mandatory country of origin labelling, high-priced inputs and low returns have hurt the bottom line for many of these farmers.

What is our government doing to help these working producers?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Palliser is part of a dynamic team on this side of the House in government that is addressing these pressing needs for the livestock sector.

We have delivered unprecedented amounts of money to keep them liquid through these trying times. We continue to work with the administration in the United States on country of origin labelling. We are making great progress there. Of course, we are re-opening markets and reinvigorating markets that went untended for a decade under the other government.

We have restructured the market access secretariat, working with industry and our provincial colleagues. We will continue to move forward on that file.

\* \* \*

### STATUS OF WOMEN

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from her previous responses, it is obvious that it is not the minister responsible for Status of Women who takes the lead role on the issues of concern to Canadian women. We want to know very simply, what has the Minister of State for Status of Women done to ensure gender equity in the budget? What role, if any, did she actually play? Will the minister of state please table in the House any gender-based analysis that was done for the budget, whether it was from her department or any other department? Was the—

● (1500)

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of state.

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, I did in fact sit on the Status of Women committee for a couple of years. We did turn out a number of exceptional reports on gender-based analysis, so I am quite familiar with the process, as she is. She knows her question is not in line with how it works.

However, the member is very well aware of the fact that we announced an action plan working toward women's equality in budget 2008. I invited the committee members and all women in the House to participate in the development of that plan which will have three pillars: economic security, leadership, and ending violence against women.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### JUSTICE

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in general, the time an inmate spends in jail while waiting for sentencing is deducted twofold from the sentence to be served. The difficult situation in his province, with street gangs and organized crime, has brought the British Columbia Minister of Justice here today to ask the federal government to put a stop to this practice that undermines the credibility of the justice system.

*Oral Questions*

Will the Minister of Justice respond to this request, as called for by the Bloc since 2006?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to welcome the Bloc Québécois to this issue. This is a very important issue for Canadians and I am glad finally that members of the Bloc have woken up to that fact. We introduced legislation today that will address gang-related murders, drive-by shootings, and assault on police officers. That is what I told our guests who came here to Ottawa. I said this is exactly what we need.

I want to know where the Bloc Québécois stands. Are they for change, are Bloc members going to support us on this kind of legislation? Let us find out.

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are losing their jobs by the thousands but the minister wants to bring in tens of thousands of temporary foreign workers, workers with no rights. According to his own department, these workers are often exploited and drive down Canadian wages. It takes up to eight years to bring someone's mother from overseas, but temporary workers are fast-tracked in one month.

Will the minister finally get his priorities straight, speed up family reunification and limit the intake of temporary foreign workers?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think just about every sentence in that question was factually wrong. First of all, this government has sped up the processing of family reunification sponsorship applications. We are pleased that this is the first year in a generation, with thanks to the actions of my predecessor, we are seeing waiting times and the inventory for immigration go down rather than up, including for family reunification.

The temporary foreign worker program is limited. It is limited according to the demand. We only approve those applications where Canadians are not filling the jobs. Every single job must be paid at the Canadian prevailing wage rate.

\* \* \*

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week my premier, Dalton McGuinty, announced a plan to boost investment in green energy and deliver green jobs. Ontario's green energy act will create growth in renewable energy sources like wind, solar, hydro and biomass. It will promote energy efficiency and encourage businesses to build green.

My question for the Minister of Natural Resources is, what is this Conservative government doing to work with the provinces, including Ontario, to make Canada the destination for green energy development?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his question and all of his hard work on the file.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate my premier, Premier McGuinty, and Mr. Smitherman who are joining with our Conservative government in supporting clean renewable energy. As hon. members know, our Conservative government is taking early concrete action to clean up Canada's energy supply and realize our potential as an energy super power.

We are investing in renewable energy, supporting development in biofuels, and strengthening Canada's nuclear advantage. I am pleased that Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Smitherman are following our government's lead and have come to the table—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, the 2007 United Nations Panel on Global Warming identified the Bay of Fundy as one of only two regions in all of North America most vulnerable to rising sea levels from global warming. In late December, the area near Advocate Harbour, Nova Scotia, suffered the worst erosion damage in living memory. This is just the beginning according to the United Nations Panel on Global Warming.

Now that we know that this is a global situation and a global problem, will the federal government agree to partner with the provinces involved in building protective structures to prevent disastrous effects of the predicted rising sea levels from this global warming situation?

● (1505)

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has previously raised this issue with myself and my department. He raises really two good policy questions: one is combatting climate change which we are committed to and the other is our cooperative working relationship with the province.

I would point out for his benefit that Minister Morse of his province has developed a very good working relationship with us as has his New Brunswick colleague. In addition, although she does not share the same geography, Minister Heppner also shares that same desire to work together with the government.

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**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** Order, please. We have a number of recognitions today.

I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of a number of ministers. First, the Honourable John van Dongen, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and the Honourable Wally Oppal, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism in British Columbia

*Points of Order*

Also, the Honourable Lloyd Snelgrove, President of the Treasury Board for Alberta and the Honourable Nancy Heppner, Minister of the Environment of Saskatchewan.

I would also like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Dr. Arnold Koller, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Forum of Federations.

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

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**POINTS OF ORDER**

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday you cautioned all members about the use of abusive language and personal attacks. As a new member, I want to thank you for that.

I was astonished yesterday, however, by the conduct of the Bloc Québécois member for Drummond during the meetings of the heritage committee, who interrupted the proceedings with language that I am unable to repeat in the House or in my home, in fact. There were repeated references to bovine excrement and I will say no more.

May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to use your good offices with committee members to urge them to apply the same restraint that you placed on the House yesterday?

**The Speaker:** I am sure the hon. member will raise the matter in committee. Committee matters are not normally the preserve of the House unless there is a report from the committee. None has been received, so I suggest the hon. member deal with the matter there.

[*Translation*]

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 18 provides that no member may use offensive language in this House.

In response to a question I put to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, she said that threats and calls for violence “are not part of Quebec’s values. That is more like the Bloc’s ideology.”

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

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I see the member for Nepean—Carleton applauding these remarks. I might also raise a point of order regarding the applause for these remarks.

The matter is very—

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** The member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, too.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** The matter is very serious. We consider these offensive remarks. To accuse the Bloc of supporting threats and acts of violence are remarks that cannot be made in this House. I would thus like a ruling on this from you on such remarks.

Accordingly, I call on the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, if you consider this to be the case, Mr. Speaker, to withdraw her offensive remarks, which are in contravention of Standing Order 18.

● (1510)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have documents in my hand that the House should see, because it is, unfortunately, the Parliament of Canada that has, through a Bloc decision, paid for this really disgusting material unacceptable to Canadians.

I have here a paper known as *Le Québécois*. The editor called for violence and threatened Quebecers, as well as the Quebec media. In a single edition, I count some five advertisements by the Bloc. Supported by its friends in the PQ, the Bloc Québécois has provided some 80% of the advertising revenues of this paper. The latest edition contains remarks against immigrants and refers to a plot by immigrants to make Quebecers a minority, which is not true. There is a comment here comparing President Obama to Lassie.

This is the paper that threatened Quebecers in recent months. It is funded totally by the Bloc Québécois and its elected members.

I should add that our minister has criticized violence, while the Bloc has funded threats. That is the truth.

I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table these documents here in the House so that the House and the Parliament of Canada can see the evidence.

**The Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent in the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** Clearly, there is not unanimous consent.

Does the hon. chief government whip wish to speak to the same point of order?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Timmins—James Bay made outrageous comments to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and today he topped it off. He referred—

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the chief government whip, but we finished with the first point of order and I would like to deal with it briefly. I will just say I will take the matter under advisement and come back to the House, and review the comments made by the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

[*Translation*]

I assure the hon. whip of the Bloc Québécois that I will listen as well to the comments made by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs during oral question period.

I can now hear another point of order, that of the chief government whip.

*Routine Proceedings*

[English]

COMMENTS OF MEMBER FOR TIMMINS—JAMES BAY

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay made outrageous comments with respect to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development yesterday and he carried on today. The allusions have to do with the utter disregard of children. I am not going to repeat the words.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to refer to *Hansard* to check those words. I believe the member should be admonished. He cannot make these outrageous statements day after day.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House when the member for Timmins—James Bay rose to ask his question of the minister, he in fact was quoting from documents from Indian and northern affairs, part of which was that there were no real issues in opposition party ridings. When he raised the point that perhaps decisions were being made along partisan lines, he was again quoting from Indian and northern affairs documents. I would be happy to table this particular information, if I have unanimous consent to do so.

• (1515)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today the member for Timmins—James Bay quite clearly accused the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of being a pork-barrel minister endangering the health and safety of children. That is exactly what he said. He accused the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of doing just that.

He was trying to undermine the integrity of a minister of the Crown. He is doing so, as we all know, for nothing more than grandstanding purposes. It is unconscionable. The level of discourse in this House should be far above the level of discourse exhibited by that member.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to ask him to withdraw his remarks, unequivocally.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan have the unanimous consent of the House to table the documents she referred to?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** No.

**The Speaker:** There is no consent.

PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL C-241

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on February 25, 2009, you made a statement with regard to the management of private members' business. In particular, you raised concerns about five bills which, in your view, appear to impinge on the financial prerogative of the Crown. One of the bills you mentioned was Bill C-241.

I am therefore rising on a point of order regarding Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (removal of waiting period). Without commenting on the merits of the bill, I submit that

Bill C-241 contains provisions that would change the purposes of the Employment Insurance Act, which would require new spending and would therefore require a royal recommendation. Bill C-241 proposes to repeal the two-week waiting period before the start of employment insurance benefits following an interruption of earnings.

The removal of the waiting period would change the purposes of the Employment Insurance Act by creating an additional payment of two weeks for claimants who do not use the full entitlement. The Department of Human Resources and Social Development estimates that the removal of the waiting period could cost as much as \$1 billion per year. Precedents clearly establish that bills that change the purposes of the Employment Insurance Act and require new or additional government spending for employment insurance benefits must be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

On December 8, 2004, the Speaker ruled in the case of Bill C-278, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system) that:

Inasmuch as section 54 of the Constitution, 1867, and Standing Order 79 prohibit the adoption of any bill appropriating public revenues without a royal recommendation, the same must apply to bills authorizing increased spending of public revenues. Bills mandating new or additional public spending must be seen as the equivalent of bills effecting an appropriation.

The removal of the waiting period would require the expenditure of funds in a manner not authorized under the Employment Insurance Act. This is supported by the Speaker's ruling on November 6, 2006 on Bill C-269, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system), which states:

—all of these elements would indeed require expenditures from the EI Account which are not currently authorized....

Such increased spending is not covered by the terms of any existing appropriation....New purposes must be accompanied by a new royal recommendation.

These precedents apply to Bill C-241 which would change the purposes of the Employment Insurance Act by requiring new spending. Therefore, Bill C-241 must, in our view, also be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his assistance in this matter. Of course, we will get back to the House. There may be other submissions on the point before I make a final ruling on it.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont is rising on a point of order.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe you will find consent for the following motion. I move:



*Business of the House*

That the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology create a subcommittee whose membership will be composed of five (5) members, with two (2) from the Conservative Party, one (1) from the Liberal Party, one (1) from the Bloc Québécois, and one (1) from the New Democratic Party, and that the Chair be from the Conservative Party; that the sub-committee have all the powers and authority of the Standing Committee, to undertake a study of the crisis faced by certain industrial sectors in Canada such as aerospace, energy, forestry, high-tech, and manufacturing, with the understanding that any legislation referred to the full committee take precedence over the work of the sub-committee, that the sub-committee not meet at the same time as the full committee, that the sub-committee report its findings and recommendations to the main committee, and that the main committee present the report to the House within ten sitting days.

• (1520)

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

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

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, in response to the point of order raised by the hon. member for—

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** Sorry. There is a sequence. The hon. member for Guelph is rising on another motion.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, discussions have been continuing among the parties. If you were to now seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion, which I would indicate to the Speaker is being seconded by the member for Willowdale. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology create a subcommittee whose membership will be composed of five (5) members consisting of two Conservative members, one Liberal member, one Bloc Québécois member and one NDP member, named after the usual consultations with the Whips, with all the powers and authority of the Standing Committee, to undertake a study of the crisis faced by the automotive industry in Canada, with the understanding that any legislation referred to the full committee take precedence over the work of the sub-committee, that the sub-committee not meet at the same time as the full committee, and that the sub-committee report its findings and recommendations to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology by March 21st, 2009.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

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

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon:** Mr. Speaker, further to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, I would like to say that our House leader will respond shortly.

**The Speaker:** I imagine that there will be many responses to this and I indicated that I would be waiting for them.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina on a point of order.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## DECORUM IN THE CHAMBER

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Today when the member for Timmins—James Bay got up to ask a question at around 2:58 p.m., there was a lot of heckling from members, including the member for Crowfoot, who said, “You’re a low life”. Yesterday, February 25, at around 3:00 p.m., the same member heckled the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. Earlier on, he heckled the member for Toronto—Danforth. This has been a pattern. I can give you the whole long list, Mr. Speaker. On February 2, at around 2:30 p.m., the same member said, “Apologize to all Canadians” while he was heckling the member for Toronto—Danforth, et cetera.

This area of the House is a bit further away from you, Mr. Speaker, and there is a tremendous amount of heckling in this area. I want to bring this to your attention because I hope that when language such as “low life” is being used, you would ask those members, who are repeat offenders, to stop the heckling.

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina for her comments in this regard. I can assure her that there are things being said at this end that she cannot hear either that would cause her concern if she were sitting up here. There is a lot of heckling that goes on in the House. I always encourage hon. members to refrain from excessive noise and of course that means sometimes excessive language, too. We have had a number of points of order today arising out of question period because of allegations that the language used was improper or excessive, depending on one’s point of view, which I will be reviewing.

I am sure that all hon. members in the House would share the concerns expressed by the member for Trinity—Spadina and will raise the issue next week at caucus, and maybe next Wednesday the House will be much quieter as a result.

Now, I believe we have a question that the opposition House leader would like to ask, it being Thursday, and I apologize for having delayed this somewhat.

\* \* \*

• (1525)

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my goodness, it is almost Friday. I have the normal Thursday question for the government House leader about his plans for organizing the business of the House for the next week or two. I wonder if he could be as specific as possible about his designation of opposition days in that period of time. He will know, of course, that the end of the supply period is March 26 and it would be very helpful to know which day on or before March 26 will be the last supply day in this particular supply semester.

*Business of Supply*

As the government House leader knows, there is a reporting procedure now in place as a part of the amendment to the budget address that requires certain reporting to the House of Commons five days before the last supply day in this semester. Therefore, that day could be rapidly approaching; indeed, it could be as early as next week. It would be helpful if the minister could be as specific as possible about all opposition days, including the last one in this semester.

I would also like to ask the minister about a matter that appears in the main estimates that were tabled today by the President of the Treasury Board. The minister was kind enough to provide opposition spokespersons with some advance notice of this item. I am referring to page 1-116 of the main estimates and vote item number 35, which provides for an extraordinary power in relation to expenditures to be made between April 1 and the end of June, this year, related to certain budget matters.

Because that power is extraordinary, I would ask the minister if he would be prepared to entertain some discussion with respect to equally extraordinary reporting procedures with respect to any decisions that the government may take under that particular vote, bearing in mind that it is an unusual provision that I understand has never been included before in the estimates. Accountability is important, and I wonder if the minister would entertain some discussion about how to make sure that accountability is there.

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I will address the usual Thursday question first.

I look forward to the business of the House of Commons and the business of the government for this next week. Despite the unprecedented tactics of the Bloc Québécois earlier this morning, we will continue the debate on the Liberal opposition motion for the remainder of today.

Yesterday the Standing Committee on Finance reported the budget implementation bill back to the House. This means tomorrow will be the earliest opportunity, according to our rules, to begin debate at report stage of the budget implementation bill. It is our hope to complete report stage tomorrow and then move quickly on to third reading.

The budget implementation bill will remain the government's top priority for next week. Following the completion of that bill, we will schedule debate for Bill C-13, the Canada grains, and Bill C-7, marine liability. Both of these bills are at second reading.

In reference to opposition days, or supply days as they are known, I will be designating Thursday, March 5 next week as an allotted day. However, I serve notice that if the budget bill is not adopted by then, I may have to return to the House to change that designation.

As to my hon. colleague's request about the last supply day in this cycle, that is still open for discussion. He will know that we have had quite a lot of discussion among all House leaders at our weekly meeting and in meetings subsequent to that to look at the schedule moving forward to ensure there is ongoing consultation, communication and co-operation among all parties as we try to get the budget bill passed as quickly as possible and get this much needed stimulus to Canadians and Canadian families that need it.

As to the extraordinary power that he looks to in the main estimates that were introduced today, referred to as special vote 35, I assure the hon. member, all members of the House of Commons and, indeed, all Canadians that accountability is paramount to this government, and we will be assuring accountability. As always, we are open to discussions with the opposition parties as to any way in which we can ensure greater accountability, not only for those moneys that will be spent under special vote 35 but for all taxpayer dollars.

\* \* \*

● (1530)

**APPROPRIATION ACT NO. 4, 2008-2009**

**The Speaker:** I have been informed that a clerical error has occurred during the drafting of Bill C-12, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2009. Accordingly I have instructed that the bill be reprinted.

[*Translation*]

For the information of all members, I am tabling a copy of the letter addressed to the Speaker from the Law Clerk in which the necessary changes are described.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*Translation*]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION — MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Before the oral question period, the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche had the floor. He has seven minutes left to complete his remarks.

The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was getting quite carried away in my speech previously, about the importance of insuring that the money gets to the communities. I will continue in the same vein because this is a topic of extreme importance.

We have heard from several Conservative members that a lot of money has been distributed at this time, or rather announced. There is a huge difference between announcing a project and putting the first shovel in the ground.

I mentioned two facets of the project in the Eel River Bar community in the Restigouche region. The first dealt with providing drinking water in order to create a tourist development. The second aspect is the tourist development project itself, an aboriginal garden.

These two aspects need funding if they are to be finalized. They are not new projects, but existing projects, ready to be finished. Where the water supply is concerned, the province of New Brunswick has even made a commitment: if the federal government was in it, so was the province.

*Business of Supply*

So there are two parts to the project and the Conservative government says that money is available, that the sod has been turned, that projects have been announced. But in the meantime, in actuality, there has been no progress whatever on these two phases of the project. One of them cannot be finished because the federal government does not want to give the necessary funding, and as far as the other is concerned, the federal government does not want to contribute to improving the drinking water infrastructure.

Hon. members will understand that I am more than skeptical when I hear from the Conservative members that money is on its way to the communities. The truth is that, at this time, no money has gone out to the communities. Promises have been made in the House. We hear plenty of great promises from the government MPs, but the reality is that our communities are not getting the results.

It would be interesting to know what the situation is in small rural communities all across the country. Part of the riding I represent is entirely rural. There are a lot of important projects that need to be done. The communities, for their part, have to be accountable to the people who live there, provide them with services, and improve their quality of life. They must also be able to carry out these infrastructure projects. If they want to do them, as things stand now, the federal government asks them to provide so much money that they are unable to draw up plans and get the projects rolling because they do not have as much as the Conservative government wants them to provide.

We want the government to speed up the funding to these municipalities, towns and villages. What we need first is speed. Then we need flexibility. Finally, we need to ensure that the program to return the gasoline tax will give these cities, towns and villages the funds they need to complete the most pressing infrastructure projects for the people of their communities.

I also gave the example of the city of Edmundston. This is a real priority. The sewage system needs to be divided, separating the storm and sanitary sewers. This is a quality of life issue for the people. We need to ensure that people's houses are not inundated when there are major floods. I am not talking about floods of drinking water but of stuff that is not very appealing on the environmental level. The City of Edmundston is ready to proceed with this project, but the government says that it probably does not fit the current funding situation.

I want to hear the opposite. I want to hear the government members say that projects from Eel River Bar, the City of Edmundston and all the others that have been submitted by municipalities in my riding, or will be over the next few weeks and months, are going to get done. Even better, I want the funding to be there and the projects to start. I want a real infrastructure program to get the Canadian economy going again and put the businesses in our rural communities back to work. If they are back at work, there will be employees on construction sites erecting buildings and making roads. People will have water and sewage systems.

• (1535)

That is the way it is. What we want is very straightforward. We want to make sure that our municipalities have access to what they need to provide services to their residents. It is not that complicated, so I cannot understand why the government thinks that citizens will

believe their little promises about spending money all over the place. Our constituents want results. They want to see shovels in the ground. They want water and sewer services. They want the infrastructure they need to get those services. That is what they want. They do not want promises. They do not want to hear that the government is working on it. They want to see people put shovels in the ground. They want to see the grader grade and the backhoe dig. That is what they need.

The Conservative government must change its mind about our motion and admit that the Liberal idea is a good one because it would put money directly in the hands of communities.

All we can do now is hope that the government will open its eyes. Someone once told me that we might have to think of the Conservatives as little babies or kittens that suddenly open their eyes and understand common sense. That is what we are trying to make the Conservatives understand. People in communities just want the Conservatives to accept common sense. They want access to the money now so that they can get started on their projects.

I know that my time is up, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I hope the Liberal motion will pass. This is an extremely important motion for the infrastructure in our communities.

[*English*]

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the last week I visited two municipalities in my riding, Victoria County and Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

When I met with those two councils to get a better sense of what requirements they have in infrastructure, they said that their municipalities were tapped out. They do not have the money to step up to the plate and they are worried it will pass them by. They simply do not have the funds to access the infrastructure programs.

My hon. colleague, the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, has a similar riding to mine, with a low tax base and a high demand for infrastructure. Could he tell the House how the Conservative government's present infrastructure program will pass those rural, small and cash-strapped communities by?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sydney—Victoria because his question is very relevant. These municipalities, towns and villages do not currently have, like most of the others, the means to carry out infrastructure projects. They have a project, but are unable to borrow the funds they require. No municipality today has a third of the money required in its bank account. The municipalities have to borrow. Who repays the loan? The taxpayers and the people of these towns and villages have to. They do not have the means to do so. The communities have to meet demands and provide basic services.

*Business of Supply*

At the moment, if we are to accept the Conservative government's approach, which means that if it continues not to listen to us, all small communities across the country, the cash strapped cities, towns, villages and rural communities, will be passed by. These communities will have to watch the train roll on by. Meanwhile, they need money. They need it so that, when this train will stop where they are waiting and the work can be done.

• (1540)

[English]

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke and the member who asked him the question talked about municipalities that possibly could not take advantage of the infrastructure program because they had no funding.

First, the member obviously knows the tax rebate that goes out to all municipalities will go up quite a lot. Second, page 135 of the budget recognizes the fact that some municipalities will be unable. Therefore, \$2 billion have been put in over two years in direct low cost loans to municipalities through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

If these municipalities are strapped, there is an ability for them to get money at a very low interest rate and that money can be used to help access infrastructure funding. That, on top of the gas tax rebate and the other programs the government has in place, should allow municipalities an opportunity to take advantage of this.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make two comments. First, I am pleased to see that the Conservative member opened his eyes, because the gasoline tax rebate was a Liberal program. As to the matter of the tax rebate to the municipalities when there are projects, it was a Liberal bill passed when we were in government. In fact, we did some very fine things.

Think about the government's position now. They talk of lending money to municipalities. The municipalities need money in their operating budgets now in order to provide fire and police services and basic services to the public. The government is going to tell them it is not a problem if they have no money, because it will be able to lend them money and charge interest, too. So, in the end, the municipalities will no longer be able to provide the basic services to their residents, but, according to the Conservatives, this is not a problem; they will not be able to say that the government did not help them.

In fact, the municipalities do not need that. They need direct aid, like the gasoline tax. The government must be able to give them money immediately and not compromise the future of the communities for the next 5, 10, 15 or 20 years. We are talking about our children's future here. So, if their future is to be assured, they cannot be burdened with debt forever. The fact of the matter is that the Liberal motion must be passed, and the public will benefit.

[English]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Lethbridge talked about low interest rate loans being available but that does not recognize the reality in our small towns. For example, the pulp and paper mill in North Cowichan may not be able to pay its taxes this year. A low interest rate loan would not help

that municipality which sees this company as a significant tax revenue source.

I wonder if the member could comment on what he thinks needs to be done to help out those small rural communities that are in desperate straits because their single industries are looking at financial difficulties.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, I have a similar situation in my riding. This is the reality for the city of Dalhousie, the third largest city in my riding. The Bowater pulp and paper mill closed down. That is exactly the same situation, and the municipality's revenues are dwindling as a result.

So, first of all, revenues are dwindling and the federal government wants them to take on additional debt. This means that the municipality's debt level will go on forever. As they say, the sky is the limit. At some point, we need to slow things down, because the reality is that the municipalities cannot be mortgaged for life.

We should help them out, so they can breathe a little easier and work on infrastructure projects without mortgaging the future of the communities or that of the citizens.

• (1545)

[English]

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Halifax.

I appreciate the opportunity to debate this motion put forward by the member for Parkdale—High Park.

It was crystal clear to those of us who were paying attention that this country was going to face an enormous downturn of profound proportions in our economy. It was clear to our cities, labour community, NGOs and institutions like those involved in health care delivery and education. The only group that seemed to be oblivious to the impending economic downturn was the Conservative Party of Canada and the government that fronts for it.

In August 2007, we watched as the American mortgage sector went into meltdown. People lost their homes, savings and hopes for the future. That meltdown sent shock waves through the American economy and real and obvious warnings to the global community, to us here in Canada and to those of us in the New Democratic Party.

We have seen over and over again that what happens in the U.S. has a significant impact on Canadians and on our economy. That is the very reason that our leader and our caucus pressed the government to address the signals in our economy that all was not well.

*Business of Supply*

I would remind members of the job losses: more than 14,000 in my community in just the past few months. In fact, London has experienced a 75% increase in those seeking employment insurance in the last few weeks. These are desperate families who come to my office. They are terrified of losing their homes. They do not know how they will manage or provide for their children and dependants. These are people who have been given no recourse or hope because of the vacuous economic update that we heard from the government last November, which was an insult to all Canadians.

The equally empty 2009 budget, in turn, offers nothing to those facing unemployment. Sixty per cent of Canadians do not even qualify for EI despite the fact that they paid into the employment insurance fund.

The same government is offering \$60 billion in tax cuts to the most profitable corporations, big banks and big oil. The same government took away women's human rights when it inflicted its so-called pay equity bill into the budget implementation bill and rolled back women's equality to the 1950s.

The same government gutted Status of Women Canada, abandoned veterans and their widows, undermined the Investment Canada Act and opened the door to foreign takeovers of Canadian business. It is the same government that absconded with \$54 billion from the surplus in the EI fund and denied first nations their rights by rejecting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and completely ignored our obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

It is the same government that created a \$3 billion slush fund and now refuses to say what it is for. This is the same government that is asking Canadians and the House of Commons to trust it when it comes to the distribution of the infrastructure dollars that we keep hearing about. I, for one, have real doubts. I have profound reservations because I do not trust it.

I do not know how the government spent its time over the past fall and early winter, other than proroguing the House when its incompetence became unbearable, but I can say that members of the New Democratic Party caucus were talking to Canadians and asking how best to defend against the coming economic storm. We talked to workers who were unemployed or about to be unemployed. We talked to seniors, educators, students, health care providers, the chambers of commerce in our cities, small businesses and NGOs. We even talked to our municipal leaders.

• (1550)

One of the crystal clear messages we heard from all sectors was that there was no time to waste, that we needed to act responsibly and quickly to address the economic crisis. That is the reason that my leader went to the Prime Minister on November 12 with a plan that met the needs of those with whom we had consulted. The Prime Minister, unfortunately, rejected all that support and cooperative gesture from my leader.

However, the fact remains that the advice that we took to him was the same advice that we heard in those town halls from the experts, from the people who are living with unemployment, the municipalities, the businesses, the people who deliver our services.

I met with members of the council for the city of London and they were very clear in what they had to say. Like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, they told me that the long term health of Canada's economy was closely linked to the scope and quality of municipal infrastructure investment and that municipal infrastructure deficits were a national issue requiring national leadership. They were very clear that there was no time for a top down, project by project delivery of infrastructure dollars. They needed and respectfully requested that the vehicle for delivery of the infrastructure money be on a per capita basis in the manner of the methodology used to deliver gas tax money.

As I am sure the House will recall, the transfer of money to municipalities came about in 2005 because the government adopted a policy put forward by the New Democratic Party. Since that time, municipalities have made effective use of those dollars, be it for public transit or other important kinds of infrastructure.

In my own city of London, the London Transit Commission, working closely with the members of the Amalgamated Transit Union, used gas tax money to upgrade our transit system to meet the needs of Londoners with differing physical abilities and to increase ridership. It was a very welcomed improvement for the workers, students, seniors and physically challenged ridership in London. The general manager of the London Transit Commission was very kind in his praise for NDP efforts with regard to gas tax funds for municipalities.

It has also become clear that in the past four years this money has been used wisely and well by municipalities. They know what is critical and most effective in their own jurisdictions. They are the level of government most familiar and responsive to local needs. That is the reason, among those I have already mentioned, that the method chosen by the government makes me very skeptical about the appropriate use of the promised money and, indeed, whether the money will actually flow.

Last January, my leader and I attended a town hall meeting in St. Thomas, Ontario. That community, as the House may recall, has been devastated by job losses and the exodus of the manufacturing industry is breathtaking. It is a town of about 35,000 people, with perhaps 17,000 to 18,000 families, and of those families nearly 5,000 have been affected by lay-off at Sterling Trucks, Lear, Formet and many more. It is absolutely catastrophic. We were meeting with these families, and the mayor of St. Thomas was present because this issue was at the heart of the crisis lived by the people of the St. Thomas area every day. The mayor of St. Thomas told us that while he appreciated the extra \$7 billion in infrastructure money, he said that it would do no good if it was not spent.

*Business of Supply*

I would like to remind the House that in budgets 2007 and 2008, \$33 billion was set aside for infrastructure. We asked the mayor of St. Thomas, indeed, many of the mayors across the country, about that \$33 billion and, without exception, they reported that they could not access the money. It was never spent. It was never intended to be spent because it was tied to a share put in place by the municipality and the province.

These municipalities are broke. They are stretched to the limit. They have no money for infrastructure. We need an honest vehicle for this money and we need flexibility. We need to see it flow but I do not see that in budget 2009.

• (1555)

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to the motion introduced by the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

I would like to thank the member for London—Fanshawe for agreeing to share her time with me.

The motion is essentially a way to address the failings of the budget implementation bill. It is really trying to send a message to the government.

Bill C-10, which is currently before the finance committee, simply does not go far enough to address our current economic crisis. Further, in the budget implementation bill the Conservatives have attached a series of ideological riders. They are trying to sneak through the back door a series of ideologically driven measures that have nothing to do with the stimulus package.

Hidden in this document of more than 500 pages are the Conservatives' proposals to take a woman's right to pay equity out of the human rights act. The bill would open up Canadian industry to more foreign ownership and would make it easier to go after students punitively. The budget fails to protect the vulnerable, fails to safeguard the jobs of today, and fails to create the jobs of tomorrow.

Today we have a Liberal motion to transfer money to municipalities via the gas tax and to transfer at least half of the proposed new infrastructure funding with no requirement that these funds be matched by the municipalities.

At the finance committee this week, New Democrats proposed amendments to Bill C-10. We proposed to strike the clause that proposes changes to the human rights act to prevent women from taking pay equity complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. We proposed to strike the provision that relaxes rules around environmental assessments under the Navigable Waters Act. We proposed to strike the provision that unilaterally tears up collective agreements signed by the government. We proposed to strike the provision that introduces punitive changes to student loans. We also proposed to strike the provision that weakens control on foreign companies taking over Canadian ones, and we tried to strike the clause that required other levels of government to match funds before they flow.

The motion does try to fix one problem with Bill C-10, and that is a laudable premise, despite the fact that the Liberals abstained from a vote in committee earlier this week that could have done essentially the same thing. They abstained when a vote of "yes" would have

meant a majority and would have meant that there would not have been strings attached to infrastructure funding.

Our proposed amendments were practical proposals for change. Our amendment to address environmental assessments in particular under the Navigable Waters Act was a proposal that was demanded by the people of my riding.

Constituents have written to me in shock that the Conservative government would see environmental regulations as red tape to be cut through. One constituent, Joel Richard from Halifax, wrote to me and said:

When we protect public access to waterways in Canada, we are also protecting the natural environment of those waterways. We understand that it is important to initiate infrastructure projects to stimulate the economy. But we should not use that as an opportunity to dismantle safeguards put in place to protect Canada's environment.

It has been made abundantly clear in the House that the budget and its implementation bill use the economic upheaval we are facing to push through a tax on women, workers and students. New Democrats would like to see less of that brutal agenda and more of the funds that are needed to get Canadians back to work.

The budget is another very good example of the government's inability to develop strategies, strategies to address issues such as the economic crisis, climate change, or gang violence.

Today the Minister of Public Safety introduced another bill that lacks a real strategy. In their attempt to address gang violence, the Conservatives have introduced a bill that really does not do much.

New Democrats will support the bill. In fact, we call on the Conservative government to fast-track it. When it comes to tackling violent gang crime, New Democrats are calling on the Conservatives to move farther and faster.

We need a comprehensive federal anti-gang strategy, but the bill is not a strategy, much like the budget implementation bill. A comprehensive strategy must include not only tougher sentences but also more police officers on the street, improved witness protection, tougher laws to tackle proceeds of crime, modernization of the laws that cover surveillance and evidence-gathering, and a comprehensive plan for prevention to ensure our kids are diverted from gangs in the first place.

• (1600)

The people of my riding are used to New Democrats getting results for people, and we have continually done just that.

Back in 2005, New Democrats in this House were able to get Bill C-48 passed. That was the NDP budget bill. The leader of the NDP and the member for Winnipeg negotiated hard to get billions of dollars for infrastructure and housing investments. This meant real investments for Halifax transit and infrastructure.

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The NDP's 2005 budget amendment meant around \$85 million in new investments for Nova Scotia, including \$26 million for transit, \$29 million for university and college infrastructure, over \$20 million for much-needed affordable housing, and almost \$8 million for off-reserve aboriginal housing.

Very much as a result of the member for Toronto—Danforth's work when he was president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and then later the leader of the New Democratic Party, we saw a new funding model that allowed money to flow in a quicker and more equitable way. This gas tax formula was superior to the previous system of always requiring matched funds.

It is clear that New Democrats know how to work collaboratively and represent Canadians in Parliament for results.

Housing is an area of provincial and municipal jurisdiction that the federal government can assist via infrastructure funding.

Until the mid-1990s, Canada had been a world leader in developing cooperative and not-for-profit housing, but it has done very little since. The Liberal government of the day allowed affordable housing investments in this country to stall for a decade because of the requirement for provincial matching funds at a time when provincial coffers were bare, so it is welcome now to see that the Liberals have adopted the NDP approach as their own.

New Democrats enthusiastically support this motion. I would have preferred that the members over there would have agreed to try to amend the budget bill instead. That would have actually changed the funding models in reality. As I stated earlier, these same members blocked our amendments that would have done exactly what this motion calls for.

Unfortunately, even if it is passed, this motion will have no real effect on these funds flowing out now. We will continue to see a requirement for matching funds from municipalities and provinces already stretched to the limit, and we will continue to see a lack of private funding slowing down projects. This will lead to unacceptable delays.

Just last month, I held a press conference with builders and housing advocates to illustrate how investment in affordable housing can address a serious housing crisis in a city while at the same time acting as a powerful fiscal stimulant. This conference was held at a site purchased and ready for affordable housing units, but waiting for adequate funding.

We have seen record job losses across the country, and the sad irony is that many of those jobs were in the construction industry at a time when thousands are waiting for sustainable and affordable housing to be built.

At this press conference, I was joined by Carol Charlebois of the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, who spoke eloquently about the poverty-alleviating effects of affordable housing, and by Peter Greer, from the carpenters' union, who addressed the creation of jobs that would come from this type of investment. Jennifer Corson was there from Solterre Design, and she spoke about the carbon-reducing benefits associated with building environmentally sustainable units. It is win-win-win.

We had hoped that the budget would at least have a plan for creating jobs and helping those in need through affordable housing investments, but instead we saw small investments with these onerous strings attached.

I was also honoured last week to second the member for Vancouver East's bill to establish a national housing strategy. If passed by this House, this bill will bring all levels of government together to work to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for all Canadians. What we need is strong legislation to guarantee that money is turned into housing, so I hope all my colleagues here will support the member for Vancouver East's bill when it comes soon before the House.

In closing, I support this motion, but again wish that the members opposite had decided to do something about this just a little earlier.

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member touched upon the issue of the Navigable Waters Protection Act. This act is 130 years old. There has been virtually no revision to that act since it was first introduced many years ago.

Our economic action plan takes steps to make sure that duplication is eliminated within that act, duplication of certain steps that have to be taken to preserve the environment. We are not eliminating environmental statutes; we are eliminating duplication of processes.

I had the fortune of sitting on the transportation committee in the previous Parliament. Unfortunately this rookie member was not able to participate. Only one witness appeared before that committee who opposed the changes we wanted, and that one witness agreed that the Navigable Waters Protection Act is not an environment statute, unlike what the NDP member has suggested.

I would ask her this: has she gone back and familiarized herself with the committee evidence that dealt with this particular issue, and would she go back and read the economic action plan and understand what our proposal actually will do for investment in Canada?

● (1605)

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure a bill that old does need some revision. It might be a very good thing to do, but publishing for 30 days in the *Gazette* is absolutely unacceptable when that is supposed to be the environmental assessment that we are going through. Just publishing something, saying it is what we will do, and saying that if anybody has anything to say about it, they had better let us know now is not an acceptable way to get infrastructure money out the door, which is exactly what we in the NDP are trying to do. We are saying that the money needs to get out the door, but not at the expense of women, students or the environment.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have been on the floor during debate with the member for Halifax. As a fellow Nova Scotian, I would like to welcome her to the chamber.

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Communities within my constituency see opportunity in the stimulus package and the infrastructure package, but some of them are facing great challenges. Some of the smaller communities have extended themselves and accepted a fair amount of debt over the years, and they are challenged to get involved. They do not have the 30% of the dollars to get involved in the program.

Does the hon. member see this motion as a measure that would at least provide some hope and opportunity for these communities, and not necessarily smaller communities, that are carrying a fair amount of debt at this time?

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the opposition whip for his warm welcome. It is nice to see Nova Scotians here today. I appreciate his question, because a similar question was raised earlier.

I will quote from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities:

Municipalities build, own and maintain the majority of this country's infrastructure—infrastructure that supports our global competitiveness and enviable quality of life.

Earlier there was a comment to the effect that we are going to give some loans to these guys. Loans will not cut it. Both smaller municipalities and larger municipalities need funding from government to continue to maintain the majority of this country's infrastructure.

Canada's infrastructure deficit continues to grow because municipalities lack the resources and the fiscal tools they need to deal with infrastructure needs and to meet a growing list of responsibilities that now include immigration, housing and the environment.

**Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I would like to put on the record, and perhaps get her to respond to, a letter from the president of the FCM. It says that the recent federal budget announced billions of dollars in new funding for projects that will help to create jobs, strengthen economic growth and build a greener, more competitive Canada, and that the FCM strongly supports these investments.

Perhaps the hon. member could respond to that letter from the FCM.

As well, the hon. member spent a lot of her speech on housing, which is certainly an interesting topic, but the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and its member housing cooperatives across the country appreciate our government's decision to include important social housing measures in the January 27 federal budget.

Will she acknowledge that the budget has been very warmly received by the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities?

• (1610)

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Mr. Speaker, the quote from FCM says that they support the investments, and I am sure they do, but will they be able to match? This is the big question.

Housing is my critic area. I know that the Cooperative Housing Federation of Canada and other housing organizations have said they welcome this money, but there are criticisms about it. The criticisms

relate to the most vulnerable, to the homeless and to how they can do this if they are required to match funds.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Willowdale.

Municipalities across Canada are rising up against a government that dangles the carrot of infrastructure money but then puts enough strings on it to keep it in political limbo. In other words, it wants to give the money if it is necessary but not necessarily give it.

Every single member of the House has constituents facing very tough times. The words "infrastructure spending" are nothing more than a conversation if money is not reaching our ridings, municipalities and cities. The cities want less talk and more action.

The inability of municipalities to contribute to major infrastructure projects is one of our system's vital flaws. The fact is that of the revenues collected by all levels of government, the federal government receives 49¢, the provincial and territorial governments receive 43¢ and, yes, that leaves only 8¢ for municipal governments.

To add further weight to this imbalance, for every dollar spent on infrastructure the federal government gets 35¢ back through income and sales tax. One would think the federal government would be doing more to reach out to the one level of government most affected by this imbalance, the one level of government that must manage the fallout from inadequate infrastructure funding.

Yet, because of administrative delays, the cost shared \$8.8 billion federal building Canada fund announced in the 2007 budget has so far financed very few projects, leaving close to \$3 billion in unspent federal money. The application process for the building Canada fund makes a complicated mess out of transfers that should be seamless.

In fact, the provisions of the program are ridiculous. The communities component project funding for municipalities with less than 100,000 residents is based on a one-third model, a split between all three levels of government. If the community cannot come up with the cash, the federal government will withhold its commitment and give nothing to the municipality. As a businessman, this kind of logic makes absolutely no sense.

Let me get this straight. Cities like metro Vancouver and Montreal, with millions of taxpayers, are having a hard time paying for basic infrastructure such as road repairs and municipalities with small populations are going to be asked to pick up one-third of the tab. This is not going to work.

The government has played politics with municipalities, a tactic that it seems to pull with any issue of importance. In 2005, the Liberal government renewed a number of infrastructure programs, including the municipal rural infrastructure fund and the public transit capital trust. Over seven years \$11.5 billion would have been transferred to communities for desperately needed infrastructure projects, but since taking power the Conservative government has made its priority to eliminate programs that have the ability to make a real difference in our communities. The Kelowna accord is a perfect example. So too is the cancellation of the Liberal national child care program.



In the case of infrastructure, the Conservatives took the municipal infrastructure fund and the public transit capital trust and removed over \$7.5 billion of that funding to put toward the building Canada fund. In 2007, the new \$8.8 billion building Canada fund was introduced to provide much needed help to fund the long list of infrastructure projects from coast to coast to coast. Unfortunately, in the program's first year the building Canada fund flowed zero dollars into the economy.

● (1615)

At the end of the day, the government can tour the country and make announcement after announcement, as many as it wants, but until the money reaches the communities that need it most and flows directly to the shovel ready projects Conservatives are talking about, it is all a fantasy. There is a better way to flow funding to cities and not surprisingly, it was previously implemented by a Liberal government.

Currently, the gas tax is one of the most stable and reliable sources of revenue for municipalities and used for: public transit, community energy, local roads, and improvements to water, waste water and solid waste infrastructure.

Not only is this motion proposing that at least half of all infrastructure moneys be distributed through the gas tax for the next two years, but it also asks for the suspension of the municipal matching commitments that are part of the current formula. Let us allow Canada's cities to catch up from years of neglect, cost downloading and underfunding.

If we talk to any mayor across Canada, it is clear that most are missing the cooperative relationship that had existed before the Prime Minister arrived onto the scene. What the government fails to understand is that this is not the time for rhetoric. Empty promises about infrastructure spending do not put workers back to work or assist in making up for the losses Canadian families have felt in their investment portfolios.

We must stop looking at municipal infrastructure issues through the lens of the Constitution. Instead, we must understand that cities are the economic engines of our economy and poor infrastructure is an obstacle to growth.

The Minister of Finance has been hiding out in recent weeks, keeping a low profile as the economy sinks into deeper trouble. His absence makes sense. When he deals with the provinces, he tries to bully them and when he hears the cities speak up for their needs, he calls them "whiners".

The government is playing a political game of chicken with the municipalities. It allows them to collect minimal revenues and then gives them an ultimatum under threat of withdrawing funds. This is not the basis of any kind of relationship that puts the needs of the country ahead of politics. But once again the government is so concerned with maintaining power at all costs, it cannot get away from petty politics, even when the future of the country hangs in the balance.

To conclude, I just want to remind Canada's mayors and councils that help is on the way. The Liberal Party of Canada has committed to holding the government to account with quarterly performance reports which the government has agreed to provide to Canadians

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and the House of Commons. Failure to distribute the infrastructure money in a timely fashion would surely be a recipe for defeat, something that we are not afraid to do if the government does not start flowing money to communities.

I urge all members of the House to support this worthwhile motion in the name of our municipalities, in the name of the residents of our municipalities, which hang in the balance as we debate this important issue here today.

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Surrey on his re-election. He and I live in the same region and share some of the same problems, especially problems of crime that are infecting many of our communities.

However, he did start off by suggesting that he is the spokesperson for municipalities across Canada, that there is this groundswell of opposition against our infrastructure program. There is one organization that does in fact speak for all municipalities across Canada, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I checked with what it had to say. Its president, Jean Perrault, said:

Today the federal government took concrete action to create new jobs, fight the recession and invest in a safer, greener, more competitive Canada. FCM strongly supports the federal government's commitment to invest significant new dollars in infrastructure projects that will put Canadians to work in 2009 and 2010.

Why does my colleague from British Columbia not take the FCM's word for it, because it speaks for municipalities?

● (1620)

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend and congratulate him on his re-election as well. I would like to remind the hon. member that when he brought in his first private member's bill on crime, I was the first member to support the hon. member. On every crime bill I stood in the House to make sure that we have the toughest and most effective laws.

However, it took the Conservative government three years to bring in those RCMP officers to the region. The hon. member for Abbotsford is well aware that we need more RCMP officers now, on the ground in metro Vancouver, to deal with the emergency we have with the gang violence and the gun crimes. I will come back to that later.

However, regarding municipalities, I have already said that I am speaking on behalf of all municipalities. I am not going to speak about Abbotsford and Surrey, but I am going to quote the mayor of Labrador City, Mr. Graham Letto. He said, "We're very disappointed in the fact that, yes, there is new money there, but the right model is not in place to access it in a timely manner".

That is exactly what—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while I understand that the leader of the Liberal Party has ragged his finger at the Conservative Party members and said they are on probation and put them in the proverbial corner, there still seems to be some important things missing from budget 2009. Among those I think is social infrastructure.

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I understand how important the infrastructure is that we have been talking about: streets, transit, roads and sewers. However, there is something missing in terms of social infrastructure: child care, the extension of employment insurance to those who are excluded, the training that comes with that, and new affordable housing.

I would like to inform the member that we have done some studying and \$1 billion in tax cuts creates about 5,000 jobs. A billion dollars in traditional infrastructure creates about 11,000 jobs. A billion dollars in social infrastructure creates 20,000 jobs. Would the member please comment about these statistics and should social infrastructure have been included in budgets 2007, 2008 and 2009?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her progressive views and her commitment to social infrastructure.

I would like to remind the member that in fact it was the Liberal government that committed to those progressive social values. When it came to child care, who brought in the landmark agreements with all 10 provinces? It was the Liberal government. Who brought in the Kelowna accord that would help the aboriginal population? It was the Liberal government. Who brought in the agreements with the communities and cities? The Liberal government. On all those things, I can tell the member that I am proud of the record of the Liberal Party.

However, today we have a problem. We are going through a tough time and we want to have infrastructure funding that should go to the cities. We are saying this is the Conservative plan and we are going to hold it accountable. We want to see these dollars flowing today into our municipalities.

[*Translation*]

**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 Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Davenport, Human Rights; the hon. member for Gatineau, Culture.

• (1625)

[*English*]

**Mr. Francis Valeriote:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties and for clarification I would like to seek unanimous consent to replace the motion adopted earlier concerning a subcommittee on the automotive industry with the following motion: That the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology create a subcommittee whose membership will be composed of five members with two from the Conservative Party, one from the Liberal Party, one from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party; that the chair be from the Conservative Party; that the subcommittee have all the powers and authority of a standing committee to undertake a study of the crisis faced by the automotive industry in Canada with the understanding that any legislation referred to the full committee take precedence over the work of the subcommittee; that the subcommittee not meet at the same time as the full committee; that the subcommittee report its findings and recommendations to the main committee no later than March 21, 2009; and that the main committee present the report to the House no later than March 31, 2009.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Newton—North Delta for sharing his time with me today.

I have entitled my part of this debate, “Infrastructure: The Municipal Challenge and Opportunity. What We've Been Promised, What We're Missing, What We're Worried We Won't Get”.

Infrastructure investment needs to be a part of the stimulus package and we have rare all party agreement on that. However, despite significant dollars committed in the new budget for infrastructure, we are seriously concerned, first, that much of the money announced for infrastructure will not flow due to the non-spending track record of the last few years and, more important, because of the way most of the budget's spending is structured, requiring matching funds from municipalities, which, in many cases, are unable to do so.

Second, infrastructure spending should be focused on ensuring future productivity and competitiveness. This does not include cottage decks.

Third, infrastructure spending should be done with an eye to a greener, more energy efficient future. Not surprisingly, the word green does not figure prominently in the new budget.

Despite our concerns, we did understand the need to pass the budget, flawed as it is, to ensure the flow of funds in this time of extraordinary need. We will use our agreed to report cards to monitor this very closely and to keep the government to account.

However, we have reason to be worried. Over two years ago, the Conservative government announced, with much fanfare, the \$33 billion infrastructure plan called the building Canada plan for the years 2007-2014. Most of this plan was a restructuring and rebranding of existing Liberal programs and funding arrangements. That is fine. We do not mind people taking our good ideas, although a little credit would be nice. Of the \$33 billion, \$11.8 billion came from the gas tax funds initiated by the Liberal government and \$5.8 billion came from the GST rebate initiated by the Liberal government.

The \$8.8 billion rebranded building Canada fund was itself largely a replacement of other infrastructure programs created by Liberal governments, which the Conservative government refused to renew at the time and then brought back. In effect, not much new but with a new Conservative name. The remainder was mostly made up of other Liberal programs carried over, such as the public transit capital trust and the municipal rural infrastructure fund.

However, the details of this \$33 billion program indicate that although the regular formula-based funding under the gas tax and GST rebate has flowed, virtually none of the much vaunted \$8.8 billion building Canada fund have been spent.

Of the \$1.5 billion allocated for the two years 2007-09, information suggests that as little as \$80 million have been spent, only 5% of the amount allocated. Not coincidentally, this is the program that relies on projects receiving matching funds from the provinces and/or municipalities.

The above discussion relates to more than numbers. The unfortunate result of the past delays is simple but serious: job losses. In November 2008 alone, out of a devastating 71,000 full time jobs lost, 44,000 of those jobs were lost in the construction industry. So what now?

In my prior role as critic for infrastructure, I engaged in many prebudget consultations on this issue. In those prebudget consultations, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities made it abundantly clear that more of the same building Canada fund process simply would not work. It made it clear that to truly get infrastructure money out the door and the shovels into the ground quickly, a transfer mechanism similar to that used for the gas tax fund should be implemented. The Conservatives ignored this recommendation completely.

All of the infrastructure promises in the budget follow the process of the, to date, failed building Canada fund. For the Conservatives to spend any infrastructure money, they require matching contributions from the provinces and/or municipalities. Few municipalities are in a position to fund projects not otherwise accounted for in the coming year, first, because of their reliance on property taxes alone, unlike the federal government and the provinces that tax on economic growth, they have a decreasing ability to contribute; two, they have already committed to budgets requiring spending over several years; and three, they are subject to legal restrictions on borrowing.

The budget does not help most municipalities. It, therefore, begs the question as to why the Conservatives are requiring matching funds when they already know that most municipalities cannot do so.

Frankly, we are concerned, a concern supported by many municipal representatives that the Conservatives know that the municipalities cannot match these increased funds, that the Conservatives will therefore not flow the funding, and that those same municipalities will be the ones blamed when needed infrastructure does not get built.

I ask all members of the House to support the motion to ensure that infrastructure money really does flow to the municipalities, those that know the infrastructure needs and know how to meet them at this time of extraordinary economic need.

• (1630)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague keeps talking about municipalities not being able to match funds and she is right. Some municipalities will not be able to or will find it difficult to match funds. However, Toronto, for example, went to bed with \$190 million in its budget last year, so some municipalities do have money in the bank. For those that do not, we have a \$2 billion credit facility from which they can borrow. As

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soon as they send in the bill for their project, the money will be paid. If that does not work for them, we have agreed with the provinces that we will go fifty-fifty, province and federal, for projects like that.

For the member to say, cart blanche, that municipalities just do not have the money to participate is wrong, in my view, and I would like the member's comments on that.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, coming from a riding in Toronto, the good riding of Willowdale, the ability for the province and that particular municipality to participate is welcome. I give credit where it is due. The public transit needs in Toronto are significant.

However, there are many more municipalities across this country, most of which are not as large as Toronto. Municipalities across the country have been making it clear to us that although some municipalities, generally the larger ones, are in a position to take advantage of some of these funds, the majority of municipalities, particularly smaller ones, are simply unable to do so. Although there may be some credit available, they have made it very clear to us that even with that facility they are simply not able to participate.

I am not making this up. We are responding to repeated pleas from municipalities all across the country saying that they understand the needs in their community, that they know how to fill those needs but that they need to be able to address those financially but that the federal government, by insisting on matching funds and, even worse, knowing that the matching process has not worked, is of real concern.

I will repeat that the municipalities have made it clear that they are ready to build and to get these projects going but they would much prefer a process of funding that was much more similar to the gas tax fund that was not matching.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a comment was just made in the House around the fact that not only can municipalities borrow money, but they need to pay the bills upfront and then get repayment from the government. What that means is that they can borrow money and essentially fund the project 100%. They have to front the federal government's portion as well.

I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that many small municipalities simply do not have the resources available to them to pay 100% of the cost upfront and then wait for reimbursement from the government.

• (1635)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, needless to say, I thank my colleague for her question because it is, in part, a response to an earlier statement that suggested that municipalities were in a position to take advantage of a credit arrangement being purported by the current government as an answer to these problems.

It is not the answer because most municipalities cannot take advantage of the credit opportunity simply because of the process and the requirement that is being placed upon the municipalities to do it all upfront.

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We are in a time of significant economic challenge. That is not lost on anyone, except perhaps for those who have structured this infrastructure process to deny the opportunity to so many municipalities to spend the money on infrastructure as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to engage in debate on today's Liberal supply day motion brought forward by the member for Parkdale—High Park.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, who is an eminent expert on this debate because he has been tasked with this exact role of ensuring this money gets out. While it is not part of his official title, I dare say that he is one of the hardest working ministers of the Crown, and I say that out of total respect for the individual.

Before I continue with my remarks, I want to take a moment to thank the member for Parkdale—High Park. We greatly appreciate his continued support of our Conservative government's budget and, more important, Canada's economic action plan contained therein, a plan the member for Parkdale—High Park has judged positively and as "a really serious effort".

He will be happy that it is an effort that has also gained the favour of many of his former colleagues in the provincial Liberal government in Ontario. Provincial Liberals, like the Ontario minister of finance, Dwight Duncan, who heralded our Conservative government's recent budget as "a step in the right direction". He went on to say:

...the federal government has come to the table and has made the much-needed infrastructure investments Ontario has been calling for.

We appreciate that the federal government has moved to help Ontarians...

Ontario Premier, Dalton McGuinty, highly praised our budget as well, including the \$1 billion southern Ontario development fund, an initiative, I note, that previous Liberal governments had steadfastly refused to support.

In Premier McGuinty's own words, he said:

I put that (idea) to all the parties.... This prime minister has actually delivered.

This is real, it's meaningful and it's coming here just in time. This is a time when we're taking a shellacking in the manufacturing sector in southern Ontario.

I want to commend [the] Prime Minister...and his government for listening to some of the very significant specific concerns Ontarians have expressed [for an extended period of time].

We have a Prime Minister who delivered for Ontario and we have a government that delivered for Ontario; a sea change from the previous Liberal government under Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin that neglected, in fact, that mocked and ignored the demands of Ontario's elected representatives and the pleas of the people of Ontario only asking for fairness.

Under the Martin Liberal government, for instance, when Ontario raised concerns about the fairness of certain federal transfers in 2005, such as health transfers, it was met with verbal abuse of almost unparalleled vitriol. The McGuinty government was even compared to a separatist at one point by its federal Liberal cousins for even broaching the subject.

Reading from an account, as described in the April 30, 2005 edition of the *Toronto Star*, of a speech given by the current Liberal finance critic, my friend from Markham—Unionville, who was then a federal Liberal cabinet minister, it reads:

Clearly speaking with the backing of Prime Minister Paul Martin, [the member for Markham—Unionville] told a Bay Street audience McGuinty is eroding "Ontarians traditional Canada-first attitude" with his "analytically deficient" numbers showing Ontario is being shortchanged. By doing so, McGuinty is playing a "nationally dangerous" game....

In effect, [the member for Markham—Unionville] is suggesting McGuinty is threatening Canada's future by seeking fairer treatment for this province from Ottawa. [The member for Markham—Unionville] blames the premier for intensifying the self-inflicted damage the federal Liberals have done in Quebec with the sponsorship scandal.

Such comments, as one would expect, proved to be extremely offensive to all Ontarians.

At that time, Dwight Duncan, then the minister of energy in the McGuinty government, was so offended he asked for an apology. He said that to suggest that this campaign somehow helped the separatists was poppycock and that he took it as a personal insult.

● (1640)

Minister Duncan's cabinet colleague in the McGuinty government at the time, then minister of education, who is now the current member for Parkdale—High Park, shared the outrage publicly, remarking:

—what's dangerous for Canada is a country that doesn't show the capacity to solve problems....There's a billion dollars missing in transfers on health and post-secondary education from the federal government.

I am happy to report to the member for Parkdale—High Park that after the failure of the previous Liberal government to act, this Conservative government did act. We have acknowledged that problem relating to Ontario's transfers, while the Liberal government denied it.

Again quoting Dalton McGuinty's glowing commentary following budget 2009:

The federal government has...addressed an outstanding concern related to the Canada Health Transfer. We are now going to be treated the same as Canadians in the rest of the country when it comes to the funding that we receive for the Canada Health Transfer.

We recognize, more important an even larger problem related to a fiscal imbalance that existed between the federal government and the provinces. We took action to correct that imbalance, starting in budget 2007 and continuing in budget 2009. That is why federal support for provinces is now at an all-time high and will continue to grow. We acknowledged a problem existed. We took action and we delivered.

What does that mean for the provinces in cold, hard dollar amounts? Sticking with the Ontario example of consistency, in 2009-10 that province will receive \$15.8 billion in federal support, a \$4.3 billion increase over the last year of the former Liberal government, over \$4 billion more in support for the people of that province to ensure the best health care, post-secondary education and much more.

*Business of Supply*

Some may ask what the preceding has to do with today's motion. In a word, everything. If my colleagues could take a few moments to read today's motion and reflect, it states as its objective an increase in a particular mechanism that could increase support for municipalities.

However, what are municipalities? Who do they rely upon for their considerable financial support? We know the answer. It is obvious. It is their respective provincial governments.

Let us ask ourselves, knowing that, under what conditions can municipalities best be in a position to support investments in a particular activity like infrastructure? Would they be well served by a provincial government suffering under the weight of a growing fiscal imbalance, perpetuated by a federal government oblivious to its existence?

We all know what happened when the Liberals radically slashed transfer payments to the provinces and territories in the 1990s. We all know what impact it had on the ability of provinces and territories to provide basic health care, education and other services upon which they depended.

We saw the strain it had on the efforts of municipalities to support infrastructure. In the words of the longest serving premier in Canada, the NDP premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer:

Everybody understands that what happened in '95 is the deficit was moved from the federal government to the provinces and from the provinces to the municipalities. We still have potholes in our country from what happened in '95.

We understood what happened. We learned from a history of Liberal neglect, and we will not repeat those mistakes. That is why our Conservative government has ensured federal support for provinces is now at an all-time high. That is why our Conservative government is making the largest federal public infrastructure investment in Canadian history through our \$33 billion building Canada plan. That is why our economic action plan provides an additional \$12 billion in new infrastructure funding.

We took action and we delivered. We are making the necessary investments to help stabilize the economy for today, while laying the groundwork for the growth of tomorrow.

● (1645)

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I to thank the parliamentary secretary for his less than insightful remarks. There is a saying back in Labrador, "It's no good to have education if you've got no common sense".

I come from Labrador where communities range from a population of 10,000 down to around 35. They are in dire need of infrastructure. The turmoil across the country is affecting Labrador just like it is other Canadians.

The parliamentary secretary's minister has said that he will vote for a budget even though he has made mistakes. One of those mistakes is the methodology by which the government will transfer infrastructure money. All municipalities across the country agree the gas tax method is the best way to flow the funds.

Why not adopt this common sense approach to get more money into the hands of municipalities, communities like Pinware and Black Tickle that need water and sewer or places like Williams

Harbour that need road connections? Why not flow the money down this avenue?

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's questions are usually about equalization, but we would welcome Newfoundland and Labrador to the have provinces, and we congratulate it for that. We have seen a few changes in the country this year.

I might remind the hon. member that this Conservative government always ensures that taxpayer dollars are utilized in the most efficient way. Many public-private partnerships are willing to step forward. We may in fact, and I am sure the hon. minister will allude to this in his speech, be able to triple this investment through partnerships to provide the economic stimulus that we need to get this economy growing again.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Madam Speaker, as a former municipal politician for 13 years in the city of Burlington, I am glad someone finally stood in the House today and said good things about municipalities and the fine work they do with the respect that the House should give to them.

In my community alone, 13 projects worth \$40 million were proposed. Selection criteria has been checked off, including whether they have money already budgeted.

Does the parliamentary secretary have confidence in the municipalities of our country to deliver on their one-third and make a difference in terms of stimulus in a time of need?

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague who has done yeoman's work in the finance committee. He did a tremendous job in ensuring that the economic action plan got through committee. He also is working hard to ensure that our senators recognize it and keep it moving.

Am I confident? Absolutely. I am almost as confident that the municipalities have the amount of money they need for their share as I am confident that the minister who looks after getting the infrastructure out the door will get it out the door.

● (1650)

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the parliamentary secretary. It is one thing to talk about effective expenditure of money, but for me another issue is to ensure the money is spent in a way that is in the interest of Canadians. In the area I represent, there are health issues with respect to boil order advisories in a lot of the communities.

Does the parliamentary secretary not see that an expenditure of infrastructure money to help some of these communities would be a wise investment and, at the same time, create employment?

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Madam Speaker, absolutely. That is part of our infrastructure spending, especially on first nations. We have put money aside for first nations. Many of these people are on boil water orders. In fact, there is a residential community in my riding in Alberta that is not a first nations community. We hope to provide infrastructure money to that community and many others. There is nothing more concerning to us than to have communities on boil water orders.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to talk about infrastructure and this government's efforts in that regard. As my colleagues before me have mentioned, our government has a very important economic action plan to help stimulate economic growth, create jobs and bring back hope and prosperity to our great country. We are working hard to roll it out.

We are experiencing, expanding and accelerating our infrastructure investments and we will provide almost \$12 billion in additional stimulus to the Canadian economy beyond our building Canada plan. Our economic action plan provides \$4 billion of our economic stimulus fund to help provinces, territories, communities and municipalities get projects started as soon as possible. It provides \$2 billion to accelerate colleges and university construction. The budget mentions Algonquin College, a great college in Ottawa—West Nepean. It has a project all ready to go that can create a lot of jobs and help create more once it is complete by training more tradespeople. That is good news.

It provides \$1 billion to create a new green infrastructure fund. That is good news. It provides \$500 million to support the construction of new community recreation facilities and to upgrade existing facilities. My constituency provided the genesis for this idea. We have the Merivale Arena. It is in bad shape. It was a centennial project in 1967 and it desperately needs to be repaired and renovated. Right across the country, whether it is in Oxford County, New Brunswick or Manitoba, projects like that can do a lot of good and get Canadians working again.

We are also accelerating additional funds for infrastructure to move it up and get those projects going now. Some municipalities expressed a concern when we did our prebudget consultations, particularly the parliamentary secretary who did some excellent consultations, that they might not have the money. There is a \$2 billion fund of loans to support those municipalities.

I speak to my constituents in Ottawa West—Nepean. They say that in these challenging economic times they want to see their governments work together. We have led the way in the province of Ontario. We have put aside past political grudges and my premier and I are working constructively to make things happen for the people of Ontario. That is good news. That is what taxpayers expect.

We are also working very well with Ontario's minister of energy and infrastructure. George Smitherman and I just a few weeks ago announced a \$1 billion for almost 300 infrastructure projects right across the province of Ontario. Three levels of government are all in the same boat, all with an oar in the water and all rowing together, helping to invest in our communities and get Canadians working again.

Let us look at what municipal leaders said about these investments.

South Stormont-Dundas Mayor Bryan McGillis said of his residents, "We've been waiting for this money for 30 years. I've almost got tears in my eyes I'm so happy". That is incredible.

Now, one might say that I just fished out one quote. There are more.

Quinte West's public works chair said, "I'm excited, dumbfounded and astonished. This is a project that we've needed to get done for a long, long time".

Merrickville-Wolford Mayor Doug Struthers said, "It's been a tremendous day for our municipality".

The member for Leeds—Grenville has been pushing hard for this project in Merrickville. Its existing sewage treatment plant was in danger of collapsing. We could have had raw sewage going down the Rideau Waterway, just after it was named a world heritage site. That goes through my constituency and right to the border of Parliament Hill. By working together, we can accomplish things.

People said that these must be Conservative mayors and politicians. What do Liberals say about these announcements? Let us take a look.

My good friend Dave Levac, a Liberal MPP from Brant, said, "This is the kind of co-operative venture that produces the most effective and efficient projects any level of government can hope for". Is that not good news? He works well with the mayor of Brant.

I suppose I could go on and on, but I will resist that temptation. However, I have news for the member from Toronto and other members. Premier Dalton McGuinty and I are not satisfied that we have done enough. That is why tomorrow morning we will be doing it again. We will be creating more jobs and more opportunities. The Prime Minister is in British Columbia spreading the good word, investing in our cities and public transit. Premier Dalton McGuinty and I will be working together and announcing even more funding. The key thing is that we are all working together.

● (1655)

Instead of creating 1,000 jobs, if we get more money from the province, we can create 2,000 jobs. If we get municipalities on board, we can create 3,000 jobs. We can create more jobs by working together and get more economic stimulus. The size of the growth package will be much bigger. We are leveraging funds and that is good news.

There were other views. When we did the prebudget consultations, everyone said that the fastest way to create stimulus is to just give the money to them. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation said just to put it all in their pockets and they will spend it faster. The provinces said the model of an infrastructure trust would be better. Just give all the money to the provincial premiers and they could spend it. The municipalities said the same thing. Just give all the money to them right away and they will spend it.

We are taking a balanced approach, just as the Prime Minister and this government always does, fair and balanced, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Airports wanted the money to go to them. The Commercial Rail Association wanted it all invested there. The public transit folks said to skip the municipalities and go right to the transit authority. However, as usual we are taking a measured and balanced approach.

We have extended the now permanent gas tax transfer so it creates the kind of partnerships so municipalities and projects around the province and around the country can get support.

Another benefit of the government's approach is that contributions by all three levels of government are dedicated to specific projects. Taxpayers know what their money is being used for and how it will benefit communities.

There have been times in the past when it has not worked that way. I am sad to report that in my own community, the city of Ottawa diverted provincial infrastructure money meant to go for road maintenance into its snow-plowing budget. We want to make sure that does not happen. That money was meant to fix our roads, not to be syphoned off for operating expenditures.

The government of my friend Dalton McGuinty ultimately passed a law which prevented the misuse of infrastructure money. The Investing in Ontario Act received royal assent on May 14. The City of Toronto in the past has used provincial infrastructure money to pay down debt. I understand that Toronto is in a difficult situation. Mayor Miller is a friend of mine and does a good job of representing the city, but we want to ensure this money gets Canadians working and simply does not go to pay off bonds or to plow snow.

I know that is important to the member for Labrador. We want to create jobs and strengthen our economy. We have a lot of cooperation for that.

We are doing a lot to cut red tape. We have made changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act that have gone through this House at second reading, which one premier called the biggest job killer in his province. That is your province, Madam Speaker, British Columbia.

My premier came forward with a five inch binder, a business case which took an additional nine months to prepare, which has slowed down the Spadina subway going to the riding of the member from York West.

We are working to streamline those efforts, because when my premier has advice, we listen and we work together. That has always been my approach.

### *Royal Assent*

Another favourite premier of mine is the premier of Manitoba. One of Canada's best premiers, Gary Doer, came out and said that we should have one project, one approval, not one project and three, four or five approval processes through two levels of government and that "perhaps we could spend our time and money a little more effectively".

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

This is what the premier of the province of Quebec, Jean Charest, said:

[*English*]

"I am always fascinated by the question of whether there will be national norms, as though the people of Quebec and Manitoba care less about the environment than some bureaucrat in Ottawa".

Even David Miller, my good friend the mayor of Toronto, with whom I have a good relationship, said that he thinks it is right to harmonize the federal process with the provincial. When we are going to do the right thing for the environment, we are actually doing the right thing for the economy in the long run.

That is very good news. We are committed to working together with our provincial and municipal partners. We are committed to making investments in important community projects in those other areas, whether it be an airport, whether it be a port. Working together we can go further, faster and get the job done. That is what the people of Ottawa West—Nepean sent me to this place to do, and that is exactly what we are doing, working in partnership.

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## ROYAL ASSENT

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Before we proceed with questions and comments, I am going to read a message from the office of the Governor General.

I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall

Ottawa

February 26th, 2009

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, will proceed to the Senate Chamber today, the 26th day of February, 2009, at 5:30 p.m., for the purpose of giving Royal Assent to a bill of law.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila-Marie Cook

Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor

*Business of Supply***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and for clarification, I would like to seek unanimous consent to replace the motion adopted earlier concerning a subcommittee on the auto industry with the following:

That the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology create a subcommittee whose membership will be composed of five (5) members, with two (2) from the Conservative Party, one (1) from the Liberal Party, one (1) from the Bloc Québécois, and one (1) from the New Democratic Party, and that the Chair be from the Conservative Party; that the sub-committee have all the powers and authority of the Standing Committee, to undertake a study of the crisis faced by the automotive industry in Canada, with the understanding that any legislation referred to the full committee take precedence over the work of the sub-committee, that the sub-committee not meet at the same time as the full committee, that the sub-committee report its findings and recommendations to the main committee no later than March 24, 2009, and that the main committee present the report to the House no later than March 31, 2009.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to present this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

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

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**MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE**

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill: Bill C-12, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2009.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is interesting that my dear friend is talking about all the wonderful things the Conservatives have done and are going to do, but talk is cheap and there is no doubt about it. We can stand here and make all kinds of commitments and promises, but it is when the dollar hits the road that it really counts.

I say to the hon. minister that I am very hopeful that some of the things that he was talking about are going to happen. Of the \$33 billion that was previously part of the building Canada fund, somewhere around 4% of that ever actually got out there. Our motion is trying to make sure that there are ways the money will flow efficiently.

I would like to ask the minister a couple of questions. One of them is about the announcement made by the Liberals about the infrastructure in Toronto to do with regard to York University and the transit extension. After the Conservatives were elected, the previous minister of infrastructure made that announcement again and said that the Conservatives were committed to going forward with it. Today we are still talking about it coming out of these funds in the stimulus package when it should be coming out of the previous fund.

Second is the issue about matching funds. Whether I am talking about my city of Toronto or some of the other cities, the difficulty cities have with matching funds is they do not have the extra dollars. They have an aging infrastructure, whether it is community centres, or sewers and water mains, and the cities do not have the money unless they raise the property taxes. How is the government going to deal with the pressures for things that are critical and need to be done, but which the municipalities do not have the money to do?

● (1705)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Madam Speaker, let me compliment the member on those very precise and good questions.

On the money for the Spadina subway extension which will service her riding, there is so much work that needs to be done from the announcement to the project going forward. There is a lot of engineering work. Building a subway is a gigantic undertaking. That has gone on. There has been a significant amount of red tape which has slowed down the process. My premier brought up the example of that five inch binder, duplicate environmental assessments, the Navigable Waters Protection Act; we are clearing the deck of those impediments. There will still have to be engineering work done. I understand construction will begin very shortly on that project. They are ready to break ground in a big way, which is good news for her constituents and people all over the GTA.

The member talked about 4% of the \$33 billion being expended. Of course that \$33 billion includes the gas tax money and the GST rebates, which has gone on completely on schedule, so it is substantially more than that. We are moving aggressively to make decisions quicker and to cut red tape to see things flow.

She talked about municipalities, and even her own, not having the money. In the budget we did come forward with a \$2 billion loan program. Interest rates are at historic lows. That will help municipalities.



*Business of Supply*

I know that her own city of Toronto underspent. In 2007, the last year that city's statements were audited, it underspent by some \$160 million to \$180 million. It underspent its capital budget. I know Toronto, and the good news is there are funds there. If there is not, it does not necessarily have to be the municipalities. The Hon. Frances Lankin, PC, now the head of the United Way of Greater Toronto, has some projects for which the United Way could come up with a third of the funding, and the province is prepared to support a third. So there is another example of how things can happen for people in the greater Toronto area.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased that my hon. friend and colleague, the minister is co-operating with the provinces and municipalities across the country, particularly in my home province of Ontario and specifically in my city of Toronto.

Over and over again the mayor has raised the issue of access to the building Canada fund and the need to cut red tape. I appreciate the minister's comments, but I also saw this in the last recession, in the 1990s. Many people, specifically in the construction industry, who were out of jobs really should not have been because there were projects that were left hanging and were not being implemented.

Again, I want to have the minister's assurance. Will the minister do everything in his power to make sure these projects go out the door so that people who are losing their jobs, especially in the construction sector, can in fact get work?

**Hon. John Baird:** Madam Speaker, the answer is yes, we will do everything within our power. We can cut some legislative burden, which is in the budget bill, which the hon. member has supported, and that is noted and appreciated. We can cut it with regulation, which we are moving forward with, which all 13 premiers have agreed to support. We can move it through bureaucratically at the federal level, politically at the political level, and oftentimes there are political fights which delay projects.

At the end of the day, though, we can only clear decks on those things at the federal level. At the end of the day, in his community, it will be community organizations, the city or the province with the shovel itself. The good news is all those other levels—

• (1710)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Resuming debate. The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I too rise today to speak on the issue of sharing on a per capita basis a significant and growing portion of the federal excise tax on gasoline to support the infrastructure needs of cities.

Cities are the engines that drive our economy and they are hurting. As Mississauga's legendary mayor, Mayor Hazel McCallion, has said, "If the heart isn't strong the arteries aren't strong", and Mayor McCallion has a very strong heart.

With 80% of Canadians living in cities, large and small, cities need guaranteed, sustainable and annual funds to address their infrastructure needs, to fix their crumbling infrastructure, to grow their communities, to prevent further decay of existing infrastructure, to initiate projects, and to keep Canada competitive.

Cities do not need politicians who disparage municipal mayors by calling them whiners, and who purport not to be in the business of fixing potholes. At the end of the day there is only one taxpayer and we are all in the business of fixing potholes. Otherwise, we watch our infrastructure crumble.

The Liberal Party has a strong record of robust strategic investments in infrastructure with programs like new deal for municipalities, a proud legacy of previous Liberal governments. The Liberal Party remains committed to working to meet the needs of our cities.

In the 2005 budget the Liberal government agreed to transfer \$5 billion of the gas tax over five years and transfer \$2 billion annually after 2009. This would have made funding predictable and long term based on allowing municipalities to pool, bank or borrow against this funding providing them with significant additional financial flexibility. To ensure accountability communities would report on the use of the funds on an annual basis.

In the election of 2006 Liberals pledged to make the gas tax transfer permanent, a measure the Conservative government has adopted.

Today the Liberal motion goes one step further by recommending that the gas tax be shared on a per capita basis making distribution more fair and equitable to all municipalities. It is efficient and accountable, and has a proven track record of success.

Mayor Hazel McCallion has been one of the most vocal advocates on the needs of cities through her "cities now" campaign which asks for 1% of the gas tax. Mayor McCallion was one of the first politicians to identify the need for both provincial and federal support for municipalities to facilitate the strengthening of their failing infrastructures.

Mississauga is the sixth largest city in Canada. It is debt free and prudently managed. Tax increases have been kept to a minimum level and the city has amassed an enviable cash reserve of \$800 million. Yet, Mississauga has a current infrastructure deficit and needs \$75 million annually or \$1.5 billion over the next 20 years.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that Canada's municipal infrastructure deficit to be \$123 billion and rising. It lists over 1,000 shovel ready projects waiting for federal funding. The \$14 billion required for all these projects would help address the need for road repairs, water and waste management, municipal building upgrades, public housing and public transit, projects which would create an estimated 150,000 jobs.

The FCM report shows that a \$1 billion capital investment in local infrastructure would result in a .13% increase in national GDP and create 11,500 new jobs including 5,400 jobs in the construction industry alone. The FCM cites that the gas tax model is the best way to flow money into these projects quickly so cities and communities can get started on infrastructure projects.

*Private members' business*

Mayor McCallion noted that cities cannot maintain 58% of the nation's public infrastructure with 8¢ of every \$1 as municipalities are currently limited to raising funds through property taxes alone. The gas tax method is one of the most effective ways to channel economic stimulus ensuring the best outcome for Canada's future competitive advantage.

The gas tax is efficient and accountable. Over 95% of the gas tax funds have been delivered to municipalities over the past two years. This will increase immediate economic stimulus and create jobs. The big city mayors caucus recommended that the gas tax process was the fastest way to get money into the hands of municipalities in order to put people to work. Municipalities, such as Mississauga which has shovel ready projects, have been disappointed in the past by the government's web of red tape. The renowned mayor, Hazel McCallion, calls it the "glacial pace at which funding announcements turn into cash".

● (1715)

Mississauga is still waiting for its share of the \$33 billion building Canada fund to flow for projects such as the \$52 million bus rapid transit system, the \$30 million downtown revitalization project, the \$20 million for Sheridan College, the \$10 million for Burnhamthorpe Branch Library, the \$8 million for fire halls, and the \$4 million for pathway lighting, just to name a few. This is a total of \$124 million worth of projects, shovel ready, but plagued with long bureaucratic delays.

Mississauga is anxious to begin working on construction of its \$259 million bus rapid transit line and other projects. When will the money start to flow?

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member.

It being 5:15 p.m. pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, March 3, 2009 at 3 p.m.

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:** Madam Speaker, given the time and the fact that we want to make certain that we have private members' business, I wonder if we could see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ)** moved that Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (removal of waiting period), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I will be pleased to read the summary of the bill.

This enactment removes the waiting period that precedes the commencement of benefits after an interruption of earnings and repeals provisions that refer to that waiting period.

Let us begin with a definition of what a waiting period is. It is the two weeks following application for employment insurance. This two week period starts the day following the day the person loses his job. There are very few cases where this waiting period does not apply. There are exceptions for maternity leave for the first child, etc, but they are very rare. In our opinion, the two week waiting period is not right and that is why we want to get rid of it.

On November 25 last year, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development answered a question from the Bloc Québécois concerning abolition of the waiting period as follows:

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

We do not agree with this. Even if people are laid off just a week, that week ought to be paid. As a general rule, in the present crisis situation, people are rarely laid off for a week, or for two weeks, but for far longer than that.

The truth is that the waiting period is nothing more and nothing less than a way of punishing the workers. Because they have lost their jobs, they get nothing to live on for two weeks. How can a family with several children and a single breadwinner survive for two weeks without that one income? It does not occur to the present government that people have huge hardships to cope with during that period.

I will even give examples of people in my riding who worked overtime for which they were not paid for several years. It was paid when they lost their jobs, even though they had worked those hours several years earlier. In the case of people receiving a pension, the employer's part was considered income by employment insurance, even though it had been paid in 2006-07 and was not current income. It was calculated, therefore, as income and divided by the number of weeks worked, which pushed back the beginning of the waiting period, in some cases by as much as several weeks. In other words, people who are without an income and who have spent all their money are punished with a two week delay without an income. This puts them in a very difficult situation and it is totally unnecessary.

Does the government arrange it so that the unemployed suffer serious economic difficulties, in the hope that they will get back to work faster? This kind of logic is totally nonsensical. The role of government is quite the opposite: to help people and meet their needs.

Sweden sets an example for the whole world, even though it is sometimes criticized for giving too much. Still, 80% to 85% of Swedes who lose their jobs find another and go back to work.

● (1720)

The two week waiting period does not exist and everyone who loses their job gets one year of employment insurance.

There is no work penalty, and the duration is not affected by a waiting period. We think that if the waiting period were eliminated, people who lose their jobs could find another more easily and more quickly because they would not be worrying about how they are going to survive the next two weeks. It would help people get back to work.

The government deprives the unemployed of \$900 million. The minister has actually calculated that such a step would cost \$900 million. It is possible. We will take that number. We do not say it is unrealistic and it may be true. What it means, though, is that \$900 million is not being given back to the unemployed. That \$900 million would do a lot to help people get back to work.

The current economic crisis is creating more unemployed people and the government therefore wants to inject money into the economy as quickly as possible. I think that the \$900 million that has been paid by both the unemployed and their employers should be given back to the unemployed and should not be turned into something that is discriminatory. I will actually read an article in a few minutes from a newspaper in my riding which points out just how discriminatory this is for working people.

As I said earlier, all the large amounts received just delay the waiting period. This money is subtracted and pushes back the two week waiting period.

I would like to mention a few short passages from a newspaper in my riding, a large regional paper from Sherbrooke, which talks about a terrible scandal, the two week waiting period. It says:

Economic groups, unions and politicians have been fighting for over a decade to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

This specifically concerns the waiting period. This is fair to say because it has been demanded by unions, by community groups, by groups that defend the unemployed and also by workers. Truly everyone is demanding that the waiting period be eliminated.

It has been said that employment insurance is a universal system. If it is universal and is imposed by the government, why now are only 53% of people eligible for employment insurance benefits when in 1989, 83% of people who lost their jobs were eligible? Fewer and fewer people are eligible for employment insurance and, on top of that, there is a waiting period that should not exist.

In addition, I would like to point out that they have added—and this is the argument we will keep hearing—five weeks to the end of employment insurance benefits. However, these five weeks at the end do not replace the two weeks at the beginning. We know that only 28% of people use all of their employment insurance benefits. That means that this five week measure affects only 28% of unemployed people. Once again, this is obviously discriminatory.

I would like to come back to the newspaper article. It talks about how we have moved from an employment insurance system to a deficit insurance system. It adds that this is scandalous. How true.

We agree fully with this newspaper, which also mentions that eliminating the two week waiting period would have a much greater impact on the financial security of claimants. That is exactly what I am trying to say. You can see that the Bloc Québécois are not the only ones to think this way.

### *Private members' business*

The article also goes on to say:

● (1725)

In an economic crisis, these measures penalize the most vulnerable workers in our society.

That is quite right. The most vulnerable in our society need these two weeks.

According to the Canada Labour Congress, estimated benefits lost...total more than \$43 million a year for the City of Sherbrooke alone—

The figures are the same. Sherbrooke is just beside my riding. I live in the Eastern Townships and the amount of employment insurance benefits not handed out and kept by the government is estimated at \$100 million. These monies could cover the two week waiting period. The money is there. We do not have to look for it elsewhere. Workers have already paid for it.

How can the Government of Quebec tolerate having this social cost passed on to it—

Given that employment insurance is not paid during these two weeks, the social cost is passed on to Quebec, or Ontario or the other provinces because people have to get through these weeks with a minimum amount of money.

Sherbrooke is already seeing what it can do—

It is not just a national matter. Cities are also interested in this problem as are regional stakeholders such as the chambers of commerce. Earlier, I spoke about those advocating for this change. As we can see, the chambers of commerce also want the waiting period to be eliminated.

This article asks—and so do we together with the Liberals and the New Democrats—that everyone join us to create a majority and eliminate the waiting period, which is a real failure of our democratic system.

This government must recognize the pressing need to eliminate the two week waiting period for everyone—

I did not say it. It was in an article that was just published on February 19. That is very recent.

—to improve access to the program and speed up payment of premiums.

This injustice must be corrected now. For many of our fellow citizens, access to insurance paid for by employers and employees is not a privilege but a right and a question of dignity.

That is how the article ends, and we completely agree with it. We would also like to ask the Liberals to support our bill. In the past, it was under the Liberals that the employment insurance system began to deteriorate. However, since they have been in opposition, they are keeping an eye on employment insurance and they appear much more willing to listen. We hope they will be receptive to the unemployed workers who are having difficulty during those first two weeks. We are not asking for a major revolution; we are simply asking that the two week waiting period be completely eliminated for everyone and that as soon as someone loses his or her job, that individual can receive employment insurance immediately.

The waiting period always comes at the beginning, except when money is found and it is pushed back even further. The two consecutive weeks end the Saturday of the following week. It is all planned very carefully so there can be no getting around it.

*Private Members' Business*

We are asking that these two weeks be replaced by employment insurance. Even if it costs \$900 million, that would be one way of injecting \$900 million into the economy immediately. Indeed, we can be sure that anyone who loses their job will not be setting this money aside, either in the bank or in a trust fund. They will spend it immediately, because they need it.

• (1730)

This is what we really want and we hope that all members of the House will understand the importance of this bill to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ)** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with congratulations to my colleague for his altruistic bill which will demonstrate the kind-heartedness of the 308 members of this assembly who will—at least I hope they will—vote in favour of helping the unemployed. Let us not forget that our children, our neighbours, even we ourselves, may one day need this assistance when a job is lost. The waiting period has to be eliminated so that EI recipients can immediately have some income to help their families.

My question is this: as far back as 2004, a motion with the backing of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was moved by the Bloc Québécois in order to get the federal government of the day to pay back the \$46 billion—and let us keep in mind that a billion is 1,000 million—that had been lifted from the employment insurance fund, in order to return that money to the people for whom it was intended, who are in need of it, and who are receiving employment insurance benefits. Those people and their employers had put that money into the fund, not the federal government.

If I am correct, the figure is now \$54 billion. This would mean that what the Liberals started—which was absolutely odious—the Conservatives have continued. They have continued to dip into the EI fund and the money has not been returned to those rightfully entitled to it.

Is this really the case? Would this not be a good way of getting the money to help people in need of it?

**Mr. Christian Ouellet:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. The position he has taken with respect to this matter illustrates that this is really a generalized need.

A surplus is indeed continuing to accumulate in the employment insurance fund at a rather unbelievable rate. That is why it is being said that the government is accumulating money—

• (1735)

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

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## ROYAL ASSENT

• (1745)

[English]

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

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

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

*And being returned:*

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that when the House did attend Her Excellency the Governor General in the Senate chamber, Her Excellency was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the royal assent to the following bill:

Bill C-12, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2009—Chapter 1.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (removal of waiting period), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** Before the royal assent ceremony, the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi had the floor for questions and comments following his speech. He has about three minutes left to wrap up his remarks or take further questions.

The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I do not mind moving on to another question, but I may not have finished my response to the previous question.

The important thing to bear in mind is that, right now, the employment insurance system is not getting what it is supposed to get. It is grossly unfair to workers, partly because of the two week waiting period. That is the first thing we should eliminate, but the employment insurance system has a number of other shortcomings too.

[English]

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague, but how much does the program cost?

[Translation]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet:** Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I did not understand the question. I think my colleague wants to know how much this measure would cost. The minister mentioned a fairly accurate figure, \$900 million, which would come from the fund. There is money in the fund. The fund is not short of cash—quite the opposite, in fact. As my colleague pointed out earlier, the surplus now exceeds \$50 billion. The money is there, and the \$900 million would be injected directly into Canada's economy.

*Private Members' Business*

[English]

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak about the employment insurance program. I thank the hon. member for raising the subject.

I will address the specific issue of the two week waiting period in Bill C-241, but first I would like to outline our government's strategic approach to EI through Canada's economic action plan.

While Canada is better prepared than almost any other country to weather the worldwide recession, we certainly are not immune to it. We know people are facing uncertainty and are concerned. We know that those who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own are facing difficult times ahead. We feel for these people and we are working to protect them. We have taken and continue to take action to ensure that help is there for Canadians and their families when they need it most.

To this end, we consulted widely with Canadians. In fact, prior to introducing our economic action plan in budget 2009, we conducted the most extensive prebudget consultations in the history of our country.

Through our plan, among other things we are proposing to extend EI benefits, while investing an unprecedented \$8.3 billion in the Canada skills and transition strategy. Our aim in all of this is to improve employment insurance in areas where the need is the greatest.

One of the things that came up time and time again through our consultations was that EI benefits needed to be lengthened in order to provide greater assistance to those facing longer-term challenges in looking for work. That is why through our economic action plan, for the next two years, we will make available nationally the five weeks of extended EI benefits that have been previously available through a pilot project only, in regions with the highest unemployment. The government will also increase the maximum duration of benefits to 50 weeks, up from 45.

Some 400,000 Canadians could benefit from these changes. This measure will provide financial support for a longer period to unemployed Canadians who would otherwise have exhausted their benefits. This means unemployed workers will have more time to seek employment while receiving EI.

This is very important and a point I cannot stress enough. Exhaustion of EI benefits is difficult on any family. Canadians who are unemployed for extended periods will have more time to find work under our plan.

It is putting the dollars to use where they are needed the most. This approach better suits the needs of Canadians than simply eliminating the two week waiting period of which the member speaks. There are several reasons for this.

First, it is important to look at why there is a two week waiting period in the first place. The two week waiting period serves to ensure that EI resources are focused on workers dealing with significant gaps in employment. In fact, if we eliminated the two week waiting period, claims would not be processed any more

quickly. The additional processing required by eliminating the waiting period would generate a significant increase in volumes associated with short spells of unemployment. This would put further pressure on service standards and processing resources.

These additional strains and pressures on the system could lead to even longer wait times for people to have their claims processed.

On these points, we are backed up by David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada. On December 18, Mr. Dodge appeared on the CTV Newsnet program, *Mike Duffy Live*. Some of us still remember that program and many have watched it.

When asked whether eliminating the two week waiting period for EI was an expenditure worth making, Mr. Dodge responded unequivocally. He said, "The answer is no. That would be probably the worst waste of money we could make...because there's a lot of churn in the labour market, just normal churn". Mr. Dodge also said, "that two weeks is there for a very good reason...the real issue is that some of these people are going to be off work for a rather long period of time".

Therefore, that is where we are directing our efforts. I think what the former governor of the Bank of Canada was trying to say at that time was those who were off for longer periods of time were the ones who were in more desperate straits and needed the help to a greater extent.

The fact is that during these uncertain times, some people may be off work for longer periods. That is why EI help needs to be targeted in such a fashion, so they will receive that help when they need it.

● (1750)

It is worth noting that the Bloc's proposal to eliminate the two week wait period would not provide any additional assistance to workers who exhaust their EI benefits. For those who exhaust all of their EI benefits, eliminating the two week period would simply mean their benefits would start two weeks earlier but they would also end two weeks earlier.

We believe that providing EI claimants with five additional weeks of benefit is better targeted than the two weeks the opposition is proposing. Five weeks is better than two weeks. I wonder if the member would not agree with me that is a significant improvement and an advancement to the program. This is better targeted help. This is smarter help. It is help that is needed more.

Providing an additional five weeks of benefits would go further in helping those who need our help the most, those who are having difficulty finding work over the long term. They will derive greater benefit from having five additional weeks of benefits as opposed to only getting two weeks of additional benefits at the beginning of their EI claim period.

Looking at the bigger picture, our economic action plan focuses not only on the benefit side of EI, but equally on the importance of training. We are increasing funding for training delivered through the employment insurance program by \$1 billion over two years.

*Private Members' Business*

This large investment will help to respond to the higher demand for labour market programs and training owing to increased unemployment. As a result, thousands more EI eligible clients could receive training and be better prepared when times improve.

In this regard, I would like to highlight something else David Dodge said, "I think the Prime Minister's right, that we do have to concentrate on improving the skills of people, and with that improvement in skills...we will find opportunities going forward".

We are making an investment into the future. We are making an investment in people so when the economic circumstances change they will be ready to meet the challenges.

I agree with Mr. Dodge. We do need to concentrate on improving skills and training, and that is what we are doing.

Our plan also takes into consideration the needs of long-tenured workers who have been laid off. To help these long-tenured workers change occupations or sectors, we are introducing a pilot project that would extend EI benefits to them so they could pursue longer term training.

We are also proposing that workers with severance or other separation payments be eligible for earlier access to EI benefits if they use some or all of their payments to purchase skills upgrading or training.

With our plan, not only are we proposing to extend benefits, we are also proposing to freeze EI premium rates for 2010 at the same rate as 2009. This will provide a projected \$4.5 billion stimulus over two years.

This stimulus means more money for employers to keep or hire employees. This means more money in the pockets of hardworking Canadians.

Through our new strategic training and transition fund, we are also providing significant funds to help meet the different training and support needs of workers who do not qualify for EI. This will include those who have been out of work for a prolonged period of time. Up to 50,000 individuals are expected to benefit from this training and other measures.

Rather than looking at just one aspect of EI and tinkering around the edges, we have looked at the economic and labour market as a whole. We have put forward EI measures that are targeted to the needs of Canadians. Our actions are forward-looking and better suited to help those who need it most.

Members of the Liberal opposition should be reminded that their former Liberal minister of human resources, Jane Stewart, had this to say about the two week waiting period, "the two week waiting period is like a deductible in an insurance program. It is there for a purpose".

In the end we have to look at the entire package. The entire package not only helps those who are on EI for a longer period of time, but it allows them to upgrade their skills and retrain. We have to look at the broad picture by investing billions of dollars into skills training and retraining.

We are looking at the big picture. We cannot take just one segment of it like the bill proposes to do. We have to look at it globally, which we have done. I think Canadians will find it acceptable.

• (1755)

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in this debate.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal Party, I commend the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, our critic for HRDC, who does a tremendous job on the EI file and on his whole critic portfolio. This is an issue and a subject on which he has done a great deal of work. I have a great deal of respect for all he has accomplished.

On this particular issue of the two week waiting period, the position of our critic and the position of our party will be to support this bill as we did in the last Parliament. A similar bill was brought forward in the last Parliament and we supported that as well.

I and many Canadians are very concerned with what has gone on in the economy of late with 129,000 jobs being lost just in the month of January. Many people are facing the great dilemma of whether to fill their oil tank, their prescriptions or their fridge.

I am concerned when I hear the parliamentary secretary state that David Dodge figures this is the best way to do this. I bet it has been quite some time since David Dodge had to walk in the back door, look at his wife, who is trying to feed four kids, and wonder where the next quart of milk is coming from. It is something he probably has not had to experience.

The unemployed are the most vulnerable and they need help and they need it now.

In reference to the five weeks, this is something the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has come back with in many of her answers to the question about the extension. The reality is that the five weeks applies only to those who qualify for maximum benefits. If people qualify for 30 weeks they do not get 35 weeks. If they qualify for 32 weeks they do not get 37 weeks. People need to qualify for maximum benefits in order to qualify for those five weeks. This is something the government has been stating but we have not received clarification on this. I would hope the government takes the proper steps to ensure those five weeks are extended to all claimants through these very difficult and trying times.

The reference was made to a former minister, Jane Stewart, who handled the HRDC file a number of years back in past Liberal governments, and to the changes that were made through 1990s. We know that the EI system had been bankrupt coming into the early 1990s. We know that the Auditor General did not want EI revenues and the EI program run through an arm's length or a separate account but through general accounts. However, with inflation and an unemployment rate at 12% through the Mulroney days, our economy was in turmoil.

*Private Members' Business*

In order to salvage the EI program in the mid-1990, unprecedented steps were taken. Maybe those steps were necessary. I know the government likes to refer back and say that the Liberals made these cuts when they were in control but it forgets the second part of that where it was saying that the cuts did not go deep enough, that the cuts should have been greater.

The Liberals did make cuts and some of the changes that were made in the mid-1990s did alter the system and put disincentives in the system that hurt many people. I think we could probably get consensus on that on this side of the chamber.

As unemployment came down, more people were working and paying into the fund and with fewer people drawing out we all know the success story that was the EI surplus.

• (1800)

Changes were made in mid-2000, 2003 and 2004, including the doing away of the divisor rule and a number of changes that took some disincentives out. We know that every change in the system has a cost and that there is an accounting for every change and adaptation that is made. Coming into the debate late, I am not sure what the costing is on this or whether or not my colleague had put that forward.

Members of our caucus have put forward a number of pieces of EI legislation through private members' bills. My colleague for Sydney—Victoria has a private members' bill on extending sick benefits to those receiving benefits who have catastrophic health concerns. If one is battling a catastrophic disease or receiving cancer treatment, there should be an extension of health benefits paid through EI because we want those people to be totally focused on getting healthy.

One of the greatest concerns about any change in the system now is with what the government has done in establishing the arm's length agency to administer it. As we go into these trying times, we do not know if it will be able to stand up to a recession. We hope it will. When witnesses appeared before the HRDC committee, the actuaries were very concerned about the \$2 billion limit that was put on the establishment of this arm's length agency. They thought the figure should have been closer to \$10 billion or \$12 billion. I guess we will see. If we continue to bleed the jobs that we are losing of late in this economy, the system will certainly be tested.

I think that those who lose their jobs are the most vulnerable people in our society. They should not go without a paycheque for a week or two weeks. We see that the increase in the time to turn around those benefits has increased over the last two years. I believe it is wise. I commend the member for putting this bill forward and I look forward to supporting this when it comes to the floor for a vote.

• (1805)

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am glad to join in the debate tonight on an issue that means quite a bit to not only the people I represent in Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, but to people across Canada.

The bill would put in place something for which we, in the NDP, have been calling for quite some time: to end the two week waiting period before a claimant can receive employment insurance benefits.

The bill closely resembles the bill of my colleague from Nickel Belt and is a component of my own private member's bill that we will debate here in the House in the coming weeks.

As I stated, the bill is important to the people in my riding but is even more important to Canadians who will be forced to apply for employment insurance, which is becoming all too common these days. When workers lose their jobs, are laid off or watch as the company they have been employed by dissolve before their eyes, the last thing they need is a gap in their income.

Unfortunately, that is about the first thing they get. They need to wait for two weeks before they are eligible to receive a stipend from employment insurance, the same insurance they have paid into in good faith for the term of their employment. It is an unnecessary hardship. It is a hardship that is being thrust upon people at the worst time when they have enough to worry about.

To hear our Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development talk about these people, it is not difficult to spot the contempt and suspicion she has for the unemployed. We must remember that she thinks it is very lucrative to be on EI. I think that is a shame. To her, people on EI are lazy or even look forward to receiving benefits. She does not recognize that it is a benefit that they paid for in good times with the expectation that they would be able to count on it in lean times.

Even for those lucky enough to qualify for the benefits, they are forced to wait. They are forced to exhaust severances and dip into hard-earned savings while they wait.

It is very telling. It shows the level of respect the Conservatives have for the unemployed. It shows the lack of compassion they have for the unemployed and it shows the shortsightedness they suffer from as well, because there is no better short term economic stimulus available to the government than employment insurance.

This is not something I am wishing were true or just making up. It is a fact. Employment insurance has the single best multiplier effect out of the stimulus tools available to the government. It has a multiplier of \$1.64 for every dollar the government spends on it. Therefore, basically, when people receive EI, they are not the ones taking big vacations. They are out spending the money in their communities. Hence, the economic stimulus is even greater. It has the best bang for the buck.

It is certainly better than tax cuts that flow directly into savings accounts in most cases. It is even better than infrastructure spending because it flows directly to the places where the economy is doing its worst and helps to shore up those local economies. It is not bogged down with red tape and has an established and reliable delivery system.

*Private Members' Business*

People on EI spend their EI cheques within two weeks of receiving it. Best of all, it has already been paid for by the workers of this country. It really does not cost the government anything. It just needs to lose its dependency on using the premiums it collects to fund other government expenditures.

It is extremely important that people do not need to wait two weeks for their cheques at the beginning. The problem is that at the end of the day there are less people who qualify for EI so the two weeks would actually benefit these people.

The government already knows all of this and is choosing to ignore it. It was told as much by Ian Lee, the director of the MBA program at the Sprott School of Business back in the prebudget consultations. It just chose to ignore it. The Conservatives like the program the way it is.

For the present government and the Liberal government that preceded it, employment insurance has been the cash cow that funds their real priorities, priorities like corporate tax breaks and dirty sponsorship deals, things that really matter to these hard right, entitled politicians.

We have been told that over \$54 billion have been built up in the employment insurance fund. The fund has been building up because over the last 15 years successive governments implemented deep cuts to benefits and changed the ineligibility rules.

●(1810)

That money, which was meant to be used as an emergency fund for the workers, has been basically stolen from them and used for all kinds of expenditures.

Statistics show that in 2006 and 2007 fewer than four in ten unemployed workers were able to access benefits. Is that not a shame? The impact on qualification was even greater for women. In 1996, the maximum weekly benefit was \$604. Now the maximum is only \$447, with the average person getting about \$335 a week.

These trends go the wrong way. We need to reverse them. If people do not have access to their EI funds when they need them the most, where do they go? They go on welfare. I think that is a shame.

We can see that a lot of money should be available and there should be no reason for a person to have to endure a waiting period at all. In a time when we are witnessing our economy shedding jobs at an alarming rate, there is no way people are collecting EI because they are lazy or because it is so lucrative that there is no point in looking for another job.

In many cases, especially in a riding such as mine, there are no other jobs for these people. They have a choice to make. They can tough it out and wait for the mills and mines to get back to work, which is something the government does not seem to want to help very much, or they can leave. Sadly, we are witnessing more and more departures.

White River, a community in my constituency, is shrinking at an alarming rate. Is that what we want for our smaller, more vulnerable communities? Does everyone have to abandon their rural roots and take low-paying service industry jobs in the bigger cities? I do not

think that has to be the case. I do not believe we have been elected just to sit on our hands and watch that happen.

There are things we can do and mechanisms we can trip to try to stop the bleeding. Reducing the waiting period for EI is an important one that we must continue to fight for.

[*Translation*]

We are not the only ones calling for these changes. The Bloc recognizes that the two week waiting period should be eliminated and that other changes should be made to employment insurance. The Canadian Labour Congress, the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, the Conseil national des chômeurs and unemployed workers themselves are calling for these changes.

●(1815)

[*English*]

They see the benefit of protecting our workers and their communities now, immediately. They see the benefit in keeping our unemployed workers in their communities, allowing stores to stay open and rent and mortgages to be paid. They see the real difference a few weeks of EI benefits can make in earlier access.

These are exceptional times. Exceptional times deserve exceptional responses from governments, but we are not getting that from our current government. It is out to make the hard times harder. Shame on it.

It has tacked on a few weeks of EI, and it would seem that is it. That is all it is going to give to the workers of our country. It has not made it more accessible. It has not made it more substantial. It has not done much, and that is patently wrong. The government has all kinds of money for tax breaks for corporations—money that comes in part out of the EI fund, as we have seen—but when it comes time for the unemployed and their real and pressing needs, sorry, the cupboard is bare. I cannot accept that, and neither can my colleagues.

We will be standing to support this motion when it comes to a vote, and I can only hope that when the time comes, the government will recognize the need for this measure and support it as well. It is extremely important that people have access to their EI as soon as possible.

I can say that the NDP will be supporting this motion. The Bloc will be supporting it because of course it is a Bloc motion. I can only hope that the Liberals and Conservatives can support it as well.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my colleague, the member for Brome—Missisquoi, for introducing Bill C-241.

This is the sort of bill that would provide real, invaluable assistance to tens of thousands of workers who have lost their jobs or unfortunately will lose them because of the serious economic crisis we are going through.



Over the years, workers who lose their jobs have suffered countless injustices.

Do we need to remind this House that the percentage of unemployed workers who receive employment insurance has shrunk from 84% to 46% in the past 20 years?

Do we need to remind this House that Liberal and Conservative governments have siphoned off more than \$57 billion belonging to workers? And that this money will likely never be returned?

In light of this, the waiting period only adds insult to injury for the unemployed, at a time when what they really need is a helping hand from the government.

What exactly is the purpose of the waiting period?

It is very simple: this is nothing more and nothing less than a way of punishing people for losing their jobs. Let us keep in mind that in order to draw EI benefits, a person has to have fallen victim—and I emphasize that word—to a layoff that has nothing to do with failure to perform, and even less to do with voluntary departure. These are people who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves without a job between one day and the next.

So what exactly does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development want to punish them for?

Another aberration, and again according to the minister, the reason for the waiting period is that this is supposedly an insurance, like other kinds of insurance, and all commercial insurance does include a deductible before one gets any pay-out.

I have never heard such an unfortunate expression of cynicism in this House. In comparing the state to a business, this government is demonstrating what little empathy it has for the less well off members of society. By denying its social role, by virtue of which it is supposed to redistribute wealth rather than contributing to the inequalities, it is demonstrating a doctrinaire and ideological vision that is totally inappropriate.

But let me get back to the bill from my Bloc Québécois colleague who, on the other hand, is demonstrating a real understanding of the difficult situation in which workers who lose their jobs find themselves.

It must be understood that it is not a matter of adding two weeks of benefits, but merely of changing the start date of payments, so that unemployed workers are not in an untenable situation for the first two weeks.

According to Human Resources and Skills Development estimates, such a measure would cost some \$900 million. Nine hundred million dollars is far less than the \$57 billion confiscated—to avoid using unparliamentary language—from working men and women.

So \$900 million would be plowed back into the Canadian economy, as the government itself admits in its assessment of the economic spinoffs from EI-related measures in the last budget.

In this period of recession, that means \$900 million which would benefit not only the unemployed workers but also the businesses where they would spend the money they received.

### *Private Members' Business*

When a person loses his job, and his sole source of income is EI benefits, it is rather a rarity for his first reflex to be investment, contrary to what the Prime Minister implied in a CBC interview during the last campaign.

What interpretation can one put on the scandalous comment he made at that time that Canadians should look on the bright side and take advantage of the weakness of the stock market to buy some stocks?

This kind of behaviour unworthy of a Prime Minister shows us just how profoundly disconnected this Conservative government is from the harsh reality that this crisis has created for hundreds of thousands of workers and their families.

Bill C-241 would provide some relief. This measure, simple yet concrete, efficient and direct, has been called for by dozens of groups representing workers' interests and by unions as well.

This is a perfect opportunity for the government to show goodwill and openness with regard to one of the greatest injustices ever committed by this government.

I invite the members opposite to give us their support so that this bill can be passed as quickly as possible.

The sooner this bill receives royal assent, the sooner the unemployed can receive the benefits to which they are entitled, those they have been paying into week after week, month after month, year after year.

When they pay their premiums, they do not skip two weeks. They cannot decide to stop paying for two weeks of the year. They have to pay every week.

Why should the government force them to wait two weeks before they can access their money?

• (1820)

And I must emphasize the word “their”, because apparently, previous governments, like this one, did not seem to understand this nuance, although it is fundamental, between the government's money and that of unemployed workers.

Yet government members fully understand, for instance, the difference between money they receive as salary and money paid to them by the House of Commons to carry out their responsibilities as MPs, for example. These are two different accounts, completely separate, that have nothing to do with each other, just as public accounts have nothing to do with the money paid by contributors to the system.

Fortunately, the government listened to the Bloc Québécois, which has always stood up to defend workers. Yes, it is thanks to the Bloc Québécois that the Conservatives agreed to separate those two accounts. It is thanks to the hard work of my colleagues who tirelessly denounced the deficiencies in the system.

*Private Members' Business*

I would like to talk about the contributors' money for a moment. It is truly appalling that in 2006, barely 64% of those who paid into the system were eligible for employment insurance. That is less than two thirds. And we are talking about workers who, I repeat, pay into the system week after week. The fact that the system is so inaccessible is positively scandalous, since, although they finally agreed to separate the employment insurance account from the federal treasury after years of pressure, they have definitely not done anything to improve the pitiful coverage provided to workers.

But, once again, as I was saying earlier, the Bloc Québécois was there to throw a lifeline to this government, which is sinking further every day into the depths of indifference. However, as a last resort, we especially want to throw a lifeline to the workers, and let us hope they do not have to wait two weeks for it.

In closing, I would like to congratulate my hon. Bloc Québécois colleague on his foresight and his efforts to really do something for unemployed workers.

[English]

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to rise and speak in opposition to Bill C-241 proposed by the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

I can assure my hon. colleague and all members of the House that his concerns for the plight of unemployed workers are shared by all members of the government, including this member. In fact, I am sure there is not a single member in the House from whatever party who is not equally concerned with the needs of laid off workers and their families. Each and every one of us has stories of hardship in our own riding. All members of the House are determined to do whatever we can to help our constituents.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources previously said during this debate, one of the things that came up constantly through the government's consultations was that EI benefits needed to be lengthened in order to provide greater assistance to those facing long-term challenges in looking for work. That is why the government's economic action plan has provided that for the next two years we will make available nationally the five weeks of extended EI benefits that had previously been available through a pilot project only in regions with the highest unemployment. The government will also increase the maximum duration of benefits to 50 weeks, up from the current 45.

As a result, 400,000 Canadians could benefit from these changes. These measures will provide financial support for a longer period of time to unemployed Canadians who would otherwise have exhausted their benefits. This means unemployed workers will have more time to seek employment while still receiving benefits from the employment insurance mechanism.

It is my opinion, and I believe the opinion of members on this side of the House, that this approach better suits the needs of Canadians than simply eliminating the two week waiting period. The fact is that during these uncertain times many people will be off work for longer periods of time. That is where our EI help needs to be targeted and that is where this government has targeted.

To address the most pressing needs of workers today Canada's economic action plan is investing \$8.3 billion for the Canada skills and transition strategy. To ensure that more Canadians could access the training and skills upgrading they need to land the jobs of the future, our government has invested unprecedented amounts in training programs.

These investments will help 160,000 people, including long tenured and older workers, get retrained to find a new job and put food on the table for their families. The government will also help those who normally would not qualify for employment insurance access to training they need to re-enter the workforce.

Ensuring that our country has the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world is vital for our long-term economic recovery. Supporting the development and training of unemployed workers will keep the Canadian economy growing and our communities prospering. Equally important, with the right training, people can get good jobs and have better opportunities for themselves, their families and their future.

We listened to the concerns of many employers and also employees. This is why the government is freezing EI premium rates for 2010 at \$1.73 per \$100. This is the same rate as 2009 and is projected to provide \$4.5 billion in economic stimulus.

To help companies and employees adapt to the current economic downturn we are also extending the duration of work sharing agreements by 14 weeks to a maximum of 52 weeks. This will enable Canadians to continue working while companies adjust to a temporary slowdown and recover.

To complement this measure we are also proposing to increase access to work sharing agreements through greater flexibility in the qualifying criteria. This measure will help many Canadians stay working through these uncertain economic times.

The government has weighed the options and decided to focus our resources on helping workers and families that need help the most. Our actions will provide more support to Canadians for a longer period of time, something that this bill will not do.

It is clear that the government has listened and responded to the needs of Canadian workers and their employers to enable them to get through this rough economic patch as quickly as possible.

Like all elements of the government's economic action plan, these improvements in investments will help Canadians weather the current economic downturn and come out stronger than ever.

Therefore, with all due respect for the good intentions that this bill attempts to portray, I urge all members of the House to defeat this bill. Instead, I call on all parties to work together with the government to advance Canada's economic action plan, the real long-term solution to our current challenges.

In closing, Canada's economic action plan will help more Canadians for a longer period of time with much more lasting benefit. I think that deserves wholehearted support by all members of this honourable House.

• (1830)

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I thought we were at the adjournment debate, but there are two minutes left.

The hon. member for Gatineau has two minutes to speak.

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ):** Madam Speaker, these two minutes are very important. The more we talk about this, the better. I am convinced that at the end of my speech, more members will be thinking about voting for Bill C-241, which aims to remove the waiting period.

It is important to understand that the two week waiting period at the start of the employment insurance benefit period means that benefit recipients have to go without this income. We are talking about first aid. Even though the government is adding five weeks at the end of the benefit period, not everyone gets to that point. People need assistance from the government at the beginning of this difficult time. It is very important to understand that people receiving employment insurance need this help to take care of their own immediate needs and those of their family members.

It is not because the federal government lacks money that we cannot go ahead with this. It is a question of political will.

I will conclude by saying that \$54 billion has been pinched from the employment insurance fund. This bill would cost \$900 million. The money is available. We need to help workers and eliminate the two-week waiting period.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Madam Speaker, on June 30 I asked the minister two questions about infrastructure in aboriginal communities and post-secondary education. I am going to turn to infrastructure first.

We have heard a lot of sound and fury in the House over the last couple of days on Attawapiskat. In the Attawapiskat issue, the school was designated as a priority for the 2009 year due to health and safety requirements, overcrowding, and curriculum requirements. There have been a number of comments made in the House about the fact that there were no health and safety concerns and there were inspections done.

In fact, in the government's own documents, dated December 3, 2008, it was the high school that on June 13, 2007, had no immediate health and safety concerns. In another memo from the department itself on March 17, 2008, a number of schools were identified as being problems for the department and for the minister.

### Adjournment Proceedings

In two of those schools, North Spirit Lake being one, where the chief had recently expressed concerns about the continued delay of the start of the project, the department noted that there was no real issue, just sitting in an opposition party riding.

Today in an interview with APTN, the minister, when asked about the political ties, said, "If you come to Alberta, every riding but one is Conservative. Many schools that are built in Alberta are going to be on Conservative turf. Sometimes that's just the way it is". In addition, in the same interview with APTN, the minister indicated that the government has a list that starts with health and safety issues, and then it works down that list.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is this. It was announced today that a new school will be built for Burnt Church. Since 2006, this is the first announcement of a school being built. How many other schools have been built since 2006, if any, and in which ridings? What criteria were used in selecting those schools to be built?

Turning to post-secondary education, today at committee we heard from the department about post-secondary education and the importance of it. I am going to pose my question and then give some background in case I run out of time.

Much is made about accountability, as rightly it should. Since the government has been talking consistently about accountability, why did it stop working with the Assembly of First Nations in the joint accountability initiative?

Today in committee, we heard that under the review of the PSSP, the department has already been examining options, including the 100% grant and some changes to that. It is examining perhaps an income-tested option. It is examining the fact that aboriginal and first nations students on reserves may be required to apply for student loans.

Consultation is an important part of this process, as identified in the Auditor General's report of 2004. I would question the fact that consultation, when options have already been developed, is not consultation. First nations will be simply presented with those options, then asked for their opinions on those options. A fulsome consultation would have first nations at the table developing the options that the leadership could then review with their constituent communities.

Again, I would ask the government, why did it stop that joint accountability initiative that was in place, which could address some of the concerns that have been raised in the Auditor General's report.

• (1835)

**Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I actually thought we were in adjournment proceedings and that I would be responding to a question that had been asked days earlier, not today, and not new questions. Therefore, I will comment very briefly.

I was at the same committee meeting today and based on the interpretations I just heard from the hon. member opposite, it would seem that we heard two different things.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

What I did hear very clearly was that some of the initiatives we are taking are not top down. They are based on a lot of dialogue coming from first nations and from aboriginal leadership first and foremost.

It was very clearly stated by departmental officials today that political considerations on the funding of schools are not how they make their decisions, and the member opposite knows that. The member who asked the question in question period today knows that as well, although he was not at the meeting earlier today.

I am pleased to rise to speak to the question posed much earlier. I think January 30 is the date that was mentioned.

Time and again this government has reaffirmed its commitment to work with aboriginal communities to make a real difference in their lives, from infrastructure, to employment, to health services. We are working in partnership across government to improve the quality of life for aboriginal Canadians.

Budget 2009, Canada's economic action plan, is no exception. The action plan contains \$1.4 billion over two years for specific initiatives aimed at improving the well-being and prosperity of aboriginal people in Canada. Our government has focused priorities so that aboriginal Canadians can play an even greater role in the Canadian economy.

In addition to this new budget spending, aboriginal families and communities will continue to benefit from almost a billion dollars annually in first nations community infrastructure needs, including housing, water and waste water systems, education facilities, and other infrastructure such as roads, bridges and community facilities.

Just today the minister was in New Brunswick announcing a new school in Burnt Church. That is an important announcement. That is one of the 10 new schools announced as part of budget 2009, Canada's economic action plan. More will be announced in the coming days and weeks. I am sure that the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan will be listening very intently to those announcements.

We know that infrastructure funding alone is not enough to address all of the challenges. We are investing \$200 million over three years to support aboriginal skills and training to ensure aboriginal readiness for opportunity-driven initiatives and to improve labour market outcomes.

The government is working closely with its partners to achieve measurable results for all aboriginal people and all Canadians.

• (1840)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Madam Speaker, with respect to the parliamentary secretary's comment regarding this period being adjournment proceedings, my two questions on January 30 specifically had to do with infrastructure and education and the post-secondary review that is going on. I was adding information.

I want to reiterate my questions. Have any other schools been announced since 2006? If yes, how many and in which ridings? What criteria were used in selecting the schools to be built?

My question was about moving money around and my not having any confidence that the government was actually doing what it said it was going to do.

My second question was around accountability and post-secondary education. There was a joint accountability initiative between the Assembly of First Nations and the department. Why did the government withdraw from that process?

**Mr. John Duncan:** Madam Speaker, we had a two-hour meeting with officials today on this very subject. The member opposite had every opportunity to ask those questions. She also had every opportunity to research those questions. It is a very simple ask. All I can say is that we will provide that information. I do not happen to have it, but I am sure that I could have it within a few minutes, if I have been given any notice at all.

The member and I share geography. We are both from Vancouver Island. We both have some very similar constraints, issues, concerns and first nations communities. To summarize, my endorsement by first nations was based on progress by this government on specific claims, residential schools and the common table. We are making progress—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. member for Davenport.

HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, historically, Canada's reputation of action in the area of human rights has been exemplary. When confronted with brutality and violence by regimes or warring parties brought upon innocent victims, Canada has always spoken out loudly and forcefully in defence of those not in a position to defend themselves. Canadians are proud of the legacy of Lester B. Pearson and his historic and transformational role in promoting and facilitating peacekeeping among nations.

Around the world the blue beret is a proud symbol of Canada's role on the international stage. Canadians have occupied an integral role in crafting the responsibility to protect doctrine and the subsequent change to the concept of peacemaking. The so-called three Ds that have marked Canadian foreign affairs—diplomacy, defence and development—are an approach that has earned the respect of the world. Indeed, new U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has expressed her commitment to these principles as the new guiding standards of United States foreign policy.

With such realities in mind, it is distressing to see that in the face of recent international crises in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, the government has neglected Canada's traditional role as a leader in human rights. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a long, drawn-out war officially ended years ago, yet at least 40 women are raped daily, 45,000 Congolese are killed monthly and 250,000 have been displaced since the end of August. This is not a situation that is improving on its own and the status quo is clearly unacceptable by any reasonable standard.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The Democratic Republic of Congo is not alone in its experience of the government's indifference. Where is Canada's voice and commitment in regard to the situation in Zimbabwe? Zimbabwe's people continue to endure suffering associated with political and civil strife. They have an inflation rate that is over 200%, making even the most basic commodities beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. There is ongoing discrimination, food shortages and a cholera epidemic, and up to 1.3 million Zimbabweans are suffering from AIDS.

In spite of this desperate human suffering, Zimbabwe's autocratic president has restricted humanitarian assistance from non-governmental organizations. The responsibility to protect doctrine makes clear that those nations committed to the convention have a right, not to mention a duty, to intervene on behalf of people where governments cannot provide assistance, or the government is acting deliberately in a harmful manner. Deliberate acts of oppression in Zimbabwe have led to a complete depreciation of political and economic capital that would allow action on the part of the government. This is a disaster of truly epic proportions.

Sadly, we are witnesses to similar atrocities in Sri Lanka. Vigils have been held all over our country for family members in Sri Lanka who have been caught in the crossfire. As those who meet to call attention to the situation in Sri Lanka light candles of remembrance, the flames serve to remind the government that its own leadership has diminished Canada's role from a guiding light to no more than a burning ember.

Close to a quarter of a million people are trapped in northeastern Sri Lanka and there is no end in sight to the violence there. What action has the government taken to signal its leadership in this crisis? The need to act is clear and Canada must live the principles it helped enshrine in the responsibility to protect doctrine. I am not altogether sure that our government understands the gravity of allowing situations like these to continue without ensuring that our voice is heard.

Simply put, will the minister answer whether or not his government will resolve here and now to return Canada to its place of leadership in the international community?

● (1845)

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Madam Speaker, contrary to what my colleague is saying, I want to assure him that Canada continues to speak loudly on the international scene. Canada's guiding policy and this government's guiding policy is shared values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We will continue following that.

On the other hand, my hon. colleague spoke about key situations in three countries. From the onset, I share those concerns with him in all of the three countries and the three situations he has highlighted.

I want to assure the hon. member that the Government of Canada, my government, has been working on those three areas very strongly and has made our voice on these issues known to all these governments.

On DRC, I went to DRC myself and I visited across the whole country. I saw the atrocities that were being committed. Canada has a

chair at the Great Lakes conference, one of which I chaired in Nairobi. We very strongly put the rest of the world's position that all parties must come to the table, respect the rule of law and ensure that violence is stopped, specifically gender-based violence.

The member is absolutely right that so many lives are being lost in the Congo, and that continues. We are very much disturbed by what is happening right now in Eastern Congo. We will continue to raise our voice to ensure that people come to the table and that human rights are respected in the Congo.

As for Zimbabwe, I again share his concern about what is happening there. The positive sign is that there is a unity government right now, after a lot of pressure from the African Union. However, we have a wait and see the attitude. We want to see some positive action happening by that government. Unfortunately, initial reports indicate that is not taking place. We are highly concerned with that. I agree with him that it is cause for concern.

Canada will continue providing humanitarian assistance to DRC, to Zimbabwe and to Sri Lanka, but we will not provide assistance to the governments. We will continue with international forums to ensure we put pressure on all parties to come to the table.

As for Sri Lanka, we are highly concerned with what is happening in there. That is why an emergency debate took place. The Government of Canada has called for an immediate ceasefire so humanitarian assistance can reach the people of northern Sri Lanka where the civil war is going on.

We are working with our partners, like India and other countries, to put pressure on the government of Sri Lanka to allow humanitarian assistance to reach those people.

I share my hon. colleague's concerns. I can assure him that the Government of Canada is taking a very proactive stand on these issues.

● (1850)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Madam Speaker, it saddens that my hon. colleague and his government refuse to ever speak about the very important key cornerstone of international doctrine, the responsibility to protect doctrine, which is something Canada had played a major role in.

Canada worked hard from the beginning of the 20th century to assume control of its external affairs. In the years following Canada carved itself an image that has endured in the eyes of people across the world. This image has been one of good and caring members of the international community, committed to the rights and dignity of citizens all over the world. It has been our creed long before the responsibility to protect.

This image of honourable purpose has enshrined itself in Canadian values and in our national identity. It was Thomas Jefferson who once said that care of human life and not their destruction was the first and only object of good government.

This applies as much abroad as it does at home. Canadians do not turn their backs to the atrocities that are committed in countries around the world. We have always acted to protect human rights, and we absolutely must regain this position of leadership that is our heritage and our obligation.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Madam Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague I have nothing against what he is saying. That is exactly what we are going to do. He has talked about the right to protect.

Where I differ with him is when he says we have not taken any action. Under the same conditions that he has talked about, the leadership role of Canada and the right to protect, Canada and this government has taken very strong action and continues to take very strong action.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and I, everybody, have been on the phones. We are talking to our allies, looking for common ground to go and address the issues he has highlighted. He is concerned, we are concerned, every Canadian is concerned.

I can assure him, right now, that we will continue speaking forcefully on those issues.

[*Translation*]

## CULTURE

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ):** Madam Speaker, we were somewhat surprised a few days ago when the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, a Reform Conservative, declared that the members of his party were not buddy-buddy with artists.

This was a surprising but candid statement. The Reform Conservative member said out loud what all his colleagues are thinking and revealed the contempt that the Reform Conservatives have for our artists.

The cultural industry in Quebec represents 314,000 jobs, 171,000 of those direct ones. In Montreal alone, the cultural industry in 2005 generated economic spinoffs of \$1.4 billion, and was responsible for a growth rate of 4.7%. That is huge.

The culture of Quebec is a kind of formidable business card distributed by such greats as Robert Lepage, Cirque du Soleil or La La La Human Steps.

Last fall, the Reform Conservative government was true to form with respect to Quebec when it announced \$45 million in cuts to programs for artists touring abroad.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages announced that \$22 million of that money would be transferred to the Olympic torch relay for the 2010 Vancouver games. Just a few days ago, the Reform Conservatives were back in the spotlight with a new program, the Canada prizes, and some \$25 million in funding for foreign artists to perform and exhibit in Toronto.

Yet no fewer than 23 broadcasters in 17 different countries from Japan to Belgium wrote to the Prime Minister asking his government to reinstate programs to help Quebec and Canadian artists tour internationally. He did not even take the time to reply.

Members have repeatedly questioned the Reform Conservative government about its approach to the cultural sector. We have learned that it made unjustified cuts to the touring program. Then the government announced \$25 million in funding for a program known as the Canada prizes, which nobody seems to know anything about. The government tried to distance itself from the project once it realized that it was a boondoggle. But it is hard to just walk away

when the budget text repeats exactly what the promoters wrote last summer. And they talk about the prudent management of public funds.

The Reform Conservatives are attacking artists, art and culture for purely ideological reasons. They will regret it because Quebecers feel that culture is the very soul of our nation.

The headaches caused by the Reform Conservative decision to eliminate the PromArt and Trade Routes programs that supported tours abroad are just beginning. The International Exchange for the Performing Arts, CINARS, predicts that, within three years, 3,300 international performances, some 2,000 jobs and no less than \$24 million in direct revenues will be lost because of the Reform Conservative cuts.

That is reason enough for Quebec to take control of its own cultural development. It is more important than ever for the federal government to transfer all culture-related responsibilities and funding to the Government of Quebec.

• (1855)

[*English*]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to the questions asked. A number of things were raised by the member from the Bloc Québécois, and I will certainly do my best to speak to all of them.

I first want to address one of the things that offends me as a Conservative member, and that is the constant language used by the Bloc to the effect that there is some kind of ideology opposed to artists within my party, which there absolutely is not. However, there is a very parochial ideology within the Bloc, a very narrow ideology that causes them to be fixed on given issues to the exclusion of others.

The member talked about money that has been lost or potentially could be lost in industry in Quebec. Has the member stopped to think about how much money has been lost in Quebec through the Bloc's actions with respect to the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Plains of Abraham? Has it thought of that? A lot of money has been lost. A lot has been lost by Quebec City, and the Bloc should think about that.

Tourists would have gone to Quebec City, spent money, provided employment and supported the city. The Bloc claimed it was a victory that people were scared away. There were 150 threats sent to the chair of the National Battlefields Commission, some threats so serious that the commission felt it needed to cancel the event to prevent people from potentially being harmed, including artists who were coming from all around the world. That is what the Bloc did. I will not be preached to about ideology. That is the most ideologically driven party in the House of Commons.

With respect to the Canada prizes that the member referred to, my party believes in rewarding Canada's most prominent artists, which is why it has introduced the Canada prizes. The \$25 million endowment earmarked for the prizes will not only heighten the visibility of Canada as a leader in arts and creativity, but will also give Canada's emerging artists an unprecedented opportunity to showcase their talents to the entire world.

To ensure the model chosen will be in the spirit of our commitment to celebrate creativity and the arts, we are currently examining various models for the Canada prizes and consulting with the cultural community. We intend to make the Canada prizes the ultimate showcase for artists from across the globe. Standing shoulder to shoulder with them will be artists from right here in Canada.

With respect to the overall budget for arts and culture, Madam Speaker, you would know that this particular budget has the greatest amount of funding in support of arts and culture in the history of the Canadian government. That is not ideology. We did not put the most money in support of arts and culture in the history of the government of Canada because we are ideologically opposed; it was because we are ideologically supportive of the arts and culture in Canada. That is why we did it, and I am very proud of it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Nadeau:** Madam Speaker, here is an example of what I was talking about earlier.

Last fall, because of the Reform Conservatives' cuts, the La La La Human Steps dance company had to tell its Italian partners that it was cancelling the performance of its opus, *Amjad*, which was to be staged at the Ferrare theatre in Leonardo da Vinci's homeland. Fortunately, Gisberto Morselli, the manager of the theatre, paid out of his own pocket to bring the Quebec dance company to his venue.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

That is an exceptionally rare situation that is not available to many artists.

There is a solution to the problem the Reform Conservatives have created, and it is this: now, more than ever before, all responsibility for culture must be transferred to the Government of Quebec, together with all of the funds earmarked for it.

● (1900)

[*English*]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** There is another solution, Madame Speaker. The members of the Bloc can start voting in support of arts and culture in this country. They can start supporting budgets that put substantially more money behind artists and behind arts and culture in this country. That is a choice the Bloc could make, but it has made the choice to vote against artists. Then it tries to divide Quebecers and Canadians because it has a very parochial ideology. That is unfortunate, but it is not going to change the fact that this government is going to continue to support arts and culture in this country. We are going to continue to stand with artists because we believe in them.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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