



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 144 • NUMBER 021 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, March 2, 2009

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 2, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

[English]

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[Translation]

SERVICE CANADA

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should provide Service Canada with a mandate to offer full passport services at all of its regional offices throughout Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, in this House I have the privilege of representing the riding of Brossard—La Prairie, which is composed of four municipalities with very diverse characteristics: Brossard and Candiac, two relatively new cities and Saint-Philippe and La Prairie, two cities that are deeply rooted in Quebec's history. Life in Saint-Philippe is rural, Candiac is proudly building up its suburban character, La Prairie intertwines history with exemplary community energy and Brossard is emphasizing its cultural diversity in order to increase its bustling economic development. These four cities have something in common other than their geographic proximity to the United States border and that is their human geography. These are young cities that are attracting more and more professionals, cities whose socio-demographic profile is increasingly homogenous.

In summary, this riding is a local reflection of the same challenges that a number of Canada's regions are facing: market globalization and diversification, families that are spread around the world and, above all, a border-sharing neighbour that is changing the nature of our relationship by requiring, as of June 1 this year, a valid passport for anyone wanting to enter its territory. It is because of this last element, in addition to the other practical arguments that I will talk about shortly, that I am moving the following motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should provide Service Canada with a mandate to offer full passport services at all of its regional offices throughout Canada.

It seems increasingly evident to me that 33 passport offices serving the length and breadth of Canada are clearly insufficient to meet the growing demand for this travel document that is being required for all cross-border travel.

When one considers that close to 75% of all passports issued in Canada are the result of a walk-in visit, that is, an applicant who actually took the time to go in person to a Passport Canada office, one has to conclude that most Canadians do not trust the safe navigation of their official and original documents through our postal services. Furthermore, only 7% of all applications submitted were done through the receiving agents.

[Translation]

If, as parliamentarians, it is our intention to ensure the comprehensive implementation of Service Canada's mandate, we must bear in mind that: the goal of Service Canada is to offer citizens single-window access to a wide range of federal government services; 95% of Canadians live within 50 kilometres of a Service Canada office; since 2001, Service Canada has developed a range of services now available—and widely used—on-line and through the toll-free number; and this technological transformation cannot and must not apply to the processing of passport applications, for obvious security reasons.

It seems logical, then, to conclude that Service Canada staff is capable of meeting the challenges of a mandate expanded to include the complete processing of passport applications without any changes to the existing structures, other than passport officer training.

This motion is not intended to undermine in any way the Canadian system for granting travel documents. The integrity of these documents must be maintained at all costs. However, that reality should in no way negate the urgent need for the government to put in place every possible mechanism to make this service as accessible as possible to all citizens.

It is completely unacceptable that Canadians who live far from major urban centres are having such a hard time getting a passport. They are just as interested in travelling as their urban cousins; they are simply discouraged by the real challenges they face in obtaining their passports.

Private Members' Business

[English]

In conclusion, and on a personal note, for many people, obtaining a passport is no more nor less significant than getting their driver's licence. For many of us who were not born in Canada, who have become citizens by love and choice, holding a Canadian passport is an important symbol of our chosen citizenship, even more powerful than our citizenship cards. It tells the world that this is our country, the one we have chosen, the one that chose us. For this and all other considerations, I ask the House to grant this motion its unanimous support.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to share some thoughts with my hon. colleagues on the very effective work of our national passport agency, Passport Canada.

In particular, I want to share important information on the challenges faced by Passport Canada since 2006, the numerous changes and innovations that the agency has introduced to meet these challenges, and the excellent service Passport Canada provides to Canadians.

First and most importantly, I want to emphasize that even with the current increase in demand for passports, both in terms of mail-in applications and the volume of applicants appearing in person at passport offices, Passport Canada is delivering its services within normal advertised times. In fact, Passport Canada is currently issuing passports within 12 working days through all service channels. This is actually one of the fastest passport services worldwide.

Notwithstanding some reports that have implied otherwise, Canadians who apply for passports, whether they are first-time applicants or applying for renewals, are receiving the same service today as they did six months ago when demand was much lower.

That being said, it is important to look not at the few media reports but at the facts and accomplishments, so I would like to share some recent history of Passport Canada. Let me take members back to late 2006. That is when the implementation date of the first phase of the United States western hemisphere travel initiative, or WHTI, was finally announced.

For the first time, Canadians were told they would need a passport to enter the United States if travelling by air, as of January 23, 2007. That meant that Passport Canada and Canadians travelling to and through the U.S. by air had about 60 days notice of the most important change in the history of border relations between our two countries.

Almost overnight, Passport Canada was engulfed by a wave of demand as an overwhelming number of applications poured in. To put this into context, in four months Passport Canada received about the same number of applications as it handled during an entire year earlier in the decade.

However, our government and Passport Canada responded quickly. To add immediate capacity, a number of temporary measures were put into action. Passport Canada employees worked longer hours on weekdays and took on additional weekend shifts. In fact, every Passport Canada employee including support staff and senior managers helped process applications for one day each week.

At walk-in passport offices, waiting room and processing space were added where feasible. Some offices remained open longer hours and some added an additional evening processing shift.

Two new policy measures, the simplified passport renewal and more flexible guarantor requirements, were introduced by our government in the summer of 2007. These measures made it easier for Canadians to apply for passports, speeded up processing within Passport Canada, but maintained the agency's high security standards.

By December 2007, a little over a year after the WHTI announcement, service standards had returned to approximately the pre-WHTI transition numbers. The bulk of Passport Canada's business was now back on track.

Another detail bears mentioning, and that concerns how Passport Canada is funded. Many Canadians probably do not realize that Passport Canada does not get regular appropriations from the government and its funding is not based on tax revenues. Rather, Passport Canada is funded through the passport fee, namely \$62 out of the \$87 it collects for each passport. This means that Passport Canada must live within its financial means. That is particularly true when we look at the agency's walk-in offices.

It is probably fair to say that each and every hon. member of this House would like to see a passport office in his or her riding. However, that is simply not feasible from an economic standpoint.

Our government and Passport Canada are continuously looking at ways to improve client services. In the past, when regional demand was sufficient for the agency to provide walk-in services, it did so. Indeed, the number of regional passport offices has increased to 33 from 18 since 1988. A new office is scheduled to open in Kelowna, British Columbia, in 2010. Passport Canada can and does open offices where a business case can be made for doing so.

• (1110)

To suggest that this business must be amended to justify opening more offices would mean that Passport Canada would be obliged to fund this unnecessary expansion in services through a dramatic increase in its revenue.

The only way Passport Canada can increase its revenue to cover a major expansion in offices is either through a significant increase in passport fees or by a budget subsidy from tax revenues.

I think all of my hon. colleagues would agree that in these times of economic uncertainty, when so many Canadians across the country are taking exceptional care with their finances, now is not the time to unnecessarily expand government infrastructure. Canadians do not want to pay for a passport.

Passport Canada has an agreement with Service Canada whereby Service Canada provides receiving agent services in areas not served by a passport office, but there is a tremendous difference between receiving agent services and passport office services.

Passport Canada staff receive specialized training in handling and examining a wide range of documents. This includes birth certificates, evidence of citizenship and court orders. This expertise is continually being updated.

Not only is the environment secure but as we would expect in an era where document fraud, identity theft, child abductions and international terrorism are daily headlines, a great deal of Passport Canada's work deals with making sure that the Canadian passport remains a secure and trusted document worldwide.

This means that Passport Canada maintains stringent security checks to ensure that each and every person who applies for a Canadian passport is who they claim to be, is entitled to a Canadian passport, and does not pose a threat to the security of Canada or other countries. As we can imagine, this scope of work is unique within government.

I believe that the quality of service provided by Passport Canada is something in which all Canadians can take pride. Not only are Passport Canada's service standards one of the fastest in the world, but it is able to carry out its very specialized and secure work without any inconvenience to the vast majority of those who apply for Canadian passports.

The 2008 passport national client satisfaction survey revealed that 96% of Canadians are satisfied with the overall service provided by Passport Canada, up 7% from last year. The survey also indicated that 81% believed that the office locations were convenient, up 8% from last year.

For all these reasons, I believe that it is in our best interest and in the best interests of all Canadians to oppose the motion put forward by my hon. colleague.

I just want to add one more thing. Among the G8 countries, Passport Canada is one of the only passport agencies to fully operate at a cost recovery basis. Despite this fact, at \$87, a Canadian passport is one of the cheapest in all the developed countries. In current Canadian dollars, the American passport costs \$127, an Irish passport costs \$128, a British passport costs \$130, and a French passport costs \$143.

As I said, this is a cost recovery process, and I do not think that we would like to spend more money. While I appreciate my hon. colleague's desire to ensure that in some areas passport service be provided faster, we have to take an all round picture and, as I stated in my speech, the service level of satisfaction provided by Passport Canada is quite satisfactory.

•(1115)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to the issue raised by the member for Brossard—La Prairie in her motion. This issue is very important to the people in my riding and the city of Longueuil in general, as well as to everyone living on the south shore in the Montreal region.

About five years ago, the former member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, Caroline St-Hilaire, was doing everything she could to force the government to acknowledge that passport issuing services

Private Members' Business

for residents of the south shore were lacking. I think that she is one of the main reasons we are talking about this today. I was therefore very pleased to find out that the member for Brossard—La Prairie was joining the Bloc Québécois to fight for better services for the people of the south shore across from Montreal.

Currently, a resident of Longueuil has three options for getting a passport. The first, and easiest option, is to go to a Bloc Québécois member's office. We have been offering this service to the people of our ridings for several years now, and I have to say that it helps a lot.

However, as everyone probably knows, members do not have access to priority service, nor can they process applications themselves. We help by checking forms, photos and identification documents and by sending applications by priority mail. The problem with this method is that it creates a lot of additional work for members' employees, and that can be hard to manage. It means that they have less time to focus on other files that should be getting ongoing attention. Often, there is just not enough time.

The second option is to go to a Canada Post office that acts as a receiving agent for Passport Canada. A receiving agent provides the same service as an MP's office, with one exception: Canada Post charges a \$20 administration fee, even though the processing time is no shorter.

This is likely the most inequitable solution, because people who choose this option not only have to wait longer than people who deal directly with Passport Canada, but they also have to pay a hefty charge.

The third option is to go into downtown Montreal. Anyone who knows what traffic between the south shore and the island is like at rush hour knows that this option is no better than the first two, even though the Passport Canada offices give faster service. The Montreal office, which is in the Guy Favreau Complex, is open only from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. It is not open on the weekend. Given how heavy the traffic is, it is nearly impossible for someone who works during normal business hours to get to this office without taking time off. And I feel that this is not right.

It is therefore clear that passport offices are needed on the south shore. We are talking about a region with nearly a million and a half inhabitants, including more than 700,000 in Longueuil alone.

I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that the people of the south shore in general and Longueuil in particular are not being served equitably, for the reason I just mentioned. It is unfair that the people of Longueuil do not have access to the same services as, for example, the residents of Laval, which is similar in size. What is more, I feel that this is an essential service, because a passport is required for all air travel and will soon be required for all travel by land to the United States.

Private Members' Business

Effective June 1, 2009, under the western hemisphere travel initiative, anyone travelling to the United States will be required to hold a valid passport. As a result, we can reasonably expect the number of applications to go up considerably, despite the economic crisis.

With that in mind, on September 4, 2008, just three days before the last election call, the former Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Canada announced 99 new passport receiving agent sites at Service Canada centres. Six sites for the Montréal area were announced at the time, but to date three, including the Longueuil site, have yet to be set up.

The advantage with these sites is that, while they do not handle applications as Passport Canada offices do, they do not make people pay \$20 extra as Canada Post receiving agents do. Their processing time may be longer than Passport Canada's, but at least it saves people from Longueuil having to take their applications to a government service point in Montreal.

As members know, in recent years Passport Canada has been working closely with Service Canada to expand its network of service points. The current negotiations are leaning toward allowing some Service Canada centres to authenticate and review passport applications on site instead of simply sending them off to a Passport Canada office.

Ultimately, this would be the best and most satisfying solution for the people of Longueuil, as it would solve quickly the problems they are currently facing.

• (1120)

This way, Passport Canada could significantly increase its level of services provided to the public at a reasonable cost without having to open new offices, which would mean savings in terms of capital costs of course.

It is important that the safety of sensitive and confidential information provided with passport applications never be compromised, but there are many dangers. It is therefore imperative that Passport Canada take all necessary steps to ensure that the information remain strictly confidential. That is totally feasible. It is up to Passport Canada to establish very strict standards.

The benefits from this kind of agreement between Service Canada and Passport Canada would be really great for those living on Montreal's south shore, as well as any Quebecker who does not live in Montreal, Quebec City or Gatineau.

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “all” and substituting the following:

service centres in Canada and follow through on its commitment made on September 4, 2008, to add new receiving sites for passport applications.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, I ask the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie if she consents to the proposed this amendment.

• (1125)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Madam Speaker, I do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There is consent.

Debate will proceed on the amendment.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the chance to speak on the motion this morning. It is an issue that has been close to my heart for some four and a half years. Ever since I was elected, passports and how they are processed have been a big challenge for both my office and my community.

When I first took over, my office was the passport office in Sault Ste. Marie. The previous member was processing literally thousands of them a year and had three people working full time at it.

I decided early on that this was not the role of the office of a member of Parliament. We had many other things that we needed to do. However, we continued to help people with passports, particularly in emergency situations such as not being able to get passports or having their date of travel coming up and not having passports or needing their ID back or whatever.

Being far away from a passport office makes all that very challenging and very difficult, so we moved very aggressively to ask the government to open up more passport offices and to open up passport offices in regions of the country where there were none, such as northeastern Ontario. We suggested that in the case of northeastern Ontario, it would make sense for the new passport office to be in Sault Ste. Marie, in my constituency, since we are an international border community.

I have colleagues from northern Ontario who are facing the same challenges in the distances we have to travel to get a passport. From Sault Ste. Marie alone, the closest passport office is eight hours.

People point out that there is one in Thunder Bay and that people could be sent there. Thunder Bay, for those who have not looked at the map and who do not understand the distances we have to deal with in northern Ontario, is as far away as Toronto, so that is not an answer for us in northeastern Ontario.

We appreciate the opportunity today to speak to this motion brought forward by the member for Brossard—La Prairie. I want to put a couple of thoughts on the record concerning this issue.

First of all, we will support the bill in principle because we want to have further opportunity at committee to talk about it, to perhaps bring forward amendments that would make it better, and to speak to the government about both the inadequacy of the services that are now being delivered through Service Canada and about how difficult it is, particularly given the economic climate that we are in.

Private Members' Business

In some instances we are okay with this as an interim measure and as a step toward a full passport operation in our region. It is better than what we had. The government has set up a passport intake office where workers are working very hard to make sure, when a passport is sent forward, that it is filled in properly, that the money is collected, that the ID is in place, that there are not going to be any more holdups with that passport, and that it will come back quickly so that people can get on with their work and with their business.

We support that initiative, but it is not the end that we had in mind, which is a full passport office. We support the notion of passport offices in regional Service Canada centres. We also support the amendment by the Bloc that those Service Canada offices that have already been dedicated to deliver passport services be included in the motion, meaning that passport offices would not only be open in regional passport offices, which in our area would be Sudbury, but that the Service Canada offices now delivering those services would also have a full-fledged passport service placed in those offices.

That solution is short of setting up brand new Passport Canada offices, which I think the government still has a very clear responsibility to do. One of the things we do as a federal government is to make sure we are taking care of the relationship we have with other countries and that when people from Canada travel, they have the proper documentation with them, both for the security of the person travelling and for the security of the other countries looking at that passport to know that this is a bona fide citizen of Canada.

This is some of the most fundamental and essential work we do as a government and as a service to the people of Canada. To be shortchanging people in the way we do and to be suggesting that people from Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury or Timmins might have to travel five to eight hours to get to a passport office is just not fair. It is not equitable. It is not what we should be asking our citizens to do.

• (1130)

In the big centres, the big cities where there already are passport offices, people simply get in their cars, walk down the road, take a taxi or grab a subway, and in a matter of a few days they have their passports. That is not the case for people in rural and northern Canada.

Anybody who understands the geography of this country will understand that rural and northern Canada are a very important part of this country. Very essential activities happen there. Lots of people live in those parts of our country for very important reasons, and as full Canadian citizens, they want full access to those services, particularly the ability to acquire a passport quickly so they can get on with their business or travel.

However, I raise some red flags. Service Canada, in my community, is already inundated with the kind of work it is being asked to do, for two reasons. One is that there has been a regionalization of Service Canada services, which has depleted some of the offices that exist, not at the regional centre, but in places such as Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins. Now those workers, who work very hard, who are committed, dedicated and trained to work in those offices, are finding themselves stressed to the max and under the gun to deliver a whole array of services that were delivered in different ways until the Conservative government took over, and

until the previous government began to downsize its operations across the country.

Literally thousands of passports are processed through the Service Canada service desk in Sault Ste. Marie. The week of December 12 of last year, there were 171 passports processed; the week of December 19 there were 179; and the week of December 26, the week between Christmas and the new year, there were 70.

Then we get into the new year, and as March break approaches, anyone who deals with passports knows that activity will increase exponentially. So far this year, in the week of January 2, there were 160 processed; the week of January 9 there were 322; the week of January 16 there were 314; the week of January 23 there were 372; and the list goes on. The week of February 6, there were up to 349 passports being processed in the Service Canada office in Sault Ste. Marie. That is a lot of work.

When someone has to sit down with each one of those individuals, work through the application process, explain all the things that need to be filled out, send them off sometimes to have pictures taken or find someone to be a guarantor or whatever, it is very time consuming and difficult work, and the workers want to do it correctly. That was added on top of the work they already do.

For example, the Service Canada office in my riding, now with a reduced number of people, is being asked to process ever-expanding numbers of EI claims, applications for Canada pension, Canada pension disability, old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, social insurance numbers, boat licensing, common experience payments, employment programs, job banks, et cetera. Summer is now approaching, a time when Service Canada will be dealing with youth employment and all the work that goes with that.

What I am saying this morning is that the we in the NDP can support this in principle, but we will not support it if we do not see some commitment from the government to actually deal with the problems that already exist in the Service Canada offices across the country, so that if this happens, it does not just load on top of those workers more work that is extremely difficult to do and requires a level of involvement that does not exist already.

I would like to suggest a friendly amendment to this private member's motion, as was done with the Bloc, which the NDP agrees with, concerning the existing Service Canada offices that deliver passport services across the country, that we include Service Canada offices in communities that are at international borders. That would be really important.

Madam Speaker, I move:

That the amendment be amended by adding the words "and all international border communities" after the words Service Centers.

I would ask the member if she would be agreeable to a friendly amendment of that nature, which I would like to move at this time.

• (1135)

If it is not accepted as a friendly amendment, and if this private member's motion, which we are supporting in principle, is successful and moves on to committee, we will be bringing this amendment to that committee to have it discussed further.

Private Members' Business

We will also be bringing to that committee, as we talk about this, the very difficult challenges that face those who work in Service Canada offices right now without the imposition of a full-fledged Passport Canada requirement on them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Again, it is my duty to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 93(3) no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, I ask the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie if she consents to the amendment to the amendment.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Madam Speaker, I do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There is consent. However, we do not have the exact wording yet.

[*English*]

We will examine the amendment and the subamendment to determine whether it is a receivable amendment, and in the meantime we will continue debate.

Mr. Tony Martin: Madam Speaker, I would also indicate that the seconder of this amendment will be the member for Outremont.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate, the member for Vaughan.

[*English*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first I would like to express to my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie my most sincere gratitude and appreciation for bringing this subject matter to the floor of the House of Commons. I gather from the interest I see that, even in light of amendments, she has really struck a chord with many members of Parliament on both sides of the House who live with the reality of passport offices. I see my hon. colleague from the York region across the way, who, like I, has to deal with passports, which represent a large portion of our work as members of Parliament, alongside immigration-related issues.

However, I do want to take this opportunity, very briefly, to pay tribute to my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie for the great interest she has shown in this area and many other areas of public policy here in the House of Commons. I recall very clearly a conversation I had with her in the immigration committee, where she represents her constituency very well with insightful questions of ministers and also of departmental officials. I want to pay tribute to her because of her great dedication. She comes to this House with literally decades of experience in constituency-related issues, and the House will be well served by her experience as she brings to the forefront issues such as this one. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, with her experience, has brought to this House an issue that is of concern to many Canadians.

The motion states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should provide Service Canada with a mandate to offer full passport services at all of its regional offices throughout Canada.

Members of the House know that with the growing demand for this important travel document and in consideration of what many areas face in obtaining passport services, this motion aims to help all Canadians in all regions of the country. What is truly important to underline is that we should be helping Canadians right across the board, and what better symbol than the passport?

I think sometimes in this House we miss the symbolism of what Canadian citizenship is all about. How can we deny access to a passport if in fact it is the document that tells Canadians that they are part of this wonderful country called Canada?

Of course, this motion goes beyond the symbolism of the actual passport, although it is very important. It goes on to illustrate the understanding of this particular member as it relates to creating greater efficiency in government and in the delivery of services and why that is important.

Why does the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie believe it would create synergies between the government and Service Canada to provide a service that is important to Canadians? When one reads the objectives of Service Canada, it states:

Deliver seamless citizen-centered service...by providing integrated, one-stop service based on citizen needs and helping to deliver better policy outcomes.

• (1140)

On this point, her idea obviously merits consideration by the House. Enhancing the integrity of programs by building trust and confidence in our programs and by achieving significant savings in program payments, working as a collaborative, networked government by building whole government approaches to service that enable information sharing and integrate service delivery for the benefit of Canadians, demonstrating accountable and responsible government by delivering results for Canadians and government, savings for taxpayers and transparency in reporting are all efficiencies that would occur. These efficiencies in the delivery of service would provide greater access to Canadians right across the board.

We heard from a few of the speeches this morning that there are individuals who do not have equal access. In this day and age, a government should and must provide Canadians access especially to the Canadian passport. This type of accessibility speaks to how serious we take citizenship in our country. If there are areas across the country where people have to wait very long periods of time to have access to their passports, it speaks to the fact that we are not giving citizenship the respect Canadians justly deserve.

We can hear from the government's side that this notion is self-funded, and I agree. As people in the House know, I am not the type of member of Parliament who would like to spend money on every existing program. Nor do I think money is always the answer. However, efficient use of the Canadian taxpayer dollar is important. This is very consistent in the motion. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie has asked that we create greater efficiencies and synergies with existing structures. This point has to be underlined.

She is not saying that we should create a brand new bureaucracy or brand new programs. She is saying that we should let common sense reign in this issue. First, we are talking about the Canadian passport. Second, we are talking about existing structures, not new ones. That is where the hon. member makes a great deal of sense. This is the reason why I believe that on both sides of the House, at least in principle, we should look at creative ideas that allow members of Parliament to comprehend the needs of our citizens across the country.

To dismiss this motion outright, as suggested by a member of the government's side, would be a mistake. We would be denying ourselves an opportunity to examine possibilities that exist within our structure as a government to provide much-needed services.

I congratulate the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie for bringing this to the attention of the House and, in many ways, for responding to what she is hearing on the ground and what she has been experiencing over many years as a person who has dedicated herself to public service.

I was reading her speech. She said that when one considers that close to 75% of all passports issued in Canada are the result of walk-in visit, that is, an applicant who took the time to go in person to a Passport Canada office, one has to conclude that the navigation of documents is extremely important to most Canadians. She is saying that we as parliamentarians know and appreciate what Service Canada does, although I share some of the opinions expressed earlier.

• (1145)

I believe in certain centres they are operating at full capacity, but that is not the reason to ignore the idea. It is a reason to say to ourselves that perhaps greater funding is required.

The point is not to say no to the idea that builds on efficiency, builds on greater synergies in government, but it is to say that perhaps Service Canada centres across the country require more funding to do a better job for our citizens. That is—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order please. The Chair finds that the amendment to the amendment is in order.

[*English*]

The debate will now focus on the subamendment.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and debate this motion. I am rising today concerning the motion and the amendments submitted by the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie. The motion seeks to transform 320 Service Canada offices into fully functional passport offices. As members are aware, more Canadians than ever hold a passport for business trips, leisure or simply as a trusted means of identification.

There is no doubt that Canadians are applying for passports in record numbers. In response to pressure from constituents, it is important that all members of Parliament be aware of all the issues involved with passports. We must note that Canadian passports are

Private Members' Business

the most highly valued travel document in the world, which is no accident. The control of the process creates that integrity.

This control, however, causes frustrations for constituents from time to time that require intervention from MP offices. In my constituency, for example, the issue of access is important in Kootenay—Columbia because we are a three to eight hour drive away from Calgary, the closest—

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question. Did you say that the debate would now focus on the amendment proposed by our NDP colleague before moving on to the main motion, as amended?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I did say that to the hon. member, but I believe that there is some flexibility to speak about the topic in general.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, I will get to the subamendment, but I have to establish the context.

For people in my constituency, there is a challenge when they have an emergency to get to a passport office, so I have the same sympathy that the other 307 members of this place have.

The government has reacted positively through Service Canada. It has created a receiving office in my constituency that has resolved the majority of issues, but as I say, I have an awareness of the concerns of all member of the House, and I share them.

As a result of the changes that were made, my office has received many compliments from my constituency on the service provided by my office and Service Canada. It was a pragmatic, practical way to address the challenges that we had with the invention of the western hemisphere travel initiative.

The proposed motion and the amendments would create a number of new concerns. For example, because this is the most valued travel document in the world, how would we maintain the high level of control and our absolute integrity by expanding to about 300 offices, as opposed to the ones that we presently have?

Considering the inestimable value of blank passports and equipment, how would we achieve absolute security at all the new locations? Where would we get the trained staff for the myriad of locations? Would it actually speed up the process? What would it cost, considering all the above? If we were to make these changes, what would they be, and what is the present situation?

As has been described, Passport Canada services are already offered through a wide range of access points. Application forms may be picked up at Canada Post outlets. People can complete them online, using a printable form, in person at 33 regional passport offices, or one of 197 Service Canada and Canada Post receiving agents. In addition to that, the forms can be submitted to the passport office through our offices.

Private Members' Business

For this most recent subamendment to the motion, it would add yet another level and another consideration of security for the blank passports themselves, for the ability to print on to those passports at all those locations and, on top of that, we would have the concern of training the people at all those centres.

In total there are 231 offices where Canadians can go to get answers and submit their passport applications. To suggest that any of us, my office included, have not been approached by constituents who are frustrated and have concerns would not be factually accurate. There have been concerns, but what would be the cost to the integrity of the Canadian passport, this most valued document, by opening up the number of offices?

Not only has Passport Canada been successful in remaining within its published processing times, which are totally reasonable in my judgment, it has done it as the number of applications has increased.

Is the hon. member aware that Passport Canada does not receive a penny of her constituents' tax contributions? What that means is one of two things would have to happen. If we were to increase the number of issuing passport offices from the 33 we presently have, there would have to be a cost increase to the passports. There would have to be more people trained. There would be a lack of efficiency moving the passports from one passport issuing office to another, where they could be handled. There would be immense increase in cost. From where would this cost come?

• (1155)

Would the member prefer that the cost of Canadian passports be increased substantially. It is a stand-alone cost, which means that only people who choose to get Canadian passports are paying for them. Or, would she take it out of Canada's revenue, in which case, people who are not applying for passports and who do not consider they need a passport would be paying for the passports of people who do? It must come from one place or the other.

My colleague probably misunderstands the intent and function of Passport Canada's receiving agents in relation to Passport Canada itself. We have all of these receiving agents in our constituencies, 231 of them. We have our own office and office staff to help our constituents. The present situation is that the passport issuing office is under the absolute control and integrity that is required for this to continue to be the world's most valued travel document.

I do not believe the members would want to change that status nor do I believe they would want to increase the cost of a passport. Perhaps there are members in this House who should pay attention to the training and the calibre of the staff they have in their own offices. I am very proud of the people in my office who have trained themselves and others who have come into my employ and who have been able to help my constituents through some very difficult times.

We need to ensure that whatever we are doing with respect to this issue, we are not making law for the exception. I grant that I receive telephone calls and correspondence from some of my constituents from time to time when they have been legitimately frustrated with the passport service. I have brought two files with me to Ottawa, as a matter of fact, to speak to the minister and the ministries involved. That does happen. However, we need to be careful that we are not

going to be doing something that will deal with the exception at the cost of the integrity of the Canadian passport.

Every member of Parliament must think this issue through very clearly as to the cost and the benefit. I suggest that when members have an opportunity to look at the reality, they will not be prepared to incur the cost because there is no benefit to this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, how much time do I have?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member has 10 minutes, but there will be no time for questions this hour.

• (1200)

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, a lot of people who never needed a passport before now have to apply for one. They have to submit personal documents, which are then returned to them. They receive an official document that enables them to travel around the world, a document they need. They have to feel that the process is safe, and not everyone feels comfortable sending their application in by mail. Sometimes, applications are sent back because information may be incorrect or insufficient, or because there is a problem with the photos.

I have been a member here since 1998, and over 60,000 people have come to my office with their passport applications. I have at least two people working full time in my office to provide this service. Maybe that is why costs are so low, as the Conservative members said earlier. Although not all members deal with as many applications, many of us are in this same situation. Because we provide certain services, such as checking applications, Passport Canada does not have to. In general, once a passport application has gone through a member's office, it contains no errors. That means that Passport Canada does not have to return documents and pay for postage, a cost that I absorb for my fellow citizens. Those are additional costs. I doubt that Passport Canada will compensate me for the cost of the services I provide and for my two extra employees.

In 2004, I submitted a request to the minister responsible for the passport office, the hon. Bill Graham. I submitted a petition signed by 12,000 citizens along with 60 municipal resolutions calling for a new regional passport office in Sherbrooke. Of course, the government of the day, the Chrétien government, completely ignored our demands.

As I indicated, we have seen 60,000 applications go through my office. In 2007 alone, we dealt with 10,923 applications and, last year, there was a slight drop, with 10,436. In 2007, 2,627 applicants chose to go through the Service Canada centre.

In 2007, the passport office received from the Sherbrooke area, within a 50 kilometre radius of the city, 37,820 passport applications. During the same time period, it received 27,752 applications from the Saguenay area. In the Saguenay, however, there is a regional passport office. There is a 10,000 difference between these two areas. I guess that the Saguenay is cost effective. We are charged \$87 for a passport, but seldom are we told that out of that amount \$25 goes directly to other services provided by embassies. That is already \$25 too much that is charged to applicants; it should be covered by the Department of Foreign Affairs. Thus, applicants are already paying too much.

We know that the volume of service has increased at Passport Canada due to the large number of passport applications received, but very limited training was provided to Service Canada personnel. I cannot say how many, but many people turned to their member of Parliament in Sherbrooke after going to Service Canada because Service Canada was unable to provide all services. There were special cases where we had to answer questions for them and help them fill out their passport applications.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member. He has 10 minutes in all, but will have the five minutes remaining to him when this debate resumes.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1205)

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009

The House resumed from February 27 consideration of Bill C-10, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and related fiscal measures, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-10. It has been an interesting journey for us to get to the point where we have a budget for us.

This is a very interesting story. When we go back to before the last election, in this House we actually passed a fixed election date law. The election was supposed to be held on October 19, 2009.

We had an election. One has to wonder, if we look at all the things that have happened, whether there is something more to the story. I looked at it very carefully and listened to how the government explained this.

In the November economic statement, the government indicated that there would be four years of surplus ahead of us and that everything was fine. The Prime Minister was happy that a recession had not occurred in Canada and had clearly indicated that if we ever to go into recession it would have already happened. That was out of line with virtually every private forecaster and with the parliamen-

Government Orders

tary budget officer who has been under attack by the government. I do not know why.

The government started to change its tune as things started to come out. All of a sudden, in the January budget, instead of four years of surplus, we are looking at four years of deficit and at a recession.

The government says that we are in good shape. The Prime Minister's original assessment was that our banks were stronger than the banks in the rest of the world, so we did not have anything to worry about. On top of that, all these other countries that are boasting about being ready for the impending recession and the financial crisis, will be spending a lot of money. Since we are a trading nation, all the money they spend will benefit trade with us because we are a good trading country. It was basically an explanation that somehow we did not need to do anything. We just needed to sit back and let other countries do the job and Canada will be just fine.

As we well know, that is not the case. In the January budget, we now have four years of deficit. The government's latest jingle line is that this is a global economic crisis. That means that everybody who is a player in the global economy is in crisis, and we are all there.

This is an absolute miracle, when we consider that last November there was no problem. We had an economic statement that said there was no problem. However, between November and January, when the budget came out on January 26, there was a global financial crisis. Instantaneously, the entire world was in a global financial crisis with no indication whatsoever that there was any problem out there. This is a lot of hogwash. The whole world does not go into an economic crisis without people knowing it.

The government knew it and the parliamentary budget officer knew it and told the government about it. The Governor of the Bank of Canada knew about it and told the government about it. I have heard from far too many people that the Prime Minister simply did not want to listen to the facts. He did not mind if the finance minister was left hung out to dry by giving numbers that were clearly a terrible indication.

The House knows that under the rules of budget day, the budget secrecy provisions, and even in general developments, the finance minister should never make commentary that may have some impact on the marketplace or on other financial indicators or instruments that might be involved. It is hard to believe that he actually gave that November economic statement that was basically panned by virtually everybody who knows anything about economic forecasting. It was clearly wrong but the government will not admit it now.

We now have a situation where the Prime Minister has said that we need to rush this through because we need to get the money flowing, and if we do not do it, there will be an election. I thought that was a little over the top because the official opposition has decided, notwithstanding the flaws in the budget, to support this one because we need to get that economic stimulus package moving and in place.

Government Orders

The only alternative would be to defeat the government now, go into another election and probably not come back until just before the summer or maybe even after the summer, depending on what happens. That would be unacceptable for the people of Canada. We need to put the people's interests before partisan interests.

• (1210)

However, the Prime Minister is still playing this partisan game saying that he has to get this going because he has to take care of the country and he is the only one who can take care of the country. I am not sure whether or not that is the assessment of the people.

As a consequence, when we think about it, there were indicators. Most people, who had any investments in RRSPs or direct investments, probably received the economic forecast letters that I received and I have seen others receive where it said that we have had a long good run of balanced budgets. We ducked the last recession that the U.S. had. We had low interest rates. We had the highest employment rate in 30 years and everything was going very well. We paid down debt and gave tax breaks. However, eventually it has to turn. Fat builds up in the system, the system gets lazy, the system gets undisciplined and things happen. Of course we are now into a more cyclical scenario.

Is it not a shame that the government broke its own law and called an election a year before it should have called it? Then, is it not a shame that it decided that it was going to go forward with an economic statement that made absolutely no sense, but wasted time? Then Parliament was prorogued, for how long again, so that the government could go back and figure out what would be its next political step. It came back with a budget.

What is in the budget? It is not just budget information. It turned out to be like an omnibus bill. There were things in there that had nothing to do with the budget, nothing to do with the financial crisis, and nothing to do with the need to get an economic stimulus package out.

It included an all out attack on pay equity. It included an all out attack on the public service, on the Competition Act, and even on the Navigable Waters Protection Act, things that have taken up time because they are in the budget and members have to address them, but they should not have been there in the first place. They could have been separate bills.

The Prime Minister says that he wants to get the stimulus out. Canadians want that stimulus out. However, we cannot just flip a switch and say, "Here's the cheque, go do it". Obviously, we have to pick the projects, we have to appropriate the money, we have to come to an agreement and work out the details. Could that be going on now before the budget is passed? Could that be going on now before the cheque is cut? Absolutely.

As a matter of fact, if the government is not happy about that, why is it that over the last two years there was \$2 billion of infrastructure spending that was budgeted, approved, appropriated and a cheque ready to be cut but never spent? It never got spent. It is called lapsed, promised but not spent.

If the government was clearly committed to doing something about the financial crisis that we now face, and when the January budget came out and the Prime Minister recognized or apparently

recognized at that point that there was this financial crisis, why is that he did not accelerate or get out the already approved money and not have to wait for this? That would have put shovels in the ground or at least all the work would have started to move forward. There is no reason why money should not be out there.

The other issue that I would like to comment on is what I read in the paper, which I found a little disturbing. It was on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* where a minister of the Crown had a meeting with the representatives of 65,000 academic and general staff of universities and colleges. He started yelling at them and telling them that they did not understand the budget.

Why is it that we want to change the channel when the issues are creating jobs, saving jobs that are at risk, and taking care of the most vulnerable in our society in this financial crisis? Those are the priorities. The tools are available. The Prime Minister has to stop playing games saying that there are somehow delays going on here. This budget has gone through faster than any other budget in the history of our country. The official opposition is supporting it. It will pass quicker than any other budget. The tools are there. The government should get on with the job.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's speech. However, there is one aspect of the budget and the group of amendments that bothers me considerably. Although we hear about a desire to bring in a budget to stimulate the economy and really focus on the important aspects of economic stimulus, the Conservative government has decided to take an approach modelled after American budgets, that is, with measures that are not necessarily connected to the specific goal, and, as we say back home, measures that could be used to pull a fast one.

This includes creating a national securities commission, even though a consensus has been reached on this among the Government of Quebec, economic stakeholders in Quebec, all political parties in the Quebec National Assembly, and the Bloc Québécois. This consensus is based, for one thing, on the fact the OECD has ranked Canada second best in the world for securities regulation.

Now, with the support of the Liberals, the Conservative government is using the budget implementation bill as an opportunity to change this system, to change this arrangement and ultimately throw away a system that is working well, even though we are in a time when, if something works in the securities sector, we should leave it alone, instead of replacing it with something else.

How can my colleague explain his party's position, which is to support such a measure?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, the member is quite right. This is another area where there is not consensus by all of the provinces. There is quite a divide in terms of the provincial view on this and I know that Quebec has a unique situation in which its securities regulation function actually includes more aspects of the financial administration or markets other than the banking system, which is federal, as he knows.

He has simply raised another example of matters that should not have been put in the budget. It was not necessary to put it in the budget. It should have been discussed and studied in committee. It should have had the kind of vetting that is necessary to make a wise decision, which is what we say in our prayer every time.

I agree with the member. I think the government shows yet again that it is not prepared to address the financial crisis. It wants to switch the channel to other issues which do not help to create jobs.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague from Mississauga South. The first group of amendments refers to a section of the act that deals with tax havens.

Can he talk about his party's position on that issue?

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I would be happy to sit down and talk with the member about tax havens. It is certainly an important area for us to ensure that there is fairness and equity within the taxation system of Canada.

Let me simply reiterate that 40% of the stimulus package is infrastructure. I am not sure whether the \$3 billion surplus without the designated scrutinies or due diligence is the safest way to go. There are other opportunities to continue to get the money out without creating a situation where people are focusing on the rules and history rather than on how we get those projects approved and running so those that are shovel ready can commence as soon as possible in the best interests of all Canadians.

• (1220)

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the debate and want to go back to the securities regulator question. The Bloc is saying we do not need it, but we are going into a very difficult economic time internationally and a time when Canada has to be as competitive as it possibly can be. To have a single securities regulator seems to be the only appropriate way to move forward.

I come from a province that agrees with its own securities regulator, but this is a voluntary process. My question to my hon. colleague is this. He is standing and saying that we do not need a national securities regulator. Would he go against the wishes of his province in that area?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I did not say that. That is not true at all. I said we should be discussing this because there is no consensus. This is provincial jurisdiction, and there are 13 regulatory agencies. However, it is also important to understand that this matter of whether or not we should have a single national securities

regulator does not do anything for jobs. It is not necessary. The urgency is not there today. It should have been a separate bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on the group of amendments submitted by the Bloc. For those who are listening, I would like to recall that the budget implementation bill puts into effect several initiatives including tax cuts, elimination of rules for tax deductibility for foreign corporations, and tax havens, which I will discuss in just a moment. It also includes changes to the employment insurance plan which, we believe, do not go far enough and do not address demand or provide the assistance needed by workers in these rather difficult economic times.

In addition, the budget will fund a transition office to oversee the creation of a single securities regulator, which my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup spoke about earlier. The budget also sets a cap on equalization payments and reforms the equalization formula, which has outraged the National Assembly. We have in our hands a motion by the National Assembly and our colleagues in the Government of Quebec, which criticizes the federal government for this. The budget also includes items pertaining to the Employment Equity Act, about which our colleague from Laval talked about extensively last week when she initiated a debate about the status of women.

We would like the House to accept the amendments proposed by the Bloc. Clause 6, which permits the use of tax havens, should be deleted. This short budget clause eliminates a section of the Income Tax Act that was designed to close a loophole used by Canadian multinationals to avoid paying taxes. Tax havens have cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Since 1995, and recently, from 2000 to 2002, as well as in the 2003 and 2005 reports, the Auditor General reported on the use of tax havens, which are a form of tax avoidance. Section 18.2 of the Income Tax Act would have plugged this loophole as of 2012.

There is no justification for rescinding this section and it is quite scandalous. We need measures that will create jobs here in Quebec and Canada. We do not need measures that will create competition for local businesses that do not have the means to benefit from such a mechanism.

In this difficult economic context, the Bloc Québécois as well as thousands of taxpayers would like to know why the Minister of Finance is surrendering in such an important battle. The global economy as a whole is threatened by offshore investments and tax havens.

Government Orders

It is inconceivable that we would approve a decision by the Conservative government to allow too many financial transactions to go through tax havens. We must not let companies escape the social contract with the people and run away from their responsibilities. Many Quebecers and Canadians pay taxes, and I am sure they are outraged to learn that companies will have the right to use such a mechanism and that the government wants to encourage tax evasion by multinationals.

The lack of transparency of tax havens makes it hard to identify credit risks and promotes market distrust. A report by the Auditor General revealed that the Canada Revenue Agency had a hard time properly monitoring international financial transactions and tended to go easy in tax probes of major corporations so as not to hurt relations with those companies.

Is the finance minister so blind that he did not understand from what the lobbyists said that companies are evading billions of dollars in income tax? Tax havens equal major capital flight. In 2000, according to the Auditor General, losses due to tax havens were equivalent to 50,000 taxpayers not paying their taxes. What about today? Statistics Canada says that the use of tax havens is on the rise, which is cause for concern.

The young people in my riding, Vaudreuil-Soulanges, want to know why it was not right to use tax havens to avoid paying tax in 2007, yet it became a good thing in 2008. Workers, seniors and the most vulnerable members of our society are asking themselves the same question.

• (1225)

The Minister of Finance knows, however, that we need some sort of oversight over the international financial market. In his 2007 budget, he said that steps had to be taken to ensure everyone pays their fair share. He complained that some foreign and Canadian corporations were using the tax rules to get around paying tax. He said that every time this happens workers and small and medium-size businesses have to pay higher taxes. He concluded by stating that it was unfair.

The anti-tax-haven initiative was proposed to prevent multinational corporations from using tax havens and other tax avoidance structures to generate two expense deductions for the same investment. Today, not only has the economic situation worsened, but the Conservative government appears to have taken steps to increase the injustice.

The Minister of Finance, members will recall, had already backed off in the fight against tax havens by acting on pressure from financiers in Toronto. He gave them a five-year grace period before the implementation of his plan to fight tax evasion and then set up an advisory panel whose independence and neutrality are highly debatable.

The finance minister out and out reneged on his commitment in the fight against tax evasion when he blindly accepted the recommendations of the Advisory Panel on Canada's System of International Taxation. This panel was clearly set up to justify the minister's change of heart.

Of the six members of the panel, four are from private companies that may have benefited from the strategy and still can. They include,

for example, the former CEO of the Bank of Nova Scotia, the Canadian bank with the most branches in tax havens. The authors of the report are clearly in conflict of interest.

How can the Prime Minister today justify allowing banks and oil companies to avoid taxes through tax havens, when thousands of jobs are being lost each month and businesses are closing their doors?

The fight against tax havens is an ongoing fight. Things must change democratically. A number of European countries would like tighter legislation right away and a much more transparent means of disclosing international financial transactions. Billions of dollars are involved. The disappearance of over half of the money to tax havens is cause for concern.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member's speech was very clear, and I understand her points. I would like to ask her a question about process.

A lot of vulnerable people will be helped by this budget. We want to get the money out to them quickly. However, why would the government put in items that did not have to be in the stimulus package, that would not speed up the help for vulnerable people? Some of these could be rightful topics of discussion, but any proposed changes should be reviewed through the normal processes.

There is the pay equity section. Women of the country and federal unions such as PSAC are understandably outraged that this item would be in the budget, especially when PSAC's been told it would not necessarily save any money. Why is this so urgent and why can it not go through proper debate?

Then there is the Navigable Waters Protection Act, when a boom or a bridge is built, which affects canoeists, kayakers and rafters, hundreds of thousands of recreational boaters' organizations have said that they have not been consulted on that. How will this improve the economy?

The Competition Act has also been included in the bill, about which the Canadian Chamber of Commerce has complained. If we wanted to get money out quickly to those who are hurting, this did not have to be in bill.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question. Everything he said is important.

With regard to the most vulnerable, I believe the government is way off base. It would have been wiser to choose its targets better, among others, the changes to the equalization formula. To add to what my colleague said, changes to the equalization formula will cost Quebec almost a billion dollars a year, \$991 million to be exact. The bill also lays the foundation for creating a national securities regulator, which the Government of Quebec opposes.

There is also the matter of reforming access to employment insurance. The government refuses to abolish the waiting period. For thousands of unemployed workers, there is nothing encouraging in the budget. The bill proposes misguided tax reductions and eliminates provisions of the Income Tax Act aimed at preventing corporations from avoiding taxes by resorting to tax havens. There is also the matter of deregulation of foreign investment, which opens the door to foreign ownership. Funds allocated for social housing are poorly targeted and allocated, as indicated by the community development trust. And that is not a complete list.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Vaudreuil-Soulanges for her wonderful speech.

I would like to give her an opportunity to continue, particularly concerning employment insurance. The government is proposing to extend the employment insurance benefit period by five weeks for those who can receive benefits. Only a minority of the population presently receives employment insurance benefits or could do so.

I would like my colleague to explain why the Bloc has demanded real employment insurance reform.

Ms. Meili Faille: Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize the important work that the member for Chambly—Borduas is doing in this file.

The Bloc Québécois is demanding substantial improvement to the employment insurance system. I would like to read the Bloc's position on this issues. We must make the following changes:

Reduce the qualifying period to a minimum of 360 hours of work, regardless of the regional rate of unemployment; increase the rate of weekly benefits from 55% to 60%; eliminate the waiting period; eliminate the distinctions between a new entrant and a re-entrant to the labour force; eliminate the presumption that persons related to each other do not deal with each other at arm's length; make it possible for self-employed workers to belong to the program on a voluntary basis; and calculate benefits based on the 12 best weeks.

Those are the major improvements that need to be made to the employment insurance system.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate on the budget implementation bill. The amendments are being brought forward to try to take away some of the inequities that have been included in the bill, as previous members have stated. They are inequities that do not have much to do with the idea of having a package of financial measures to respond to the fiscal crisis, but rather adopts the government's approach to its agenda for our country, which varies considerably from that which our party supports.

I will review what has happened in the last few months in the country.

On November 27, we had the fiscal update, which to be fair and very polite ignored the fiscal reality. The government decided it was a good time to include three very prominent measures that caused quite a big furor in the House and across the country.

The first was an attack on the rights of women by declaring that pay equity was no longer something with which the Human Rights Commission was able to deal. It was to be eliminated from the

Government Orders

remedies under the Human Rights Act and made something that would have to be bargained like any other item for collective bargaining.

The second was an attack on collective bargaining rights, for which workers across the country have fought for decades. The indication that the government would refuse to honour agreements with workers was an attack on collective bargaining.

The third was something that also caused a big furor as well, and that was the attack on the changes that had been made to party financing in the wake of the Liberal financial sponsorship program scandal. Imposed were fair rules for financing our political parties.

We and the Bloc were opposed to the attack on those fair rules. The Liberals were extremely opposed. In fact, as a result of these measures and the failure to address the problem, the Liberals agreed to enter into a coalition to replace the government to ensure that these things would not happen and that the government would be able to respond to the needs of the people.

If all the rest is taken away, that is really what happened in December, just a couple of months ago.

As we know, Parliament was then prorogued through the application of the Prime Minister. We came back again on January 26. What do we have? We have some changes to the government's attitude toward the budget, but what has happened to those three major irritants that caused the problem for the Liberals back in December? All but one of them are still there.

We still have an attack on women. We still have the removal of the pay equity provisions from the Human Rights Act remedies. Women in the public service can no longer avail of the rights that many other Canadians have to seek remedy from the Human Rights Commission for a violation of pay equity in the federal sphere. They now have to go and bargain along with every other item on the agenda of a collective bargaining session and play with the give-and-take of hardball negotiations on the part of the employer, or not, or whatever takes place. Pay equity becomes another bargaining item along with holidays, overtime pay, vacations and various other things. Pay equity is one of the things that as part of these negotiations is totally wrong. However, it is apparently acceptable to the Liberal Party of Canada and to the Liberal opposition in the House. I find it astounding that this could be the case.

The other issue is collective bargaining. Part of the implementation act are the changes that would be brought about to ensure all the collective agreements in the federal public sector would be changed, with pay increases that have been negotiated or agreed to wiped out. That is being done at the drop of a hat by the government, supported by the Liberal Party of Canada.

Government Orders

•(1235)

One of the three major irritants that has been left out is the one which would take away party financing for the Liberal Party of Canada. Now the Liberal Party is supporting the government and the measures it is implementing, including the attack on pay equity, the attack on women and the attack on collective bargaining.

It is kind of ironic. There was quite a furor in the House in December. Every single member of the Liberal caucus signed the letter declaring their lack of confidence in the government, declaring their willingness to form a coalition government to govern the country and prevent the very things that we see them complain about every day in this House.

I was a little encouraged the other day. The member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl was entertaining some protestors from the Public Service Alliance of Canada who showed up at her office on Friday. They were protesting the fact that the Liberal Party was supporting the pay equity changes. According to news reports the member invited them in and she was asked whether or not there was any opportunity of hiving off those pay equity provisions from the budget implementation bill and dealing with them separately. The member apparently was interested in trying to do that but was not sure that it could be done.

I want her and all members in the House to know that there is an opportunity to hive off those sections of the bill. There are opportunities in this debate through report stage motions and amendments to vote against particular provisions of the budget implementation bill and pay equity can in fact be taken out and members can vote accordingly. I would certainly encourage them in that regard.

I am glad to see that the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl has an interest in that. I look forward to her supporting the amendment which would remove that. For any member of the Liberal caucus who would wish to register his or her objection to the removal of pay equity rights for women, there will be opportunities for them to do that today. Whenever it comes to a vote, I look forward to seeing the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl and others join with us in seeking to amend this legislation at least to the extent that it does not trample the rights of women when it comes to pay equity. It is a very significant issue for many people across this country and for the women who fought for pay equity.

Again and again I hear the President of the Treasury Board talk about how the Conservatives are fixing this. It took 15 years for women to achieve pay equity in the public sector. My question is, why is that? Who was in government forcing the women to spend 15 years fighting for pay equity? Who opposed these applications? Who opposed these measures before the Canadian Human Rights Commission? It is very obvious. Who was in power during those 15 years? During those 15 years, it was the Conservative government of Mr. Mulroney and then the Liberal government of Mr. Chrétien. Those were the governments in power. That is why it took 15 years, not because there was a problem with the system, but because both governments, the Conservative government and then the Liberal government, resisted every single step of the way to ensure that it took 15 years.

All the President of the Treasury Board has to do is say, "Hey, we are going to streamline this process. We are not going to resist. We are going to let the process take its course as it should". All the Liberal members have to do is ensure that when the opportunity comes, they actually take this provision out of the budget implementation bill.

•(1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are at the report stage for the budget implementation bill, and the group of amendments currently before us includes amendments about tax havens. The Conservatives have decided to do a 180 and go back to the old way of doing business, which resulted in billions of dollars leaving the country. Paradoxically, they have decided to set up a Canada-wide securities commission, which is unacceptable to Quebec. This group of amendments also includes the Conservative government's decision to exempt several foreign corporations buying Canadian companies from review. In these troubled economic times, when we should be tightening up the rules, the Conservative Party has, as always, opted for total laissez-faire and wants the market to handle everything. What a paradox. We all know how that worked out; we are living with the economic crisis now.

I would like the member to tell me whether he finds the Conservative government's decision to go ahead with this measure paradoxical because it will allow greater foreign ownership of our companies with no controls in place. The government will be giving up control over what happens after that. Is it not paradoxical that the Conservative government, with the support of the Liberal Party, should be going ahead with such a measure?

•(1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, yes, it is rather ironic that during the election campaign when the Prime Minister was apprised of the fact that there were serious problems in the stock market, he said that this represented some good buying opportunities. The irony is that by opening up the foreign takeover opportunities, he is now wishing to make those buying opportunities available to capitalists, entrepreneurs and companies in the rest of the world when the stock prices are so low.

Some of these companies are now at fire sale prices. Despite the huge drop in the stock market, many people and companies have enormous cash reserves. This seems to be the wrong time to make it easier for foreign companies to take over Canadian enterprises by lowering the standard and not making it subject to review in many cases. I think the new rule now is \$1 billion. There are many companies now available for takeover by foreign enterprises without a review of any kind. It is basically open season for Canadian enterprise to be gobbled up by those with strong foreign cash reserves. It is the wrong time to be doing this and I certainly oppose it.

Government Orders

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, both Dofasco and Stelco are located in Hamilton with ownership from outside of Canada. The member talked about a laissez-faire style of governance in this country. With the \$1 billion cap, it strikes me that a lot of companies will slip out from underneath it. Does the member share that view?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, yes, a lot of companies previously would not have been covered by this, but because of the low stock prices their market cap is so low they are vulnerable to takeover without any review whatsoever.

We have seen the attitude of multinational corporations—or transnational corporations, which I think is the preferred phrase these days—that have no concern whatsoever for the consequences in this country with respect to layoffs and things like that. It is a bad thing and it is open season.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to speak in this House to give thanks to the people of Etobicoke North and discuss infrastructure, an important component of the stimulus package and a real need in our riding.

Municipalities provide much of the infrastructure and services that matter most to Canadians: bridges, public transit, roads, sewage systems, et cetera. However, cities are the level of government least able to fund these projects. Municipalities, unlike federal and provincial governments, are uniquely constrained. Their main source of revenue is property tax which is likely to be reduced for at least the near future as the housing market trends downward.

Canadian municipalities must stay on top of infrastructure needs as complacency and further deterioration may ultimately prove deadly. We cannot afford to ignore warning signs or to repeat the mistakes of the past. For example, a Portuguese mayor repeatedly told the government that a bridge crossed by 1,600 vehicles a day was unsafe before it plunged into a river, submerging two cars and a coach. In 1990 and 2005, the U.S. government gave the Mississippi bridge a rating of “structurally deficient” before it collapsed, sending more than 50 cars plunging 20 metres into the river below. Here in Canada drivers reported chunks of falling concrete about an hour before the collapse of an overpass in Quebec.

These tragedies all have one thing in common: the behaviour of organizations and people who fail to assume their responsibilities during the building or service life of the bridge. I point out that I could have chosen examples regarding other forms of infrastructure.

Recent disasters show the importance of protecting Canada's infrastructure from all types of hazards, for example, the 1996 Saguenay flood, the 1997 Red River flood, the 1998 ice storm, and the 2003 power blackout.

Canadian municipalities build, own and maintain most of the infrastructure that supports our economy and quality of life. Unfortunately, our Canadian communities are increasingly at risk of human made and natural disasters, largely because after decades of neglect, our once efficient and reliable infrastructure is now crumbling. Municipalities facing growing responsibilities and reduced revenues deferred needed investment and infrastructure deteriorated.

Canadian public investment in infrastructure has declined significantly since the 1960s. Public investment measured as a proportion of gross domestic product peaked at almost 5% in 1966 and fell to 2.6% by 2002. Deferred investment has significant consequences including the closing down and failure of some facilities such as bridges, roads, sewage and water supply.

The 2004 report, “Assessing Canada's Infrastructure Needs”, showed that Vancouver had bridge and traffic congestion that cost the region an estimated \$1.5 billion in air pollution, lost work hours and shipping delays as the city's bridges were too narrow and therefore had to operate over capacity.

For Calgary, a transportation infrastructure improvement list included 880 million dollars' worth of major roadway projects. For Saskatoon, the needs included two more bridges and a list of road projects worth over \$750 million. The estimated costs of reducing the backlog of repairs to highways, streets and viaducts in Toronto was \$300 million and continues to grow today. Just to bring home the challenge, there are over 10,000 streets in Toronto with 5,300 kilometres of roads and 530 bridges.

● (1250)

Canada's infrastructure was mostly built between the 1950s and the 1970s. The decay is accelerating faster than previously thought, with infrastructure showing 79% of its service life already used.

Estimated cost to fix infrastructure increased fivefold, from \$12 billion in 1985 to \$60 billion in 2003. Today the cost is a staggering \$123 billion.

Although I have largely focused on bridges and roads, infrastructure is needed for community, cultural and recreational infrastructure, solid waste management, transportation, and water and waste water systems.

The government proudly announces that the gas tax fund allows all municipalities to better plan and finance their long-term infrastructure. This is because municipalities know in advance how much money they are getting, know they will receive funding on a regular basis and know that in turn they must account for how they spend the money. Planned, steady spending allows shovel-ready work to begin quickly.

Unfortunately, Canada's cash-strapped communities are being asked to pick up a third of the cost of stimulus infrastructure projects. This means that Canadians will see fewer shovels breaking ground, fewer jobs created and too little stimulus to the economy when they need it most.

Government Orders

Government cannot afford to wait while municipalities find the money and infrastructure continues to deteriorate. We have all seen far too often what happens when organizations and people fail to assume their responsibilities with respect to building and maintaining infrastructure.

In some cases we will have to go further and make life-protecting investments, such as the much-celebrated Red River floodway expansion project, which provides a once in 300 years level of flood protection, equivalent to the largest flood in Manitoba history.

It is also important to recognize that the risks to infrastructure are becoming increasingly complex and frequent. For example, climate change is affecting our capacity to manage the risks associated with natural disasters, and Canada has seen a rise in severe weather related natural disasters such as droughts, floods and severe storms.

The 1998 ice storm in eastern Canada left three-quarters of a million homes without electricity, and the weight of ice and snow toppled 1,000 transmission towers and 30,000 utility poles.

The impacts of climate change on infrastructure are already evident in Canada's north. Permafrost is the foundation for airstrips, buildings, and community water. Thawing permafrost will have serious socio-economic implications for maintaining these structures.

A more efficient, faster and more stimulative method must be found to transfer federal funding to municipal infrastructure projects. The need is particularly great among first nations communities, where \$1.4 billion is targeted for infrastructure, housing and skills; although encouraging, this investment does not reflect the need created after decades of economic marginalization and unfairness. Canada, which normally ranks in the top ten of the United Nations development index, would fall to 48th place out of 174 countries if judged solely on the economic and social well-being of first nations people.

In closing, I leave the House with a plea made by U.S. Congressman Elijah Cummings following hurricane Katrina: "We cannot allow it to be said by history that the difference between those who lived and died was nothing more than poverty..."

The 2001 census data showed that one first nations community was in the top 100 Canadian communities, while 92 were in the bottom 100. Let Canada not make the same mistake with communities that can pay versus those that cannot.

• (1255)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have to say that I agree with much of what I heard in the remarks of the member for Etobicoke North.

She talked about the difficulty municipalities will have in coming up with one-third of the money to match funds. In my home community of Hamilton, 7,000 people lost their jobs in February. In the last month, 600 families had to go on welfare.

The budget absolutely fails to do what the government says it does in stimulating the economy. We all know that the \$62 billion tax break is \$60 in tax breaks for every dollar invested in Canadians.

EI is the front-line defence for Canadians, and there has been no change there to help them. There is no change in accessibility. It is the first line of defence for Canadians.

The budget also, in a very underhanded fashion, will neuter pay equity for women in Canada.

Can the member tell us if she will now join with us and defeat the budget?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, over the last six months Canada has the second-worst-performing economy of the G8 countries. In the fall our Prime Minister told us that there would not be a recession. At the time of the economic statement we were told there would even be a surplus. By January we were told we would be \$13 billion in debt, and today we know it is much higher.

Canadians are in real trouble. A quarter of a million jobs were lost in the last three months alone. We need an economic stimulus package now for all Canadians.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that, in this budget, the Conservative government has announced a lot of money for infrastructure. I was in my riding recently, where some of the rural municipalities have 300, 400 or 500 people. They have to do a lot of road maintenance and take care of other infrastructure, and they are having a hard time dealing with those needs because they do not have the money. Even if the federal government does invest a lot of money, they do not have—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): As the member for Etobicoke North does not have a lot of time to answer the question, I will give her the floor for 30 seconds.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, I think the point of the speech was that municipalities do struggle to pay that one-third. We really have to make sure that municipalities that need infrastructure can in fact afford it.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with interest that I rise to speak today to Bill C-10, a bill to implement the 2009 budget the Conservative government presented in January.

Government Orders

Obviously, we oppose this bill. We made it clear that we would vote against it, because we believe that the 2009 budget and the measures in Bill C-10 do not meet the needs of the public, which, in an economic crisis, is entitled to expect appropriate and sufficient measures.

Not only does this budget not meet the public's expectations, but this legislation contains provisions in direct opposition to the unanimous demands of the Quebec National Assembly. As a responsible party, the Bloc, which works solely and always in the interest of the Quebec nation, has introduced a series of amendments aimed at correcting the main elements of the Conservative budget conflicting directly with the interests of Quebec and Quebecers.

For the purposes of this debate, I am going to focus on two of the measures contained in the implementation legislation that we consider unacceptable. First, we are proposing an amendment to eliminate clause 6, that is, the section permitting the use of tax havens. This is a major issue. I have been hearing about these tax havens since I was first elected in 2004. The Liberals put measures in place at the time, and the Conservatives, who were supposed to abolish this type of measure continued with clause 6 of this budget.

While this Conservative budget does nothing to help the regions and sectors such as furniture manufacturing, which is a major industry in the riding I represent, or the infrastructure the Liberal member just spoke of, and contains no measures to help the thousands of workers who have lost their job, the Minister of Finance is going to allow the major corporations to avoid paying billions of dollars in taxes through tax havens. It is a scandal.

This is despite the fact that, in 2007, the Minister of Finance clearly stated his intention to put an end to tax havens and to ensure that everyone would pay their fair share of taxes. However, this is not the case. At the time, that same minister also lamented that, whenever large corporations managed to avoid paying taxes, workers and small and medium-size businesses had to pay more. That is something the Bloc Québécois noticed a long time ago and it rightly came to the conclusion that this was unfair.

Yet, in the 2009 budget, the Conservative government has decided, with the support of the Liberals—those masters of tax havens—to remove a provision in the Income Tax Act that was meant to prevent businesses from continuing to avoid paying taxes through the use of tax havens. Clearly, this Conservative government has yielded to the pressures of large corporations, including oil companies in western Canada. It has reneged on its commitment to fight tax evasion during this economic recession, at a time when thousands of workers need support. It is quite insulting to see how the Conservatives and Liberals are now refusing to act to put an end to this injustice.

The Liberals did just like the Conservatives and supported this budget because they, in fact, have always been against fighting tax evasion. Who could forget the former Liberal finance minister and Prime Minister who personally took advantage of these tax havens to avoid paying taxes in Canada? I thought the Liberals would have learned a lesson from the 2006 election. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

This is why I am asking all members to support this amendment from the Bloc Québécois. Those billions of dollars we are losing could definitely be useful to the unemployed, to low-income seniors and to manufacturers who are neglected in this budget, at a time when they need programs and support.

●(1305)

There is no question that, while the Bloc Québécois wants to help our regions and our poor, the Conservatives and the Liberals are as always protecting the large multinationals that do not want to pay taxes.

The second amendment that I want to discuss is the one calling for the clauses relating to the establishment of a single securities commission to be deleted. That amendment is necessary because this government with, of course, the support of the Liberals, has decided to use this legislation to introduce the provisions that will set up a Canadian securities regulation regime. Why does the federal government want to interfere yet again in an area that comes under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces? Why do the two main Canadian parties want to deprive Quebec of one of its powers? Why centralize the whole process in Toronto, thus depriving Quebec of quality jobs and of its expertise in an area that is its own, namely its financial sector? Why are the Liberals and Conservatives opposed to the consensus that was clearly expressed by the Quebec National Assembly against the establishment of a single securities commission? This is despite the fact that, as my colleague indicated earlier, the OECD believes that the current monitoring regime under the authority of Quebec and the provinces is one the most efficient among industrialized countries. Why question such a successful structure?

The passport system, like the system used in the European Community, works very well and allows a uniform, coordinated approach to the operating rules. It also promotes the development of specific areas of expertise, which makes it possible to have different, but complementary approaches to compliance with the regulations.

Lastly, the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec is the last bastion against the disappearance of stock market activity from Montreal, because the AMF has the regulatory power to require exchange activities in Montreal. In the interest of Quebecers and given the unanimous will of our National Assembly, with this amendment, we, the members of the Bloc Québécois, reiterate our opposition to the creation of a Canada-wide securities commission.

Last week, we voted on a motion calling on the federal government to abandon the idea of putting in place a Canada-wide securities regulator. Yet not a single Conservative member from Quebec got up to support that motion, even though the National Assembly of Quebec had taken a unanimous position against such a regulator. As always, they agreed to stand up for their party and the interests of Canadians at the expense of Quebecers. But all the Bloc Québécois members rose to support that motion by a Bloc member, and I am proud that we did. Our mandate is still to defend the interests of Quebec, its National Assembly and its people.

Government Orders

Now, I call on the members of this House, but especially all the members from Quebec, to vote for the Bloc Québécois amendments to this budget implementation bill. The main purpose of our amendments is to defend Quebec's interests and the consensus expressed by the National Assembly. Our amendments also address the needs of the people of Quebec. The House will vote, and we will see once again which party is the only one that really defends the interests of Quebecers in this House, which party is the only one that stands up for unanimous votes in the National Assembly of Quebec. That party is the Bloc Québécois.

● (1310)

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé on his speech.

In his speech, he touched briefly on one sector of the economy that affects my riding in particular and his region, Trois-Rivières and Berthier—Maskinongé, that is, the softwood lumber sector. I read recently that, in addition to the businesses going bankrupt and the companies in the softwood lumber sector that are closing, all forestry operators are affected. In the budget, the Conservative government responds by telling us that no action should be taken in this sector, because it would be too dangerous. Otherwise, it could be disputed under the softwood lumber agreement. Compared to the auto industry, which is receiving billions of dollars, even though it is in loans, nevertheless, we see that there is not much in this budget for the softwood lumber agreement. I would like my colleague to say a few words about this.

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his excellent question. Softwood lumber is an important issue. Our industries are in crisis and facing difficulties at this time, like the manufacturing sector in our ridings. This budget does not include any measures or loan guarantees to support these businesses.

What is more, we are exporting much less to the United States. The Americans are currently dealing with an economic crisis that is gripping their country. As a result, there is less construction and we are exporting much less softwood lumber, which is affecting our own industries. Our exports accounted for about 35% of the American market, but that number has decreased to about 20% to 22%. Thus, the recession in the United States is very important and is having a real impact on our industry.

If we want to maintain that industry and its vitality, this government must support our forestry companies, even at the expense of NAFTA. We all know very well that the Americans are also supporting their industries.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the previous speaker mentioned that the municipal governments have the least ability to raise taxes and therefore need that infrastructure money. I would add that it is the same for first nations. Those two orders of government have responsibilities for infrastructure but very limited revenue increasing resources. I have said a number of times in this House that they need to get the same percentage of funds as they have in the past because those programs were primarily for them.

I wonder if the member has heard any concerns from his municipalities that they may not be getting the appropriate levels of funding or, at the very least, the same as they received in the past, if the process is any worse and if they are getting it fast enough.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Even if the government puts certain measures in place to fight the recession and maintain and develop infrastructure, some municipalities, especially rural ones with 500 to 1,000 residents, do not have the means to contribute one-third of the funding under the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund. Even if the federal government invests an exorbitant amount, rural municipalities with fewer than 2,000 people will not be able to sustain this program.

The Bloc Québécois motion deals with this infrastructure program. The federal government has the means to make it happen. It could invest 50%, provinces 35% and municipalities 15%. This program would then actually stimulate infrastructure development both in large cities and in relatively poorer rural areas.

● (1315)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to Bill C-10. I want to talk about a couple of things that are important for not only my riding but also nationally.

In clause 10 of the bill, the government has done a very sly thing. I will give the House a bit of history, which you know very well, Madam Speaker, coming from the area that we come from, the greater Victoria area. Our dockside workers are the men and women who ensure our navy has ships that are functioning properly for our brave men and women in the Canadian Forces.

During the last several years, people in the trades nationally were earning a lot of money in the private sector and our workers in the dockyards could have easily left the civil service, gone into the private sector and made more money. Did they do that? No, they did not. Why not? They felt they were honour bound to continue to serve our country as civilian workers on the docks.

The government refused to negotiate their contract in good faith, so it went to arbitration. The arbitration was completed in January of this year with a fair and reasonable increase of 5% that goes back to 2006. What did the government do? In clause 10 of Bill C-10, it literally tore up that arbitrated agreement and has actually rolled back the moneys that our dockyard workers are owed. That is an underhanded approach.

Government Orders

My party, the Liberal Party, approached the government and asked if we could work for the betterment of the dockyard workers. We asked the government to negotiate a way to enable the dockyard workers to receive the pay and benefits that are their due. What did the government say? It said no. It said that it would not negotiate at all and that we must take this bill in its entirety. It would not allow us to change or amend the bill. It would not accept any of our suggestions to make the bill better for Canada and Canadians. It said that we had to take this lock, stock and barrel and, if we did not, since the vote on this bill would be a vote of confidence, it would invoke an election and ensure we wore it.

The government has refused to negotiate in good faith with the opposition on this bill. It has refused to allow us to work for our constituents. It has refused to negotiate to make this bill better in the interest of our country. It said that if we do not take this bill lock, stock and barrel, it will not only have an election but the stimulus package that is in the bill, which is important now for our workers, our economy and our country, will not go through. Therefore, after an election the stimulus package might get through some time this fall.

What kind of response is that from the government to Canadians at a time of need and at a time when all of us want to work together for the common good during a time of economic crisis in our country? We have a government that simply will not negotiate with the opposition to strengthen the bill in the interest of the public. That is what Canadians need to hear and what I hope they hear in the debate today.

The government is simply saying to Parliament and to the Canadian people that if we do not take this bill we will not get the stimulus package, jobs will be lost and we will have a \$350 million election that nobody wants.

Is it not remarkable when we see events south of the border, where the U.S. president is willing to work across party lines in a bipartisan way. He is asking what the best solutions are that his country needs right now for his people. That is the kind of leadership that Canadians want and deserve. The Prime Minister is failing again to do this because he is playing politics. Why is he not listening to those of us in the other parties? Why will he not work with us to implement a series of solutions that will strengthen our country and help our citizens during their time of need?

● (1320)

Let us look at the stimulus package for a second. The stimulus package was intended to pass quite quickly. If last year is any indication, in 2008 in my province of British Columbia 75% of the moneys allocated for infrastructure projects are still sitting in the bank. What kind of infrastructure project is that?

The community of Sooke requires umpteen infrastructure projects. The west shore needs the E&N railway up and running, the Bear Mountain and Spencer Road overpasses need to be up and running, a storm sewage drainage system requires fixing, affordable housing needs to be implemented, and the federal government must work with the provinces to help post-secondary institutions from Royal Roads to the University of Victoria, Camosun College and the Pacific Institute for Sport Excellence. These and many other infrastructure projects have their hands out saying we should use

these moneys now in order to provide a long-term benefit for our economy and our country.

The president of the high tech parks in Canada, Dale Gann, has an exciting proposal that would enable the government to invest taxpayers' money into high tech infrastructure parks that will enable our economy to compete internationally. We are a trading nation. We are an exporter. The government has simply not responded. Why is it doing that? Unless we invest in high tech parks today, we are going to be so far behind the eight ball that we will be at a huge disadvantage in terms of the changing economies.

China, for example, is building dozens and dozens of high tech parks. India is doing the same. They are getting into the forward cutting edge of research and development, which are the central pillars of the ability of any economy in any country to be able to move forward and capitalize on the future challenges ahead of us.

If we also look at the ability of our workers to access post-secondary training, one of the great challenges now is the fact that access to post-secondary training is often dependent on the amount of money in one's pocket. That is not an egalitarian situation. How can we have a nation whose access to post-secondary training, to be the best that we can be, to contribute in the best way possible for our nation, is actually predicated on the amount of money in our pockets? If we do not have money in our pockets, we cannot fulfill our highest potential for ourselves and our nation. That needs to change.

The Liberal Party put forth a number of very exciting solutions that could have been beneficial and, frankly, ought to be implemented now by the government. A couple of those are that the interest rate would be prime plus .5% and that the time students have to repay their loans would only start two years after they graduated.

In the case of medical students, for example, and those in residency training, they should not have to pay their loans until their residency training is over. Why should students have to pay off very hefty loans when they are making \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year while they are still essentially in medical school, in training? They are not able to pay off all of what they owe.

Some flexibility must be put into play to enable them to pay back the amounts they can. Many students graduate and go into jobs that are just a bit above minimum wage. They cannot possibly meet the financial requirements that are placed on them. The government has to invest in post-secondary institutions in an intelligent way and enable students to access the post-secondary training they need.

The other issue is investment in research and development, from Genome Canada to the stem cell research taking place in various institutions. Canada is full of outstanding researchers. The lack of interest and attention the government has given in this particular bill to research and development is going to hamstring the ability of our researchers to save lives and to develop research and development initiatives that could massively improve the health and welfare of our citizens.

Government Orders

●(1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, when I hear a Liberal member complaining about the government budget when it had the opportunity to take power itself and move ahead with its ideas as part of a coalition government, I cannot help but smile.

In a coalition government, compromise sometimes has to be made. I believe that the other party that would have been involved in the coalition also made compromises. I believe that the program the coalition presented had advantages for all of Canada.

Today we see that Ontario and Alberta are benefiting, while the rest of Canada has been forgotten, especially the mining and forestry sectors when compared to the auto industry.

Since he is equally concerned with the mining industry in his region, could the member tell me what is actually planned for the mining and forestry sectors as compared to what has been planned for the auto and oil industries?

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I think that the member poses an intriguing suggestion. It goes back in history. The interest of our party was to make the system work. At a time of crisis, the last thing that our country wanted or needed was a political crisis. We in the Liberal Party said that we wanted to work with the government by fulfilling and implementing a series of initiatives that would deal with the economic crisis before us. Frankly, that is what we did.

Our critics in the Liberal Party put forth some profound solutions to the government. To a degree, some of them were adopted, and we were happy that the government took the olive branch that we put forward. There were some fruitful negotiations that took place with our finance team.

However, subsequent to that, the government has slammed the door shut on any viable negotiation. This is not democratic. This is not in the interest of our country. This is not in the interests of our citizens. We in the Liberal Party have said that we have a series of solutions. We can make Bill C-10 better. We want to make this bill better, but we do not want to have an election. We do not want to put our country through that because that would be utterly irresponsible.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. I must say that it raises a certain number of questions. I cannot ask them all but I would like to ask the following.

I know my colleague well enough to understand just how much he cares about social justice and wants fairness to prevail in this country. However, given that his party is preparing to vote for a law that will result in significant inequality between men and women and that will take away from women the right and the power to go before the courts to obtain pay equity, does he not believe that he is abdicating his responsibility and compromising on a fundamental principle of our society?

●(1330)

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I would just like to say that we all have a choice to make. Do we pass a bill that we think is inadequate, or do we fight and defeat a bill that we think is inadequate and by doing so incur another election, deprive our country of a stimulus package that it needs now, and deprive our nation's workers of the jobs they need to survive?

We do not feel that this is something we can responsibly take on ourselves. However, the real responsibility falls within the Conservative government's failure to negotiate with any of us in good faith to make this bill better and deal with the several inequities that my colleague and friend mentioned.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I see that I have some fans in this chamber, or at least one.

The budget implementation bill, Bill C-10, presents various initiatives contained in last January's budget, in particular the transition office for the single securities regulator. The Bloc Québécois has introduced amendments to delete clauses 295 to 299, that is to eliminate the clauses to establish a single securities regulator. The government, through this bill, wants to establish a transition office for the Canadian securities regulator and would provide an operating budget of \$150 million for this office.

The Expert Panel on Securities Regulation in Canada, appointed by the Minister of Finance, tabled its final report in January 2009. It is proposing the creation of a federal regulator for securities, over which Quebec has exclusive jurisdiction. This is an encroachment into Quebec's jurisdiction. The report proposes various mechanisms to implement the project without agreement from Quebec and the provinces. Furthermore, the report also proposes that the federal government use legal recourse to force dissenting provinces to comply with the federal project. The 2009 budget reflects the recommendations of the expert panel and reiterates the government's commitment to establishing a single regulator in Canada.

The Bloc Québécois would like to reiterate its opposition to the creation of a national securities commission. Instead, it will support harmonization of the rules governing the financial system through a passport mechanism, like that of the European community, in order to maintain the autonomy and jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. The Bloc Québécois will continue to vigorously argue against the creation of such a commission and will continue to fully support the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec.

I want to go back one year and talk about the 2008 budget, which confirmed this Conservative government's intention to set up a single securities commission. At the time, the minister reiterated in his budget his intention to introduce federal legislation to establish a single regulator. To this end, the minister commissioned a panel of experts to draft a bill to create a single securities commission. He said, "I am asking the panel to develop a model common securities act to create a Canadian advantage in global capital markets." That is what is written in a news release issued by the Minister of Finance on February 21, 2008.

Government Orders

The panel tabled its final report at the end of 2008. That document includes a series of measures to establish a single securities commission. In his 2009 budget, the minister welcomed the recommendations made by the panel in its report. Moreover, the budget allocated \$150 million to set up a committee to implement those recommendations.

This is unacceptable. The Minister of Finance is stubbornly going ahead with an initiative that goes against the unanimous will of Quebec's National Assembly and that is a flagrant violation of Quebec's constitutional jurisdictions. The Bloc Québécois will continue to defend Quebec against the centralizing views of this federal government.

For over 40 years, the idea of a single securities regulatory body has been surfacing every now and then. Since 2003, the issue has again moved to the forefront of federal politics. The Liberals, who were in office at the time, set up an expert panel to look at the possibility of establishing a single regulatory body in Canada.

In 2005, the Ontario government mandated a group of experts, led by Purdy Crawford, to examine the benefits of a single securities regulatory system. Of course, the Crawford report supported Ontario's arguments in favour of a single regulator.

The 2006 federal budget revisited the idea. In that budget, the government announced that it planned to work with the provinces and territories to set up a common securities regulator. That position was confirmed in the November 2006 economic update and the 2007 budget.

• (1335)

In June 2007, following a meeting of ministers responsible for securities, the current Conservative Minister of Finance announced plans to set up a working group to, first, study the outcomes, principles and performance measures that would best anchor securities regulation and the pursuit of a Canadian advantage in global capital markets. The group was also supposed to study how Canada could best promote and advance proportionate, more principles-based regulations, starting from existing harmonized legislation and national and multilateral regulatory instruments. It was supposed to look into how this progress could facilitate, and be reinforced by, better coordination of enforcement efforts.

In September 2007, the minister announced that the group would focus on how to set up a single regulatory organization instead of looking at how effective the current system is. When the Minister of Finance announced that work had begun on February 21, 2008, he confirmed his intention to change the expert panel's mandate and have it focus on drafting model legislation to create a single securities commission.

Budget 2008 confirmed the Conservative government's intention to set up a single securities commission. In his budget, the minister reiterated his plan to introduce the bill before us to create a single regulatory body. Quebec's National Assembly rejected the federal government's initiative and unanimously passed a motion to that effect on October 16, 2007. I will read it: "That the National Assembly ask the federal government to abandon its Canada-wide securities commission project".

Authority over securities is given to the provinces by virtue of their jurisdiction over property and civil rights under section 92.13 of the Constitution Act, 1867. The Conservatives ignored Quebec's motion. In the November 2008 economic and fiscal update and in this budget, the Minister of Finance reiterated his intention to set up a single securities commission in blatant disregard of his own Constitution.

Not long after the economic statement was tabled, the expert panel set up by the minister tabled its report, which, as expected, suggests creating a single securities regulator. It also proposes a mechanism that would allow companies to disregard the laws of Quebec and do business with the Canada-wide regulator, ignoring the organization in Quebec. In short, this report reflects what the minister wants: to impose a single securities regulator despite Quebec's legitimate objections.

Lastly, when budget 2008 was tabled, the current Minister of Finance again expressed confidence in the expert panel report. In addition, he made \$150 million available to implement his proposed Canada-wide commission.

The Conservative government is prepared to infringe on Quebec's jurisdictions in order to advance its plans for a single, Canada-wide securities commission. The federal Liberals are in favour of creating a single institution. All the political parties in Quebec are against this initiative. The current passport system works. Under this system, a company that registers in one participating province can do business with people in all the other participating provinces. The first phase of implementation was completed last fall, and the second phase is under way.

• (1340)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the budget is about saving jobs that are at risk, about creating new jobs and about helping the most vulnerable during this period of crisis.

The Prime Minister has gone way over the top. He has threatened that if we do not get this budget passed quickly and we do get the stimulus money flowing, we will have an election. This is ludicrous given that the official opposition has indicated, notwithstanding the flaws in the budget, it will support the budget to get that stimulus out.

The Prime Minister also showed his hand, that he is not very serious about this, by including matters like the pay equity, the Competition Act, the Navigable Waters Protection Act and the national securities regulator. These four areas really should not have been in the budget and have only taken the attention off the most important areas.

The member spoke extensively on the national securities regulator. I understand Quebec has a slightly different situation than the other 12 regulators. There is no consensus among the provinces. I think four provinces oppose a national regulator.

Government Orders

Is the member aware of the writings of a couple of professors out of the University of Montreal and Jack Mintz out of Calgary, who have talked about a hybrid solution of sorts whereby provinces could opt out of the national securities regulation system and thereby continue with their current system? What would the member's comments be on that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Madam Speaker, I will respond to the Liberal member by saying that his suggestion is not really a solution. I must tell him that I find it extremely difficult to see that the Liberal Party has supported this deeply flawed budget. One example that comes to mind is the creation of a common securities commission, which would be disastrous for Quebec.

In addition, there is also the issue of pay equity for women. This bill sets the status of women back significantly. I believe that we should be guided more by our convictions than our election strategy. In circumstances like this, the opposition members must work together. We should not provoke an election, but we should make sure that the government backs down on essential, important things. We have spoken about pay equity and I mentioned the securities commission, but there are also the artists who have fallen victim to \$45 million in cuts in a sector where a cut like that hurts. They can no longer go overseas on tour. There are no longer any federal programs for artists in performing arts who want to tour overseas. There is a gaping hole in the government's financial aid. This is extremely damaging.

This same government created the Canada prizes and invested \$25 million on behalf of some Toronto lobbyists, from whom they copied the entire project. The government cut and pasted from the lobbyists' promotional budget and included it in its budget. It was word for word. Then it realized that the project was a boondoggle and that the partners had never been informed about it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There are only 30 seconds left, enough time for a very short question. The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Hubert on her speech.

I would like to hear more about the cuts. Filmmaker Jacques Godbout wants to save the NFB. The National Film Board has also suffered cuts and lacks money. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that. That is part of this budget.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Madam Speaker, this government knows nothing about what artists need. It knows absolutely nothing. It is not making increases where they are needed. For example, the Canada Council's budget should be increased more. The government has cut money for the arts. It has cut \$45 million from programs, which is preventing artists from travelling abroad.

It has given \$25 million to a phoney Canada prize when the partners in that prize do not even know about it. The prize was a cut-and-paste job, lifted into the federal budget. The government knows nothing and has slashed budgets that allowed our artists to exhibit and perform abroad.

● (1345)

[English]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I rise today, all members of Parliament on both sides of the House understand that Canada is facing a storm of strong economic and financial headwinds, and we are feeling the turbulence of all this.

The impact has been greater and more extensive than originally stated by the Prime Minister during the recent federal election campaign. When we combine this with a more rapid deterioration in global economic growth, it has necessitated a discussion about substantial government intervention.

As industries such as automotive, forestry, mining and other sectors face uncertain times, as legislators we have a responsibility to respond to the concerns of people. It is the right thing to do, since we are dealing with potentially millions of Canadians who could lose their jobs, homes and savings.

These are difficult times and we need to do all we can to improve the present economic situation.

In 1993 the Liberal Party was challenged by what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. We inherited a \$42 billion deficit, double digit unemployment, skyrocketing debt and a tax system that was stifling economic growth. The record shows that while we were in office, we successfully eliminated the deficit, paid down the debt, created over three million new jobs and significantly reduced taxes, while we were dealing with externalities such as SARS and September 11.

All this was achieved in partnership and with the support of Canadians. It was a clear illustration of our resiliency as a people.

The present crisis and global economic uncertainty will test us once again. Ideas such as expediting infrastructure, investing in housing, building strong, sustainable and flexible labour markets, as well as training initiatives, supporting traditional and emerging sectors and improving access to credit must all be considered.

I believe we can in fact get through this difficult period, provided we adhere to some well defined principles which will address our short-term urgency without creating long-term negative repercussions.

We must first protect and help create jobs in Canada while respecting the taxpayer's dollar.

Truck drivers, hotel workers, people with small businesses, all Canadian taxpayers will be asked to contribute to proposed bailouts and billion dollar aid packages. Sometimes these individuals will be subsidizing workers whose salaries are much higher than theirs, as well as providing financial support to companies that may have misread and misunderstood the changing dynamics of the global marketplace. As Canadians, we have always shared in the risks and benefits of our common citizenship, however, we need to ask this fundamental question. Is this the best use of taxpayer dollars?

The answer to this question will vary according to the specifics of the proposal. Investments that create and expand opportunities should be supported, while others that offer no reasonable chance of success must be discarded. In evaluating the many options before government, it is important to assess the opportunity costs of the proposed measures.

Government's role must be clear. The priority must be to set up an overall framework that will encourage economic growth and job creation.

Canadians also need to have a sense that they can trust the managers of the economy, namely, the government. This is an issue that has arisen in conversations across the riding as I speak to constituents. Whether in schools or coffee shops, when I visit their factories and places of work, they often comment on the challenge they have when it comes to the Prime Minister's announcement during the election campaign, and they are referring to the issue of the deficit.

● (1350)

In September, the Prime Minister said that there would not be a recession in Canada and that we would be fine as long as we did not do stupid things, such as running a deficit.

In October, he suggested that the market represented some good buying opportunities for Canadians.

In November, his failed economic statement promised a surplus for the next five years. Twelve days later, the Bank of Canada announced that we were in recession.

In December, he admitted that his government would run a deficit of \$20 billion to \$30 billion.

In January, he said that his deficit would be closer to \$40 billion. Once budget 2009 was tabled, we saw that the government was running a deficit in the current 2008-09 fiscal year.

So Canadians are concerned, and rightly so. After all, he is viewed as the leader of this country.

I believe that the federal government, in partnership with other governments, business and labour, must work to attain its economic objectives. As part of setting the framework, we must be committed to fiscal accountability, transparency and responsibility. On the tax front, our system must be globally competitive on both the personal and the business sides. We must encourage and reward work, investment, innovation and productivity.

Finally, no country in this world can survive in the long term without meaningful investment in people. This means providing opportunities for training and financial support during job transi-

Government Orders

tions, as well as investing in individuals such as immigrants and aboriginal Canadians, who are consistently underemployed and whose potential remains largely unfulfilled. When aboriginal Canadians' potential is unfulfilled and when immigrants' potential is unfulfilled, our country's potential is not fulfilled.

During these times, we need to make the safety net more responsive and flexible to the changing nature of the labour market. This will guarantee that our human resources will be maximized.

All this must be done without sacrificing spending in areas such as research and development. Such a cut is shortsighted, due to the immense opportunity this area offers in modernizing the economy and providing stimulus for new ideas, new products and new services.

Tempting as it may sometimes be to look inward during difficult economic times, Canada must look at and place a high priority on expanding trade, which forces firms to specialize, to become more productive and to modernize. While recent events have put into question the regulatory framework of financial institutions in economic systems worldwide, I believe it would be ill-advised to impose on Canada's private sector and financial institutions a regulatory regime that would impede growth, innovation and job creation.

On the issue of infrastructure, infrastructure investments are also necessary to address the major deficit in this area. This is an example of smart investment, which will enhance the abilities of our cities, our communities and our country to compete and to maintain an economy that functions well, one in which goods and services move freely and efficiently.

On that point, I believe the government needs to release the funds for these infrastructure programs and not let the funds lapse, which would create a larger deficit for many of the communities that we proudly represent in this House.

● (1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened to the speech given by my hon. colleague, whom I knew in the past as the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance when Mr. Martin was the finance minister. Today he is telling us that a good securities commission system is needed. He is not specifying exactly what kind of organization is needed.

Does this mean that he finds the current system to be effective, as the OECD has said? The OECD ranked our system as second in the world in terms of efficiency. There is a consensus in Quebec to the effect that the existing securities commission should continue its work. That is the unanimous consensus of the three parties in the Quebec National Assembly and the entire business community.

Statements by Members

Does he not find it inappropriate that this federal government decided to include the creation of a centralist approach to securities regulation in a budget implementation bill? Will the path of non-participation, the voluntary choice of companies, not simply nullify the jurisdiction of the Commission des valeurs mobilières du Québec as it currently exists and as desired by Quebec society as a whole?
[English]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Madam Speaker, I thought the hon. member was paying careful attention to my speech, but perhaps he was not, because I did not address the issue of the national regulator. What I said was that I believe we need to have the most efficient labour market system that we can, including a financial system that speaks to allowing greater investments within Canada.

The focus of my comments was to outline clearly that certain principles are needed when one is creating a new environment to bring about and spur on economic growth. They include having a plan to eliminate the deficit, which is absent in the present budget; having a plan to invest in human resources; a clear statement in respect of taxpayers' dollars; a competitive tax system that rewards work, innovation and productivity enhancement in an economy; and investments in infrastructure.

I was commenting on this particular issue as it relates to the fact that the present government has lapsed money while communities are looking for funding to improve their quality of life and the economic efficiencies of their own local economies. I do not understand why there is such a government lag on this particular issue.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague is intimately aware of research and innovation in Canada. One of the concerns we are hearing increasingly about the budget is that it has provided cuts to the research community.

In my own community, Gerry Johnston from Dalhousie very quickly sent me a note, even while the budget was being unveiled, to say that we are losing money on the tri-councils, and all the research investments made by the Liberal government to make Canada such a research magnet and to reverse the brain drain are being reversed. Cuts to the tri-councils have caused real hardship and will cause much more.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on the cuts to research and innovation.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour really cares about that question, because I see him working very hard with our caucus on this particular issue of research and development.

We Liberals understand that research and development is really an engine for new ideas, for new systems of thinking and for the type of innovation that brings about economic growth, usually creating high-paying jobs and thereby increasing the income levels of Canadians.

The field of scientific research and development is one of the fundamental points that the government opposite needs to get its head around. We cannot be cutting in areas that create economic growth while we are facing a recession. It is not smart policy for the present or for the future.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

CARLY MACNEIL BUNYAN

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 23, 2009, Carly MacNeil Bunyan of Cape Breton passed away.

Carly was an amazing young woman who attained many remarkable accomplishments in her 26 years of life. She graduated from high school in 2000 as female athlete of the year and went on to study at the University of Maine. During her second year of study, she was diagnosed with a brain tumour and had to take a break from her studies. However, as she expressed in her own words, "Giving up means you have to quit. I decided not to give up".

Staying true to her words, Carly went on to graduate in 2006. Carly participated twice in the Canada Games and still holds provincial records for the triple jump across four age classes. She was involved in many different sports in her lifetime and was an inspirational speaker at various events.

One year ago, Carly's brain tumour returned and eventually the cancer overtook her, but she made a gallant fight. Through it all, she was always more concerned with others than herself.

On behalf of all members of the House, my condolences go out to Carly's family and friends.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nearly four years have passed since the previous Liberal government came to an agreement with the United States on the matter of Devils Lake. At the time, the U.S. agreed to put a high-quality permanent filter in place and build an advanced biota treatment facility for the outlet.

To date the American government has failed to honour its part of the agreement. Every spring the State of North Dakota opens the gate. Last year the outlet continued to operate with a grossly inadequate gravel filter, causing the flow of foreign species into Canadian waters, compromising Manitoba's fresh water supply and threatening Lake Winnipeg's ecosystem.

Despite this, the government does little. The regional minister denies the existence of the agreement and sees little problem with the current situation.

Spring runoff is around the corner. Once water levels start to rise, the gates will open with a faulty filter. The government must request the new Obama administration to take urgent action. The Conservative government must move rapidly to resolve this very important transborder issue.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

QUEBEC CITY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year the Quebec City chamber of commerce is celebrating the 200th anniversary of its founding. The purpose of this organization is not only to support business people but, above all, to make a significant contribution to the social and economic life of the provincial capital which has transformed itself from a trading post to a modern city recognized by UNESCO.

It has also contributed to the development of the capital by supporting various projects crucial to the development of transportation: the port, the airport and the proposed high-speed train. It was an innovator in the development of tourism when it launched the Quebec Carnival in 1954. It has supported the expansion of the high technology industry in its seven research centres.

The Bloc Québécois congratulates the Quebec City chamber of commerce on its 200th anniversary and encourages business people of the Quebec City area to continue their constant, dynamic development.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge the upcoming International Women's Day. March 8 will be a day to teach, to honour women and to share the stories of women around the world. In my riding of Halifax, an inspiring array of events is planned to recognize International Women's Day, including a public panel discussion called "Get Caught Up in the Action! Women's Movements and Change", hosted by Oxfam.

I will also be pleased to take part in a conference on women and leadership hosted by the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, this coming weekend. As we continue to fight for the rights of women in this very chamber, I want to acknowledge Nova Scotians who have taken a lead in honouring the struggles of women worldwide. Happy International Women's Day.

* * *

RETIREMENT OF RED DEER COLLEGE PRESIDENT

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to highlight one of the real treasures in my riding of Red Deer.

There are members in the House who have either taught at or were enrolled at Red Deer College. They know that Red Deer College is a jewel in Alberta's crown. RDC is a sports juggernaut in volleyball and hockey. It also boasts one of the finest academic teams. RDC is now preparing for its next phase, the centre for health and the centre for sport and wellness.

I would like to take the time today to honour the president of Red Deer College, Ron Woodward, who will be stepping down this year after 10 years at the helm. When Ron began as president of Red Deer College, there were about 3,500 credit students. Today there are nearly twice as many. Ron is a giant in our community. Generally

speaking, if something is going on in Red Deer, the name Ron Woodward is attached to it.

His contributions are appreciated, and his leadership will be missed. We wish him the best for the future, and I thank him.

* * *

● (1405)

GANG VIOLENCE

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with some dismay that many citizens of my riding of Newton—North Delta have seen over the past few weeks the issue of gang violence suddenly being redrawn along partisan battle lines.

I hear from my constituents and even my fellow members on the other side of the House that this state of emergency requires we put aside all our partisan brinkmanship and work together on real solutions to address the problem of gang violence right now.

I want to thank B.C. Attorney General Wally Oppal and B.C. Solicitor General John van Dongen for coming to Ottawa last week to build support. I urge the government to act on their recommendations for a serious action plan on gang violence.

* * *

AURORASAURUS

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, paleontologists need only travel as far as Aurora, Ontario to find dinosaurs rising out of the earth.

For its second year, the Aurorasaurus community event took place last weekend on Bigwin Drive. Steve Taylor, the unsung hero behind this colossal endeavour, arranges to have 80 tonnes of snow delivered to his front yard in mid-February. Out of this, with days of his time invested, Steve created a 50 foot long, 20 foot high dinosaur complete with a mouth full of teeth. It is a sight to behold.

Steve, together with a very special group of neighbours and friends, invites Aurora to attend the event and to make a contribution to the Children's Wish Foundation.

This year Steve and his volunteers and helpers raised more than \$3,000 in cold cash for the Children's Wish Foundation.

Our community and the many children who will benefit from his efforts thank Steve, his family and the Bigwin neighbourhood for their generosity. Aurora is a better place because they live there.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the president and CEO of the Quebec Forest Industry Council, Guy Chevrette, recently addressed the members of the Standing Committee on Finance. He attacked the falsehoods perpetuated by the Conservatives to the effect that, because of the softwood lumber agreement, loan guarantees cannot be given to the forestry industry.

Statements by Members

That is false, utterly and completely false. Loan guarantees provided at commercial rates do not contravene the softwood lumber agreement. The Conservatives have not been able to point to the section of this agreement that would prove otherwise.

It is high time that we helped this languishing industry, which is the lifeblood for several Quebec regions, including Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The \$170 million allocated for marketing and innovation is not enough. The Conservatives must stop treating this Quebec industry and its workers with contempt.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, March 2 to 8 is International Women's Week, culminating on Sunday, March 8, International Women's Day.

The Conservative Party has a long tradition of supporting women. It was a Conservative prime minister who passed the Canadian Bill of Rights granting all Canadians equality before the law.

We observe International Women's Day 2009 during a global economic crisis and now, more than ever, our country's continued success depends on women's economic security and prosperity.

We have seen great improvements in women's economic status. Women have been starting businesses at twice the rate of men. Women are increasingly represented in a wide range of professions and careers traditionally dominated by men.

Budget 2009 set out a plan to stimulate economic growth and support all Canadians. We are following through on the action plan for women to advance equality for women by improving their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

I call on all Canadians to join with me in celebrating International Women's Week.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is facing its worst financial crisis, the crown corporation may be obliged to implement major economic measures that, according to its president, Hubert Lacroix, would change the very nature of its service to Canadians.

We are talking about an increase in advertising, more American programming, selling off certain television and radio services and more.

This scenario seriously endangers the crown corporation's mission to safeguard, enrich and strengthen Canada's cultural, political, social and economic structure. Some analysts predict that this catastrophic financial situation could lead to the crown corporation's demise.

What does the Conservative government plan on doing to protect the CBC from this economic disaster? Will the Conservatives' record

now have to include the death of an institution that ensures that Canada has a voice?

* * *

• (1410)

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is determined to work to stimulate the economy and help Canadians get through this crisis. Before the crisis even hit, we saw it coming and we created the building Canada fund, the largest infrastructure investment plan in Canada. Furthermore, we freed up additional funding in our economic action plan to be able to act within the next few months, because the situation is urgent.

The Bloc Québécois, on the other hand, voted against all the measures that would help the Quebec economy. In the meantime, the Bloc used taxpayers' money to help finance *Le Québécois*, a newspaper published by Patrick Bourgeois, a man who has encouraged violence and public disorder to advance his agenda. The Bloc failed the transparency test and must now reimburse taxpayers who deserve better than these flyers promoting intolerance.

When will the Bloc Québécois start working with the government to help the Quebec economy and, more importantly, the workers of Quebec?

* * *

[English]

EAST COAST MUSIC AWARDS

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over 20 years the East Coast Music Association has been celebrating the musical culture of Canada's east coast with the East Coast Music Awards. Great talents such as Lennie Gallant, Joel Plaskett, Great Big Sea, Gordie Sampson, Rufus Guinard and many others have been recognized.

This past weekend the ECMAs were held in Corner Brook, hosted by Jian Ghomeshi and Damhnait Doyle, and featured the talents of Jill Barber, Ron Hynes, Rawlins Cross, Duane Andrews, Mary Barry and many others. The big winner this year was Hey Rosetta! from my own riding of St. John's East. Special recognition was given to the late Dick Nolan for his contribution to the music industry as a performer and pioneer recording artist.

We are all very proud of the talent and artistry of our musicians and songwriters, and the great contribution they make to our culture by providing just plain fabulous entertainment. The ECMAs are also an industry convention with workshops and showcases for emerging artists.

Congratulations to the winners. I thank the East Coast Music Association for its promotion and development of the music industry and for presenting such great talent at the ECMAs.

SEAL HUNT

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in previous Parliaments all parties in this House worked together to combat the campaign of misinformation on the Canadian seal hunt.

Given that the European Parliament will soon vote on a potential ban on seal products, it is important that we parliamentarians continue to stand together in this House to support our sealers. However, we now see that a Liberal senator intends to introduce legislation to ban the seal hunt. Add to that the fact that the Liberal leader's top adviser, Warren Kinsella, has called the seal hunt appalling, we should all be concerned about where exactly the Liberal Party stands on this issue. Is that stand to eliminate the seal hunt in Canada?

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, now known as “member XXX”, was in Montreal to hand out “old money” that had already been allocated to various cultural organizations. There was no new money included in the \$481,104 announced on Friday. The only difference is that the cheque was delivered by limousine instead of by mail truck. That is what is known as riding an old wave of announcements.

The problem is that Canada is now looked down on when it comes to investment in culture, because it is the only country in the G8 that does not help its artists tour abroad.

Is it because he is ashamed of his own government's cuts to culture and its smokescreen announcements that the minister is hiding behind the moniker “member XXX” in his press releases? We would be, to say the least.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives want a new \$3 billion fund with no accountability, no transparency and no oversight. With a deal like that, no wonder the finance minister is already warning us that money will be wasted.

If Canadians want to see real accountability and transparency in stimulus spending, they can go to President Obama's site, www.recovery.gov. There, Americans can see where their money is going, right down to the contractor and the congressional district. As the site indicates, “This is your money. You have a right to know where it's going and how it's being spent.”

Why are the Conservatives not providing that kind of accountability to Canadians for their hard-earned tax dollars?

Oral Questions

CARBON TAX

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week in Edmonton the Liberal leader continued his attempts to hide from the Liberal carbon tax. Too bad that the carbon tax was the Liberal leader's idea. He first advocated it as part of his 2006 leadership campaign. He said that we needed to “put a price on carbon” and that we have to burden other Canadians who are able to bear energy costs.

During the 2008 campaign, the now Liberal leader, along with the former NDP premier, defended the Liberal carbon tax plan, saying:

We are in complete agreement with our leader, [the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier], regarding the implementation of the Liberal Green Shift plan. Like our leader, we have said clearly and consistently that we believe it will be good for the Canadian economy.

Good for the economy? Canadians clearly voiced their opinion just months ago. Try as he might, the Liberal leader cannot hide from his brainchild, the Liberal carbon tax scheme.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last September the Prime Minister said, “If we were going to have some kind of crash or recession, we probably would have had it by now”. We now know he said this on the eve of the biggest contraction of the Canadian economy in almost 20 years.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to the thousands of Canadians who have needlessly lost their jobs because of his utter misreading of the Canadian economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone will know that the Canadian economy contracted in the fourth quarter. At the same time, they should also know the American economy contracted twice as quickly, the European economy twice as quickly, the Japanese economy four times as quickly.

Our economy remains in a position of relative strength. I would urge the opposition to focus on that and to pass the important measures we have to sustain this economy through these difficult times.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those international numbers are no consolation for the thousands of Canadians who have lost their jobs because of the government's bad management. It is the Prime Minister, not the opposition, who has caused delay. He delayed when he called an election. He delayed with his disastrous November statement. He delayed when he prorogued Parliament and all this while the Canadian economy was shrinking by \$13 billion.

I repeat, will he apologize to all those who have needlessly lost their jobs because of his mismanagement and his delay?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has taken, from the onset of this crisis well over a year ago, important actions ahead of the crisis that have put Canada in a relatively strong position. Admittedly, there are significant difficulties. However, the opposition does not help those things by simply repeating bad economic news without having anything to offer.

There are important measures before this House. Since the opposition has no alternatives to propose, I would encourage it to pass those measures as quickly as possible.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not so long ago he said there was no crisis at all.

[*Translation*]

Last September, the Prime Minister said that if we were going to have a collapse or a recession, it would have happened already. Now we know that he made that statement on the eve of the most severe economic downturn in nearly 20 years.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to the thousands of Canadians who have lost their jobs because he failed to see the economic writing on the wall?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the Liberal member is the one who denied the economic crisis, and he should be the one apologizing.

[*English*]

I will remind the hon. member for Markham—Unionville that during Christmas 2007 when I told Canadians there would be a significant slowing of our economy, that member said we were being unrealistically pessimistic.

There are real significant problems confronting us now. The government is acting. I would urge the opposition, which has no alternatives to offer, not a single alternative, to pass our bill.

* * *

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning it was reported that screaming erupted in the office of the Minister of State for Science and Technology when he met with the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

While President Obama is adding \$10 billion to fund basic research, the Conservative government is chopping \$148 million from the three research granting councils.

All of this is very damaging to our economic future. On a day when all of Canada is celebrating the work of our researchers on stem cells, why are the Conservatives telling scientists and teachers to shut up?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, while it is true there are some people who like to pick fights to get their names in the paper, I have another way of doing things.

My business is to go forward with our science and tech researchers and to make sure our entrepreneurs have the tools to

succeed. My business is the \$5.1 billion we put in the budget for science and tech, the \$2 billion for colleges and universities, CFI funding and NRC funding. It is about scientists, researchers, buildings and equipment. That is our business.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is painfully clear that the Conservatives do not understand science and have no vision for the future of science. First, they got rid of the Prime Minister's national science advisor, and now they have decided which scientific fields deserve to be funded at the expense of others.

Our scientists are a tremendous resource, and our future depends on a scientific vision for the long term. When will the Conservatives realize that?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister set up the science and tech strategy in 2007. Every budget this government has brought forward increased funding for science and tech. I appreciate that member's support on our budget.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in an interview that aired on CNN, the Prime Minister said: "We're not going to win this war just by staying." And he went on: "My own judgment is quite frankly we are not going to ever defeat the insurgency." Yet when the Bloc Québécois questioned the mission's direction, the Prime Minister accused us of being the terrorists' allies.

Can the Prime Minister explain his about-face?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position is clear. We are in Afghanistan to train the Afghan forces to ensure the security of their own country. Our troops are doing a fine job and this government is very proud of their efforts.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the interview, the Prime Minister suggested that the mission in Afghanistan could be extended beyond 2011 if President Obama gives him good reason to do so.

Can the Prime Minister clearly tell us if he intends to ask the House to extend the mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been clear on this on many occasions. Our government is acting under a resolution passed by this House. This is the first government to ever consult the House concerning military missions.

As I just said, we are very proud of the work being done by our troops, our diplomats and our humanitarian aid workers in Afghanistan.

Oral Questions

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not being perfectly clear, and we are going to ask him clear questions until we get some clear answers.

Since the vote was held to extend the mission until 2011, the Prime Minister has stated that he does not intend to extend the mission beyond that date. In addition, when President Obama visited Canada, he said he had not asked the Prime Minister to extend the mission beyond 2011.

The Prime Minister did not answer the Bloc leader, so I will ask him again. Does he still intend to honour the 2011 deadline and refuse any extension of the military mission beyond that date?

• (1425)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the success of our mission in Afghanistan cannot be secured by military means alone. That is why we have adopted a whole-of-government approach. Between now and 2011, our priorities include training and coaching the Afghan national security forces. With well-led, well-trained, well-equipped Afghan national security forces, the Government of Afghanistan will be able to take on a larger share of the job of maintaining its own security. When the military mission ends in 2011, the Government of Canada will maintain a presence in Afghanistan to develop governance.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said he was willing to talk to the U.S. President if he wanted Canada to get more involved.

What will he discuss with the U.S. President if he is not talking about extending the military mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011? What will greater involvement entail? Will the members opposite finally understand that there needs to be more diplomacy and development around the extension?

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but our priorities are clear.

[*English*]

We are committed to Afghanistan militarily until 2011. Our soldiers have done an incredible job, along with our humanitarian workers and everyone else involved in the mission. We will probably continue in Afghanistan in a humanitarian way and in a development way beyond 2011, but the military mission will end in 2011 as per the motion that was passed in the House. That is the answer to the question.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government's economic strategy is a failure. GDP dropped by 3.4% in the last quarter, the worst result since 1991. Because of the Conservative's policies, for the first time in 60 years our exports have fallen for a sixth consecutive quarter.

What does the Prime Minister have to say about such a failure? Does he realize that he needs to change course? Yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are in a global recession and everyone knows that it did not start in Canada. We are taking action and to counter this crisis we have tabled some very important measures in this Parliament. I urge the members opposite to vote for these important measures.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has now suffered the largest quarterly contraction since 1991, and while most Canadians were in shock throughout this process, with mass layoffs and losing their savings, what did the Prime Minister do? He was in total denial.

First he said that there was no recession and then he said that it was a technical recession. Now we find ourselves in the worst recession in a generation.

Does the Prime Minister now realize that with so many Canadians thrown out of work, his failure to recognize the problem is hurting Canadian families?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they talk about a failure to recognize a problem. There is a leader of a party that wanted to prevent the elected government from tabling its budget, who then went out and said that he would oppose the budget no matter what was in it, and now he tries to invent reasons to block money flowing from this budget.

His position is not only denial, it is completely irresponsible, and the NDP should actually do something positive around here for a change.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the impact of the government's policies, because relief to Canadians who are hurting as a result of the recession is very severe. The aid they need is coming too slowly and it is covering too few people.

Today, 30,000 Atlantic Canadians who are out of work are on waiting lists to get some EI help. This is at a time when Statistics Canada shows that 43% of people and 39% of women who are trying to get help from EI cannot get it mostly because they have part time jobs and other rules that prevent them from getting help.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House now what he will do to help those—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a leader who, when we brought forward measures to help Canadian workers, said that he would oppose them even before he read them. There is a leader who now says that the money being spent involves abuse, when in fact we have not yet authorized the expenditure of a single dollar.

That is how irresponsible that party is. It is about time he took the economic crisis seriously and helped pass these measures to actually help Canadian families that need help.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has again changed his tune with regard to the mission in Afghanistan. Furthermore, we had to hear it second-hand. He told the Americans: "Quite frankly, we are not going to ever defeat the insurgency".

This is the same prime minister who called us all sorts of names and questioned our patriotism every time we told him that the solution in Afghanistan was not a military one. We know that there are also problems with the training of Afghan police.

Has the Prime Minister finally informed our troops that their duty until 2011 is simply to serve their time?

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague should not belittle the efforts of the Canadian Forces members like that when he says that they will be marking time. I have been there several times, as has he. They are doing exceptional work on the ground day to day under very tough circumstances and we all should be proud of that.

They will continue to do their jobs until 2011. Canada's role beyond that will undoubtedly be in the area of development in governments and humanitarian aid, but our soldiers will come home proudly in 2011 having done an exceptional job that all members, including that member, should be very proud of.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been there too. I am not the one who is abdicating now. This is what the Prime Minister said in 2006:

Once we get rid of the bad people, we can carry on with full force in terms of the reconstruction and development.

Now he is saying that we will never defeat the insurgency. For the sake of our troops, their families and all Canadians, the Prime Minister, for once, must come clean. Why is the Conservative government abdicating now? Why the new shift? Did the Prime Minister at least inform our allies at NATO?

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member for "see how mad I can get" but nothing has changed. From the very start of the mission in Afghanistan, we have been taking a whole of government approach, which requires a strong military presence for a blanket of security over the other operations. More and more, as time goes by we are transitioning to humanitarian aid, governance and development, and that will continue after our military mission ends.

Once again, it is a mission that we all can be very proud of. Canadians are proud of the job the men and women over there have done and I know that member is also proud of them.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government can hardly pretend that the Prime Minister's remarks do not represent something of a change for him. It is not a change for the rest of us but it certainly is for him in terms of the position he has taken.

Does the Prime Minister not realize the implications of that kind of statement for our NATO allies, for our troops and for the mission they are carrying on? Does he also not realize that other countries are engaging in far more diplomacy, politics and reconstruction than Canada? I wonder what the minister intends to do about that.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I simply reject the premise of the question that other countries are doing so much more than Canada in terms of development.

If the member had been there, and I am not sure whether he has, he would have seen Canadian Forces members by the hundreds out there doing development. When people talk about \$10 of military to \$1 of development, it is absolutely a false statement because a lot of that \$10 that they attribute to the military is in fact development.

The Prime Minister's position has not changed. This is a whole of government approach. It will transition more and more toward development and governance and less and less toward Canadian military involvement as we equip the Afghans to take care of that themselves.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the government is trying to have it both ways. The Prime Minister's statement came right out of, whether it is left field or right field, it certainly came as a surprise to a great many people listening to the Prime Minister. He needs to recognize that simple fact. He also needs to recognize that from General Petraeus to Henry Kissinger to so many other people, they are looking at this issue in the broadest way with respect to the politics and diplomacy of the region.

Where is the Canadian diplomatic intervention that is supporting and backing up our troops? That is the kind of measures we need and the kind of help our troops need to do the job they will be doing.

● (1435)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that we have been working with our allies for years on this mission: the 60 signatories to the Afghanistan Compact, of which Canada is one, and the up to now 50 or so allies working on the ground in Afghanistan. We are engaged with them militarily and diplomatically through humanitarian measures. We are engaged at all levels and our men and women at all levels have done an incredible job. That member should be proud of them.

In fact, this did not come out of left or right field. The Prime Minister has been hitting them straight down the middle all along.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first the government denied that we are in a recession, then it gave us a statement that was more ideological than economic and suspended the work of the House. Now it is threatening to go to the polls if the opposition refuses to give it a blank cheque for its stimulus plan, which is plainly inadequate and insufficient.

Oral Questions

Not since 1991 has the GDP dropped this much, so perhaps the Prime Minister should pay attention to the Bloc Québécois' suggestions for dealing with the crisis rather than constantly threatening to call an election.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allegation that the special budget fund that has been set up is without conditions is certainly not correct. This fund is governed by the same conditions that all of our budget money is governed by and the projects or programs must be economic plan initiatives included in budget 2009 and passed by Parliament. The appropriate checks and balances must be in place. Treasury Board approval must be obtained. Existing requirements on accountability and reporting must be met.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will rephrase the question.

The Prime Minister has to accept the fact that he has a minority government. He has to bear that in mind and work together with the opposition. By asking us to sign a blank cheque for \$3 billion without even listening to our suggestions, he is showing us that he just does not get it.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he is doing anything but boost public confidence during this time of economic crisis?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a remarkable statement coming from an individual and a party that has contributed nothing in terms of any positive ideas toward stimulating the economy. That is the disappointment. Now that member and his party are standing in the way of allowing this money to flow to Canadians so that these important projects can take place. That member should reconsider his position, vote for this budget and help the families in his constituency.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency issued a cigarette manufacturing permit to a man who is now under investigation for drug trafficking in Canada, and who is also charged in the United States with running a marijuana ring. What is even more astonishing and disturbing is that this permit was issued despite the strong opposition of the band council where the accused's business is located.

In light of the seriousness of the suspicions surrounding this individual, would the Canada Revenue Agency not be fully justified in suspending his permit until the RCMP concludes its investigation?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Before issuing a tobacco sale permit, we check to see if the individual has a criminal record. Then, we review the business plan submitted to us by the company. Finally, we visit the premises to ensure that everything is in compliance with the business plan

presented to us. We also explain to the prospective permit holder his responsibilities and obligations.

In this case, all these steps were taken. If the facts do not reflect what we were told, of course we can revoke the individual's permit.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a fraudster who is under investigation, both here and in the United States. That individual's behaviour definitely does not reflect what he said in his statements.

Will the minister revoke his permit? That is shameful.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member knew more about the issue, he might not be asking the same question.

I will say it again. We conduct checks. We ensure that individuals comply with the rules when they apply for permits. That was done in this case.

If someone does not comply with the requirements of the law, if an individual does not do what he told us he would do, of course we can revoke his permit. The member is well aware that there are certain things which I cannot mention because of confidentiality.

* * *

● (1440)

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, workers across Canada continue to face delays in having EI claims processed. According to PSAC, over 30,000 people are waiting to get their claims processed in Atlantic Canada alone, 8,000 of those are waiting more than 28 days.

Today Statistics Canada indicates that GDP has contracted by 3.4%. That means more heavy job losses. Yet the minister responsible for EI continues to be oblivious to Canadians who are losing their jobs.

Why is the minister incapable of understanding the hardship suffered by Canadian families that have to wait for their EI cheques?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is we are very engaged in trying to ensure that those who have been unfortunate enough to lose their jobs get the EI for which they qualify as quickly as possible. That is why we have already been bringing back recent retirees who are skilled at handling EI. We have extended our hours. We are adding automation to the system to make processing go faster.

We are processing up to 50% more claims now than we were a year ago. We are doing most of those, unfortunately not all, on time. We are getting better at it too.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister really does not get it. A delay in getting a cheque to a family means that it could miss a mortgage payment or even have difficulty putting food on the table. How is that stimulating our economy?

Oral Questions

A family that suddenly finds itself without a paycheque depends on EI to help it through a tough time. Yet the minister does nothing because she said that she did not want to make EI too lucrative. These workers paid into EI and they have a right to get it when they need it.

When will the minister do something, anything at all, or will the Prime Minister appoint somebody over there who actually cares about unemployed Canadians?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are trying to take care of these people because they need it and deserve it. That is why we are stepping up overtime. That is why we are increasing automation. That is why we are being proactive in reaching out to companies that indicate they may be having layoffs. That is why we are expanding our work-sharing program, our targeted initiative for older workers and significantly expanding the training to help these people get back to work in jobs that will last.

I thank the member for his support of the budget on that.

* * *

PAY EQUITY

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to mislead Canadian women. It has said that its so-called pay equity legislation is based on the Ontario pay equity model, but the government's plan could not be more different.

Could the minister explain exactly what parts of his legislation are modelled on the Ontario proactive pay equity legislation?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is of concern to people concerned about equity in the workplace is that women are waiting 15 and 20 years in order to have complaints resolved. We have said that there needs to be a proactive mechanism to ensure that these complaints are dealt with on an ongoing basis through the collective bargaining situation, as it is done in other provinces.

The member, in fact, is well aware of the Liberal 2004 study that looked at this issue and recommended this model. We are implementing it.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely and patently false. It is obvious that the minister has not even read the Ontario act. The Ontario model has a pay equity commission to ensure pay equity is implemented and a tribunal to hear pay equity complaints. It does not allow for women's rights to be bargained away, as the government is doing.

What measures from the Ontario model are in the Conservative government's legislation?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one cannot bargain away those rights at the collective bargaining table. The member knows that and the member is simply making up these statements.

The other point that she raised is about the independent tribunal. There is an independent tribunal that will review these matters as well in the legislation, exactly as it is in the Ontario and other legislation.

● (1445)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 19, the Prime Minister and President Obama met to discuss many of the issues facing not only our North American continent but those of our planet. Both the Prime Minister and the President agreed in a U.S.-Canada clean energy dialogue that would co-operate on several critical energy science and technology issues in pursuit of a clean environment.

Could the Prime Minister please update the House on the progress taken since this very important and historic meeting?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is in Washington today to continue the clean energy dialogue that was initiated when President Obama was in Ottawa.

[English]

While in Washington, with regard to the clean energy dialogue, the Minister of the Environment will talk to the American administration about the expansion of clean energy research, the development and deployment of clean energy technology, the promotion of clean and renewable energy sources like hydroelectricity.

This is an important initiative between our governments and one we hope will be a model for the rest of the world in terms of climate change.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend the Prime Minister, like the leader of the Liberal Party, suggested that he was open to extending Canada's military role in Afghanistan beyond 2011. Reports stated that if the U.S. asked Canada to remain, the Prime Minister would want the U.S. to clearly state its long-term objectives and an ultimate end date.

Could the Prime Minister state unequivocally that if these two criteria were satisfied, would he seek to extend Canada's military mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priorities and objectives in Afghanistan have been clear from the start, and that is to leave the country in the hands of the Afghans in a manner in which they can manage their own affairs. We have been doing that since we got there. We have been doing that with the other 59 members, or signatories, to the Afghanistan compact. We have been doing that with the other 49 or so allies on the ground there. That has not changed. It has been a transition from a military mission to a humanitarian governance and development mission. That will continue.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister also said on the weekend, “We are not going to defeat the insurgency in Afghanistan”. This runs completely counter to what the Prime Minister has believed over the past years, even to the point where he questioned the very patriotism of Canadians who held this view.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House when he came to this conclusion and if he has discussed, personally, his new thinking with other NATO leaders? Remember “cut and run”, remember “we are not going to leave until the job is done”. What is going on?

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and anybody who is knowledgeable about the mission have been saying from the start that this is not a militarily winnable mission alone. There is a combination of military and diplomacy. It is giving the Afghans the power to manage their own affairs. That is what we have been doing from the start.

The simple fact is our priorities have not change, nor have our methods. The Prime Minister was talking about military alone solutions and nobody has ever said that is the ultimate solution.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the American prosecution lawyer at Guantanamo prison has confirmed that the detainees, including Omar Khadr, have been subjected to severe abuse. He stated that, no matter what he had done, this poor person has been mistreated.

How can the government justify its refusal to repatriate young Khadr given the testimony that is being gathered about the reality of torture at Guantanamo?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on many occasions I have repeated that Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges in the United States. Our position has not changed. We are aware that the trial of all cases before the military commission was halted in Guantanamo Bay on January 26, and that the U.S. administration is reviewing all the cases. We will wait for whatever results the U.S. administration comes out with.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, the government is hiding behind a

supposed process that would prevent them from demanding that Khadr be repatriated. Yet other countries have repatriated their citizens.

If Canada does not repatriate Omar Khadr, does this mean that the problem does not come from the process, but rather from the government's lack of political will?

• (1450)

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on many occasions in the House, Mr. Omar Khadr faces serious charges including murder, attempted murder as well as the charge of murder of a medic.

We continue to closely monitor the situation, including the work of the American committee formed to study the fate of the Guantanamo detainees, including Mr. Khadr. Our position has not changed.

* * *

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question about government ethics.

Next month Ottawa Mayor Larry O'Brien goes on trial to face criminal charges stemming from his campaign for mayor and the Minister of Transport has been subpoenaed. On Friday, my question for the minister about this matter went unanswered, so I ask it again today.

Will he invoke parliamentary privilege or will he respect the subpoena and testify at the trial?

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. He asked this very same question on Friday, so I will give him the very same answer because I answered the question not once, but twice then.

The Minister of Transport has always fully co-operated with the authorities on this issue and he will do so in the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a Crown witness stated that Mr. O'Brien and the minister met at Hy's restaurant on July 26, 2006, and that they spoke about setting up a meeting with Terry Kilrea regarding an appointment to a government position.

My question is simple: Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities agree to testify at Mr. O'Brien's trial? Yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I point out for my hon. colleague, for all members present and for the general public that our colleague, the Minister of Transport, has not been accused of anything. Just like many people, he has been called as a witness in this case. He has fully co-operated in the past and he has indicated that he will fully co-operate in the future.

Oral Questions

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is meeting today with the U.S. envoy for climate change, Todd Stern. While Stern was negotiating the Kyoto protocol, the Prime Minister was calling climate change a socialist plot. We had 13 long years of no action by the Liberals and now three more years of no action from the Conservatives. Now the minister claims he is in sync with the Obama administration.

Does this mean the minister is now admitting he has taken no action on reducing greenhouse gases or emissions from the tar sands and that he has a new plan in line with the U.S.?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the hard work of the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Environment. They set an example to the international partners of working in a collaborative way to tackle the fight on climate change. We have the toughest target in Canadian history, an absolute reduction of 20% by 2020. That is amazing.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in defence of their tar sands policies following the damning *National Geographic* exposé, *the Conservatives now suggest that all is well because they are working with the U.S. to study new technologies to capture and sequester carbon underground, yet little solid action has been taken by the government on addressing broader impacts to the tar sands on first nations, rivers, the boreal forest, or species at risk.*

When can Canadians expect concrete action by the government to address the mounting health and environmental impacts of the tar sands?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the hon. member that indeed we have acted decisively on this issue. The example of that is in our economic action plan. We have put \$1 billion into a clean energy fund able to address the real issues associated with the oil sands. I will tell the House that the government clearly recognizes that a healthy economy requires a healthy environment and that is the direction we are going in.

* * *

SEAL HUNT

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a member of the Liberal Party in the other place intends to introduce legislation that will see the ban of the Canadian seal hunt, while a senior adviser to the Liberal leader, Warren Kinsella, calls the seal hunt appalling.

Will the government comment on the Liberal Party's betrayal of Canadian seal hunters?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has spent much time and resources defending the Canadian seal hunt which has come under attack in Europe.

Now we find out that the seal hunt is coming under attack by the Liberal Party right here at home. The Liberal senator from Ottawa Centre intends to legislate an end to the Canadian seal hunt while the

Liberal leader's very close adviser, Warren Kinsella, is quoted as saying, "—the seal hunt is also appalling, and has become way more trouble than it is worth".

The Liberal Party is telling thousands of families who depend on this hunt, "Too bad. Go find a new way of life". This is appalling.

* * *

• (1455)

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pay equity has been long since established in this country as a human right, not only federally but by the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. Rather than moving forward on women's rights and showing leadership to the world as we have done in the past, the government is regressive.

I ask the minister this question. How can the government take a recognized human right, such as pay equity, and make it an item that is now up for negotiation, contrary to what the provinces are doing?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the member is wrong.

What happens in provinces like Manitoba is that there is an ongoing duty to ensure that pay equity is recognized in the collective agreement. The first pay equity legislation was brought in, in Manitoba, in 1986. I would suggest that it is high time that the federal jurisdiction follow it as well. Women should not have to wait 15 or 20 years in order to have complaints resolved.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only is the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development being insensitive to the plight of unemployed workers by refusing to eliminate the two week waiting period, but it is further drawing out that waiting period by not having enough staff to deal with the increasing number of claims.

Will the minister immediately hire the additional staff needed to effectively deal with the increasing number of claims by thousands of people laid off because of the crisis?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have done. We want to help people receive their EI benefits. We have already rehired retirees who worked in the EI office. We have called back people who had moved to other departments. We have improved the automation of the system. We want people to get their benefits as quickly as possible.

Oral Questions

[English]

● (1500)

FINANCE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at a time when Canadians are struggling to make ends meet, banks and credit card companies are driving up fees while they report healthy profits. The minister's only action on this was to outline a proposal to strengthen disclosure requirements. More information about how we are being ripped off is one thing, but what Canadians really need is better legislation to protect them and small businesses.

Will the minister commit to protecting Canadians against this gouging or is he going to rub salt in our wounds and only explain to us how it happens?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only salt that is being rubbed in any wound is the fact that the NDP decided to vote against the budget that would actually provide money to Canadians. The Bloc is supporting that position as well.

We are seeing a great frustration in the House today. Liberals have said that they want to speed this up, get money out to Canadians, get the \$6 billion tied up in the bill out and get the five week extension to EI out the door. That is salt in the wound of any Canadian who has lost his or her job.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CF Base Petawawa is one of the busiest and most active military bases in Canada, yet it lacks access to some of the basic services necessary for the health and welfare of our troops. Canadian Forces members and military families have called for a better system to ensure that ill and injured soldiers are able to receive the care as well as the support they need to prepare for the next phase of their lives.

What is the minister doing to fix this problem?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for her excellent question and her hard work on behalf of the men and women in uniform in her riding.

This morning, we announced the DND Veterans Affairs joint personnel support unit with eight centres across the country, including CFB Petawawa in her riding, to ensure a one-stop shop for consistent care and support during all phases of recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration for injured and ill CF members and their families. Whether they are returning to military life or exploring new civilian career opportunities, they will receive the assistance they need.

Our CF members perform excellent work. It is a difficult task we ask of them. The JPSU ensures a way to support them.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the deadly conflict is unfolding in Sri Lanka, thousands of civilians are trapped and threatened in the conflict zone from which all NGO aid groups are expelled. Canada has pledged aid, but there are no NGOs to deliver it.

I ask the government, will it rise from its mute and weary disinterest on this and tell Sri Lanka now, directly and at the UN, that it has a duty to protect and that Sri Lanka will be judged not by how many fighters have died but by how it treats and protects its own civilians?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told the House previously, our primary concerns are the civilians who are being victimized by this conflict. Our government has asked for a ceasefire and open access for all humanitarian aid, so that the wounded can be evacuated and the refugees and civilians can be assisted. We want to have peace and order for these people who have been suffering for so many years and we will do our part responsibly.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what responsibility does the federal government have for the implementation and enforcement of the Canada Health Act? In my constituency, health care is in crisis. The hospital is running a \$13 million deficit and it is running its operations on a \$32 million line of credit. One of the outcomes may be the closing of a very important district hospital.

What responsibility does the federal government have to ensure, under the Canada Health Act, that every Canadian has access to health care when they need it?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act. In fact, our government has committed to funding provinces. This year, up to \$22.6 billion is being transferred to the provinces, with a 6% escalator for the next few years. The responsibility of health care delivery rests with the provinces and territories. This government is committed to funding the provinces.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Citizenship and Immigration Canada plans to relocate its Quebec City office to the Lebourgneuf area this spring. This area is far from the city centre and not well served by public transportation. The Quebec City office will become inaccessible, thus compromising the service to which citizens and newcomers are entitled to expect.

Points of Order

Will the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism promise to review this decision in order to ensure that the population can access the services?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of this government to ensure that citizens receive appropriate service and that is what we are doing. The citizens of Quebec City will have the same service as that available throughout Canada, and that is first-rate service.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to Section 535.2 of the Canada Elections Act, I have the honour to lay upon the table two reports of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada regarding returning officers.

[Translation]

These reports are deemed to have been referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the President of the Treasury Board claimed, constantly, that the model that the government is using is based on the Ontario model. I know that it is not.

The information the minister is giving in the House is incorrect because the pieces that appear in the Ontario model are not at all in the government one, in terms of the commission, the tribunal, as well as all of the appeals and the lack of punishment for the unions, which the government has.

I would like to table the Ontario legislation so that the minister might read it and be able to reacquaint himself with the real facts of the legislation as opposed to what he is presenting in the House which is patently false and totally off-base.

• (1505)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Beaches—East York have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

* * *

[Translation]

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation for the Canadian section of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the

Americas respecting its participation in the regional workshop of Central and South American parliamentarians, “Liberalizing Trade: The WTO, the Doha Round and Development Challenges”, held in San José, Costa Rica, on November 7 and 8, 2008.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations in relation to the review of statutory instruments. If the House gives consent, I intend to move concurrence in this report later today.

* * *

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-330, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Chatham-Kent—Essex.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move this private member's bill for a name change to my riding. As you know Chatham-Kent—Essex is the current name. The people of Leamington, who occupy that section of Essex, have brought it to my attention that they would like to see this name change. This private member's bill has already taken place in the provincial legislature and I would also like to table this in this House, as well.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-331, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (arrest without a warrant).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce my private member's bill today, an act to amend the Criminal Code. The purpose of this bill is to give a peace officer the power to arrest without a warrant a person who is in breach of a probation order binding the person or a condition of the person's parole. I believe all members of all parties in the House of Commons would agree to support and see a speedy passage of this bill.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-332, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (review of parole ineligibility) and to amend other Acts in consequence.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would amend the Criminal Code to repeal section 745.6 of the act, often referred to as the faint hope clause, which allows a person sentenced to life imprisonment for high treason or murder to apply after 15 years for a reduction in parole ineligibility.

The bill also makes related amendments to the Criminal Code and amends certain other acts in consequence.

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

* * *

• (1510)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations presented to the House earlier today be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Brampton West 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)

* * *

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the Clerk.

It was forwarded to me by Mrs. MacIntyre of Sarnia, Ontario, who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that the greatest fraud was a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts but that he broke that promise and imposed a 31.5% punitive tax that permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly of seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority government, first, to admit that the decisions to tax income trusts were based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

WAR RESISTERS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present another petition from the war resisters support campaign.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government to demonstrate its commitment to international law and the treaties to which it is

signatory by making provisions to U.S. war objectors to have sanctuary in this country.

GRANDMOTHERS FOR GRANDMOTHERS IN AFRICA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition today from the Grandmothers for Grandmothers in Africa in my riding. They have collected over 1,000 signatures from Barrie, Ontario.

The petition is focused on increasing foreign aid, in particular the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, and for providing lower cost medicines and drugs for developing countries.

It is my pleasure to table this petition on behalf of that very active association in the riding of Barrie.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour to present a petition signed by over 80 constituents who are profoundly concerned by the decision of the government to deport the Tabaj family to Albania.

This family fled to Canada after an assassination attempt on the life of Mr. Arjan Tabaj, in which two other people were machine-gunned to death. With the assassins still at large in Albania, the deportation of Mr. Arjan, his wife Anilda and three children back to that country would clearly put the lives of his family in jeopardy.

For this reason, the petitioners urge the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to reverse his decision to deport the Tabaj family.

REVENUE CANADA

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of 850 fishers from Newfoundland and Labrador and some from Quebec who have been treated unfairly by the Government of Canada through Revenue Canada.

A group of fishers took part in a voluntary retirement program when they were invited to get out of the fishery by the Government of Canada at a time when the cod fishery was in dire straits. At that time they were advised by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, as a result of information passed on to it by Revenue Canada, that the money the fishers received in the way of a benefit would be taxed 100% as capital gains. This was in fact an error.

A correction was made by Revenue Canada but it was never passed on to the fishers who were impacted. All these fishermen are out thousands of dollars as a result of a decision by Revenue Canada that it is now refusing to correct.

On behalf of these fishers, we ask that this wrong be righted and that the fishermen receive the money that was taken from them. We ask that Revenue Canada own up to its mistake. Some of these fishers have since passed away and their estates are now looking to the government to right this wrong.

This was a mistake made by the government not the fishers themselves. Many people have been impacted by this and they need these thousands of dollars owed to them, which have not been forthcoming. We ask that the government to own up to this wrong and right it on behalf of these fishers.

Government Orders

●(1515)

OMAR KHADR

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from hundreds of law students across Canada asking the government to respect the human and legal rights of Omar Khadr and bring him home. They are deeply concerned that the government believes the war on terror can be fought outside the law. As Canadians, they are concerned that our country's credibility as one committed to human rights and the rule of law has been severely undermined.

They also note that Canada's deep commitment to international human rights require ensuring Omar's right to a fair trial and humane treatment. For six years, Omar has been denied these rights. Canada's complicity in that denial implicates our country in gross violations of international law and undermines our value as Canadians. They want the government to bring Omar Khadr home.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

EMERGENCY DEBATE**TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME**

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Vancouver Centre and I would now invite her to address the Chair on this subject.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 52, I would like to request an emergency debate in the House of Commons for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, in this case to address the recent alarming increase in violent gang shootings in the greater Vancouver region over the last month.

The Government of British Columbia has referred to the situation in a letter to members of Parliament as warfare.

While violent gun crime has been escalating in Canada's urban regions over the past three years, the situation has now become critical in the greater Vancouver region, especially in the last month.

The increase in gang shootings is an urgent new development with 18 shootings in the last four weeks, 13 of them occurring in 14 days and 10 of them fatal. These gang-related shootings are occurring in public places such as streets, malls and grocery stores where citizens are increasingly at risk of becoming innocent casualties. This has led to a heightened level of fear and anxiety among the citizens of greater Vancouver.

Members of the Government of British Columbia visited Ottawa on Thursday requesting urgent assistance. They returned empty-handed and disappointed. The legislation promised by the govern-

ment will have little impact on the problem, meanwhile, the problem escalates daily.

The Speaker: The Chair received the letter from the hon. member for Vancouver Centre this morning requesting this debate. I have heard her arguments on the point and while I have no doubt the situation is a serious one, I am not convinced at the moment that it meets the exigencies of the Standing Order in respect of an emergency debate. Accordingly, I will deny the request at this time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS[*Translation*]**BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2009**

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-10, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and related fiscal measures as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to Bill C-10 to implement the budget, the Bloc Québécois proposed amendments that were then grouped with other amendments. The main purpose of the Bloc Québécois' amendments was to delete the entire portion of the bill relating to the government's intention to create a single securities commission.

Last week, during the Bloc Québécois opposition day, we focused on this issue. In Quebec, there has been strong opposition to this plan for several years. The Conservative government had a so-called expert panel undertake some studies and, in the end, it told the government exactly what it wanted to hear.

Quebec has always been against this plan, primarily because of jurisdiction. Securities regulation falls under Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction. The federal government must respect that. That is the main reason the Bloc Québécois proposed the amendment to delete provisions creating a single, Canada-wide securities commission from the bill. Such a commission would result in a regulatory monopoly that we believe would be dangerous for the entire regulated securities sector.

We currently have a proven system that has been made better with the introduction of the 13 passports. Within this system, the various regulators can deal with each other and institutions or organizations regulated by one entity can do business with the other 12 regulators.

At present, only Ontario has refused to take part in this initiative, which has been commended by the OECD and the International Monetary Fund as being very effective. Ontario has refused to take part because, by refusing, it put pressure on the government to waste no time in creating a single securities regulator that would likely be located in that province. That would have many benefits for Ontario, but not for Quebec.

Government Orders

With the changes affecting stock markets, including the case of the Montreal Stock Exchange versus the Toronto Stock Exchange, the securities regulator in Quebec, the Autorité des marchés financiers, has become the last bastion protecting the industry and securities trading in Quebec. The current passport system has made it possible for several organizations to exist, and it will continue to do so. It provides balance. The smaller regulators can encourage diversity and innovation.

We have only to think of the solidarity fund managed by the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec or FTQ. This is a Quebec innovation, but other provinces have also made innovations. The current system makes these innovations possible. It provides protection against overly large markets that would create a form of regulatory monopoly, as I said earlier.

• (1520)

This bill would establish a Canadian securities regulation regime transition office. This bill would provide the government with \$150 million for this plan. We do not need such a system. To start, we would save \$150 million. We can see that the government wants to spend large sums at a time when the economy needs the money. Creating this kind of an organization does not make sense; this money should go into supporting businesses. We are reminding the government almost daily that it must increase its help to Quebec's forestry industry, yet it is contributing only \$170 million for the entire forestry industry across Canada. This is pitiful compared to the \$2.7 billion given to the auto industry in Ontario. This \$150 million could very easily be directed elsewhere. It would not entirely correct the inequity, but it would at least serve to soften the severe blows to Quebec's forestry industry.

This group of amendments also deals with tax havens. If it passes—which we hope it will—one of the amendments would ensure that the government cannot back down on recent announcements. In 2007, it said that tax havens are unfair to small and medium-size businesses and to workers in various sectors, because businesses that benefit from tax havens pay less tax, and then the tax which the government requires in order to fulfill its responsibilities comes, for the most part, from the pockets of workers and small and medium-size businesses.

This amendment would keep the government from backing down on previous commitments. We will support this amendment to remove the entire clause pertaining to tax havens from Bill C-10.

To conclude, I reiterate the Bloc Québécois' support for these Group No. 1 amendments.

• (1525)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have a chance to speak to the budget again at this stage. I want to reiterate my view, which is similar to the view stated by our leader: we are not so much supporting this budget as we are letting it pass. At a time of difficulty, what Canada needs more than anything else is fiscal stimulus and political stability.

There are some things in here that I think will help. Certainly there is a lot more than there was back in November. However, we think a

lot more needs to be done and we are going to be looking for a lot more from the government. For example, with regard to pay equity, if the government wants to show some good faith to the people of Canada, the measures it has proposed regarding pay equity should be withdrawn from the budget. They are gratuitous, not needed and detrimental to Canada.

That is not the only area where we need to see changes. We have serious reservations. The biggest reservations I have with this budget concern the people in Canada who are most in need of help. On the weekend, the Leader of the Opposition was in Halifax for the very successful Nova Scotia Liberal annual general meeting. On Sunday morning, he had the chance to meet with some child care advocates in Nova Scotia. We had representatives from a host of organizations talking about the importance of early learning and child care. We had a representative who works in aboriginal early learning and child care, and people who work with people with disabilities and low-income families.

It is very clear that the government is heading in the wrong direction. I was disappointed that there was not something for early learning and child care in the budget. If we want to stimulate the economy, child care is a very positive way to do it. It does an awful lot of things.

Let me read a few of the things that early learning and child care does for Canadian families. Economically, it makes us more competitive. It yields a high economic and social return. Early learning and child care provided under the QUAD system, as was proposed by the Liberal government in 2005 and actually implemented, keeps families out of poverty. Of particular importance is that it supports the participation of women in the workforce, which \$100 a month simply does not do.

In December UNICEF reported on a number of benchmarks for early learning and child care across the OECD countries. It is staggering to believe, but Canada ranked last. I should not say it is staggering, because those who understand what is actually happening in Canada, particularly now, would not be surprised. "Disappointed" is certainly a better word.

We come last in investing there. I do not know that all Canadians understand. Perhaps it is because we are not connected geographically to some of the more progressive nations in the OECD with which we consider ourselves allied. However, as a matter of fact, Canada lags when it comes to early learning and child care.

If we had a case in which a child of six or seven was denied access to primary school, there would be an outcry from everybody, yet every day, in every community in this country, children under six are denied the opportunity for early learning and child care. Child care does not stop at age six. However, education does not start at age six either.

Government Orders

On the social infrastructure side, this budget fails on a number of counts, such as employment insurance and tax policy. On EI, we have five extra weeks provided for those who qualify. Less than half of the people who actually pay EI can actually draw it, but this budget does not address that issue. It adds five weeks for those who already draw, which is helpful, no question, and they need it, but what about eliminating the waiting period, or making EI more generous, or equalizing access across this country, particularly for low-income workers, who often tend to be women? What about improving EI in that way? There is so much more that could have been done.

On tax policy, a report put out by Ken Battle of the Caledon Institute indicates that a family of four making \$150,000 will get, and I am going from memory here, close to \$500 in tax benefits from this budget, while a family of four making \$20,000 will get nothing.

That is not fair. It is unconscionable. It is not right. I do not like that, and I want to make sure the government does something to equalize opportunity in this country.

• (1530)

I will give a couple of suggestions. What about doubling the GST rebate, so that families that actually need help could get more money? Measures like this are not only good for the individual and socially just, but they are also economically wise. They would actually put stimulus into the economy at a very big return rate.

A study Ian Lee has quoted, a senate study in the United States, indicates that investing in EI returns \$1.61 into the economy. What about EI?

What about investing in the child tax benefit, particularly the low-income supplement that was sacrificed when the universal child care benefit came in? What about enhancing the child tax benefit as an opportunity to make this economy better for those who need help and also to improve our opportunities as a nation?

On the front page of *The Globe and Mail* today we saw the story of what is happening in research. Then the government stands up and says it is investing in research. It says it is investing here.

I met with some researchers back home on Friday afternoon with other colleagues from my party and my province. They are very worried. How can the government possibly cut the tri-council funding? Why would it cut funding to NSERC, to SSHRC and to CIHR? At a time when Barack Obama in the United States is investing \$10 billion in research, we are cutting it back.

It indicates a fundamental lack of understanding of research. It indicates a fundamental lack of understanding that in research you cannot take your foot off the pedal. Ten years ago we reversed the brain drain in this country, and now we are on the verge of a perfect storm the other way. The Americans are investing and we are starting to pull back. That is not productive, that is not sensible and that is not good policy.

I would be remiss if I did not mention, while I have the chance, the importance of social science and humanities research as well. The government is not only cutting funding, but they are also targeting it away from social science and humanities funding. I think the reason is that social sciences and humanities funding validates

arguments that are opposed to where the government likes to go on issues such as criminal justice and economic policy. It does not make any sense.

We are going to let this budget pass. It is hard for me to say I support it. I say we will let the budget pass. I will give the government two great suggestions, and they do not have to credit the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour when they do it. I will stand up and say, “Well done”.

First, a couple of groups are not getting much attention in this whole slowdown. One is our students and another is the group of great not-for-profit organizations in our community, the people who work with people with disabilities, who work with seniors, who do youth recreation from soccer to swimming, who work with the heart and stroke foundation and all kinds of great organizations.

A perfect way to provide a stimulus is that for \$100 million, in this day and age a very small investment, we could double the amount of money in the Canada summer jobs program. We could employ an extra 35,000 or 40,000 students this summer. They are going to be having a hard time. Companies cannot afford to hire like they used to, so students are going to be needing work.

At the same time, the not-for-profit organizations and the community organizations across this country are going to have a hard time hiring students. They are going to have a hard time keeping their own staff, so why not double the amount of the funding in the Canada summer jobs program? For \$100 million, we could provide 35,000 or 40,000 jobs and help people who are suffering hardship as well as people who work with people with disabilities, with seniors and with child care. It is a great idea, and I give that to them free of charge.

Another one has to do with HMCS *Sackville*. Canada's naval memorial is looking for a permanent place. HMCS *Sackville* is the last surviving corvette from World War II. I think there were 269 corvettes that sailed across the North Atlantic and kept the shipping lines open. Many of the Canadians who served on them did not make it both ways.

Now Canada's naval memorial, HMCS *Sackville*, is looking for a permanent home in Halifax. If we want to use the infrastructure money effectively, the Government of Canada would do well to support the Queen's Landing project and give Canada's naval memorial a permanent home. I know the Minister of National Defence would share this view as well as my respect for HMCS *Sackville*.

Government Orders

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the budget. It is not what I would like to see. I think at a time when Canada needs some political stability and economic stimulus, we will see how it goes. I cannot say that I am all that hopeful, but I am a patient man.

● (1535)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I cannot help but ask the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour how he can stand in the House and indicate that he is prepared to vote for something to which he says he is fundamentally opposed.

Where does the member draw the line? When is something so repugnant that he and others in his caucus will stand up and express their true feelings?

He will know, as others in the House know, the old expression, “They came for the women, and I was not there. They came for the people with disabilities, and I was not there. They came for the unions, and I was not there. They came for the Jews, and I was not there”.

Where and when does the member draw a line? When will he stand up for something that is as fundamental as pay equity, a human right in this country?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question, but it portrays a fundamental lack of understanding of where Canadians are.

Let us say we vote against the budget. One of two things will happen. We would form a coalition government, which was proposed before.

Let us just see what she is accusing us of. She is accusing us of not wanting to take power. She is accusing us of not wanting to make our leader the Prime Minister of Canada.

What she is acknowledging in the question is that we are putting the country first, that we want to do what is right for Canadians, that Canadians want some political stability, that Canadians want a party that will put the politics behind us for awhile and make this thing work.

We have given those members every opportunity, but it is a very short leash, and our leader has made that very clear. We will have an election pretty soon, but my office has not been busy with people calling saying that they want an election because they have not had one for so long. It is crazy. We have to give this thing a chance to work, but we have to judge it harshly, and we will do that.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is justly recognized as an astute observer in matters of social policy, spending, student assistance, research and a number of other areas. He has noted the really conspicuous propensity of the Conservative government to shrink government. At a time when government should be investing in the economy to assist the economy, could explain why that is there? Is it simply unrestrained prudence or is it just an exuberance to shrink government?

Three of the ministers over there came from an Ontario government that sold an entire highway to get government out of that. Could he comment on that?

● (1540)

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, it is a wonderful question from my colleague, one of the most knowledgeable members and parliamentarians in this place.

The fundamental question right now is how the government feels about what it is doing. I am not sure the Conservatives even look at mirrors any more. I know the Kool-Aid containers need new Kool-Aid. They have all swallowed the lines over there. However, those guys do not believe in government. They love power, but they do not like government. They hate government. Now all of a sudden they are forced into doing something. They are saying today that we have to get it money out the door faster. A couple of months ago they did not need anything, everything was wonderful.

That government does not believe in government. It believes in power. It wants to shrink the federal spending power through tax cuts and other things so it does not have the opportunity to help those most in need.

When the Liberal Party of Canada takes power again, we will take care of those who need help. That is what we were sent here to do.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, how can the member support legislation that takes away a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value, that takes away unions' rights to bargain collectively, that attacks the environment by removing the essence of the Navigable Waters Protection Act?

Two of those three things were in the fall statement on which the Liberals were ready to defeat the government. The only thing that has changed this time is the Liberals got their party financing back.

Is this not the definitive proof that the only principle the Liberals believe in is the principle of their own—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like to give the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour a brief opportunity to respond. He has 30 seconds.

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, my colleague is asking me about pay equity, the environment and the public sector. In the next election Canadians will have a choice. The government after the next election will either believe in pay equity, the environment and the public sector or it will not.

We believe in those things. We will stand up for those things and ensure that they are done the way Canadians want them to be done.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise with incredible sadness, disappointment and concern again today. It is really hard to sit in the House and to hear from Liberals that they find certain elements in the budget bill absolutely repugnant and reprehensible, yet they are able to look themselves in the mirror and vote for it.

Government Orders

The Liberals suggest that it is the Conservatives who should look in the mirror and try to face up to what they are doing. The irony is we know where the Conservatives are coming from and we are trying to change their minds. We know from statements of the past that they do not believe in equal pay for work of equal value. In fact, they are clinging to the concept of the fifties of equal pay for equal work. We know they do not respect the work of women in our country, women who have for the last 30, 40, 50 years struggled for equality. We know they do not understand what is at stake for women who desperately want to achieve in their lifetime that goal of equal status. Therefore, we understand what we are up against and we are using every tool we can think of and find at our fingertips to try to bring them to their senses. While they may agree with those antiquated regressive statements and positions, the majority of Canadians do not. Therefore, we expect the government of the day to reflect the majority will of Canadians.

However, for the Liberals, I cannot begin to find any rationale at all in the statement just made by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, that they can justify standing up and saying that they believe in something as fundamental as pay equity, but they are going to let the government do what it has to and that they are going to just hold their noses and let it happen.

Where do they draw the line? When do politicians stand up for what they believe in? When does it count? Why did we get elected than but to stand for something we believe in and fight for it?

Pay equity is unlike all the other issues we are dealing with right now. It is a fundamental human right. It is a right that is being totally eliminated in Bill C-10. Members should read the bill. The government is taking away the right of women to go to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. There is no reprieve, no avenue through our courts to seek that fundamental right entrenched in the charter.

Instead, the government is putting in place legislation that does not honour the concept of equal pay for work of equal value. In fact, it does not allow for a comparison of jobs between men and women so we can get rid of women in ghettos where they are underpaid and undervalued.

Interestingly, nowhere in the entire legislation, in this so-called equitable compensation act, is the word “men”. How can we have pay equity if there is no way to compare? The legislation is not proactive. It takes away a fundamental right. It is the loss in one fell swoop, in an instant of everything for which the women's movement has fought for more than 30 or 40 years.

The Liberals can stand in the House and say that in the interest of avoiding an election they will let it go.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Smart people.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: My Conservative friend over there suggests they are smart people. I guess by a Conservative definition, that is being really smart. That is intelligent, is it not? Do not stand for principles. Do not stand for what one believes in. Do not be committed to why one got involved in politics in the first place. Principles go out the window. Expediency counters all commitment to principles. It does not matter. Is that smart? Is that intelligent?

That is not what the voters want. They want us to stand up for something in which we believe.

We are not looking at this from the point of view of whether it is going to cause an election. We are simply saying this is fundamentally wrong.

● (1545)

The Minister of Justice, the Attorney General of this land, is wrong. He is not being forthcoming. He is not telling the truth to Canadians. We have only a few opportunities to say that and to try to convince somebody in the House, besides New Democrats and the Bloc, to stand up for their principles. We do not have any time left.

The Liberals need to think about what they are doing. They need to realize what this means in the country. They need to understand what they are doing in terms of destroying a legacy, of destroying something women before us fought for and won. They should not think about themselves; they should think about the women and others who fought for pay equity before us.

There are other parts of the bill that are up for debate this afternoon, and I want to touch on another one. This group of amendments deals with the national securities regulator. Again, I want to let all members of the House know why we are opposed to the national securities regulator. In fact, this does not come from a group of New Democrats but from many Canadians who are very worried about savings that may be lost or who are feeling the pain of having lost their life savings.

Whether we look at our seniors or our small business investors, one thing is clear. They have all told us we cannot simply put in place a national regulator and expect the world to be fixed. This will not mean anything unless the government decides it really wants to get tough, in terms of financial abuses, and wants to crack down on fraudsters and those who take advantage of others through criminal means.

I want to refer to a well-known activist in this area. The Conservatives will know the name of this person, I would hope. It is Stan Buell, president of the Small Investor Protection Association. He says very clearly that we can consider the idea of a national securities regulator. However, we know that unless we proactively work in this area to protect seniors and others from those who take advantage of them, all the national securities regulators in the world will not mean a thing. Regulators, he says, requires someone who believes in taking power to do just that. This area requires investor protection, not just regulation. He says that we have to have action that allows for whistleblowers to come forth under protective and proactive legislation.

He says:

For Canadians across Canada to receive adequate investor protection, there must be a paradigm shift in the approach to regulation.

I want my Conservative friends to listen to this very clearly so they will know where we are coming from and what we expect of them. He says:

Government Orders

Whether Canada moves to a NAFTA regulator, moves to a harmonized system with passports and Uniform Securities Laws, or retains the status quo, investors will see no improvement if the regulatory system remains based on prescriptive rules that enable the industry to circumvent regulations and to develop new products faster than rules can be changed.

That is what is at stake with respect to this part of Bill C-10 and why New Democrats are fundamentally opposed to a provision in the bill that now suddenly, out of the blue, moves toward a national securities regulator. For all of these years, nothing was done by either the Conservatives or the Liberals before them, to the point where the provinces put in place the passport system, which has been serving our country well in the face of a vacuum.

It makes no sense for the government to now proceed without indicating to Canadians that it is prepared to crack down on fraudsters and con artists who take advantage of people and their life savings. No one in the country will be assured through this budget of any kind of help or assistance on the part of the government if there is no set of protective measures put in place that will give Canadians the confidence that someone will be there when a fraudster operates and when consumers are taken advantage of. That is putting the cart before the horse, and we object to that.

● (1550)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a letter from the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, Lana Payne, addressed to me. I assume the six Liberal MPs from Newfoundland and Labrador have also received a copy of the letter, because she is asking all opposition members to take whatever steps are necessary to remove the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act from the budget implementation bill. We will have a chance to do that later today, so I hope the Liberals from Newfoundland will help to try to defeat this.

I do not know if there has been enough attention given to one of the things she complains about in the letter, that in the budget implementation legislation there is a provision that says that if an individual woman in the public sector files her own complaint through the Human Rights Commission, if a union supports and helps in that effort, the union will be fined \$50,000 for helping one of its members apply to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

I wonder if the member for Winnipeg North would care to comment on the fact that a government would impose a fine on a union for helping a member file a human rights complaint. Is that something she has ever heard of before? I know I have not. I do not know everything that has happened in this country in the last 50 years, but this is a real shock to me.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Madam Speaker, that was a shock to all of us. We knew the Conservatives were dead against something as progressive as pay equity and were going to try to do whatever they could to kill it, but on top of that, to fill up this legislation with slings and arrows and to suggest that anyone advocating in the labour movement on behalf of an employee to get the employee's rightful access to pay equity would be penalized to the tune of \$50,000 is just beyond comprehension, beyond belief.

I have never heard or seen anything like this in my 20 years of elected political office, nor in my 40 years of working in the political movement, especially in the women's movement where we have fought for so long to have pay equity in the first place. We cannot

stand here and allow pay equity to be killed in one fell swoop without doing everything we can to stop it. Everything about this legislation is wrong, wrong, wrong, and I would urge the Liberals to rethink their position.

Just today in the press we noted that the Minister of Health, a woman in the cabinet of the government, has come out in full support of the Conservative government's legislation preventing female federal public service employees from filing pay equity complaints, and supports the notion that a union would be fined \$50,000 if it gave support to an employee for pay equity. That is shameful. That is unacceptable, and I would hope that if we cannot convince the Conservatives, at least the Liberals will stand up and help us separate this part of the legislation out of Bill C-10.

When it came to equalization, the leader of the Liberal Party somehow managed to give all the members from Newfoundland and Labrador dispensation from voting against equalization. Now we are simply asking, if the Liberals really believe in pay equity and understand it is a fundamental right, will they be given dispensation to vote against Bill C-10 and stand up for the women of this country and stand up for pay equity?

● (1555)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, when someone says the contrary to the truth and does not know the facts, it is a misstatement. When someone knows the facts and says something that is contrary to the truth, of course it is a lie.

Day after day in the House, the President of the Treasury Board has been standing and saying things that are contrary to the truth. In light of the fact that he was an attorney in Manitoba and should know, what his party is doing here, removing women's rights to equal pay for work of equal value, is not what happened in Manitoba, and he keeps saying the contrary.

How would my colleague qualify the statements of the President of the Treasury Board?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Winnipeg North, of course without unparliamentary language.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Madam Speaker, I know that to give the President of the Treasury Board the name of what he really is doing would be unparliamentary, so I will not do that at this point. I will say there is not a shred of truth in anything he is saying about a resemblance between this so-called pay equity—more likely inequity—legislation and what Manitoba did.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on behalf of my constituents of Don Valley East, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-10, the budget implementation bill, but before I speak to Bill C-10, I would like to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Winnipeg North.

Government Orders

I would like to remind the member not to be so sanctimonious. She talks about principles. What principles does the NDP have? It has zero. What did it give up in 2006? It gave up Kelowna, Kyoto, the agendas of citizens and communities, and early learning and child care.

The NDP leader said “Lend me your vote.” For what? He then got into bed with the Conservatives. The NDP members talk a good talk when it comes to the vulnerable, but when it comes to the real fight, the real nuts and bolts of supporting the vulnerable, they are nowhere to be seen.

So I really do not need any lessons on principles from the member or from that party.

Going back to Bill C-10, this has been a strange week in Ottawa, with an admission from both the Prime Minister and the finance minister that Canadians should somehow expect that rushing the stimulus package out the door will result in a budgetary boondoggle by the Conservative government.

This is a remarkably frank admission by the Conservatives, considering that the money has yet to be approved by Parliament. It is defeatist language coming from the Prime Minister, who presented a self-inflicted political crisis in December when his fledgling government was forced to withdraw its November 27th economic statement that was drafted by some zealots in his office.

Last November should have been the government's first opportunity to present a stimulus package, when the whole world was aware that we were heading into tough economic times. Instead the Conservatives, who lack all impulse control when it comes to partisan games, brought in an economic statement that had more to do with political tricks than economic management.

In the fall, during the last election, the Prime Minister falsified information. He claimed that there was no economic crisis, and that if there were a recession, Canadians would already be in one. The Prime Minister even joked about the opportunity to buy stocks. This is the Prime Minister who does not have any regard for the countless Canadians who have lost their jobs.

The solution they provided in their November economic statement, which was the most absurd solution—

An hon. member: And toxic too.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: And toxic too.

Madam Speaker, the solution they provided attacked the most vulnerable. It attacked pay equity, the labour unions, et cetera.

Therefore, the Liberal opposition forced the government back to the drawing board, over the holidays, to come up with a meaningful budget to help stimulate the economy and protect the vulnerable from adverse effects.

As the official critic for national revenue, I sit on the public accounts committee, and the responsibility of public accounts is oversight of government spending. We have seen a number of areas where the government has not been accountable or transparent, and it has shown total incompetence in fiscal management. This does not span only the financial area; it deals with federal-provincial transfer

payments, the health and safety of Canadians, the environment, et cetera.

There are positive things in the budget that we had asked for, and there are areas of concern. For example, we are concerned about the management of the home renovation tax credit. This tax expenditure has the potential for disaster, and we will insist on proper accountability.

It is because of this kind of dismal performance, the government's dismal economic performance—getting rid of the \$13-billion surplus, going into a deficit, not being able to manage the economy—that the Conservatives' allies at the National Citizens Coalition, once headed by the Prime Minister, disparaged the government for poor management. In fact, the head of NCC has called on grassroots supporters of the Conservative Party, many of whom are already tapped out, to withhold political donations until they see some form of improvement on the part of the government.

● (1600)

The chief economist for the Toronto-Dominion Bank and a former senior finance official, Don Drummond, specifically pointed out that the home renovation tax credit looks like one big black hole with few safeguards and little room for accountability. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Minister of Finance will consult carefully with his officials at the Department of Finance to make sure we do not end up with a Swiss cheese stimulus package that is full of holes.

The Canadian people deserve better leadership, and as the leader of the official opposition has indicated to the government, the Liberal caucus has put the government on probation. This stimulus package will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure it is effective and accountable and that the money does move out to projects that the budget claims to support.

There are many parts of this budget that the Liberal Party fought for and are urgently needed by Canadians—for example, the national child care tax benefit, doubling tax relief provided by the working income tax benefit to encourage low-income Canadians to find and retain jobs.

We also asked for and strongly support a provision that will reduce the minimum withdrawal rate of RRIFs by 25%. As I mentioned before, the leader of the Liberal Party has indicated that Liberal support for this budget is conditional and that we will be reviewing the government's use of taxpayers' dollars quite closely.

There are some measures we welcome. These are the \$400 million for construction of social housing; \$75 million for the construction of social housing for persons with disabilities; \$400 million for first nation reserves; and \$200 million over two years in social housing. However, we have to have transparency and accountability.

The Conservatives have a habit of announcing and not delivering, especially in the infrastructure area. They have announced it in three budgets but have never made the money available. It is important that this money be delivered.

Government Orders

In consulting with my constituents of Don Valley East, they made it clear that any stimulus package must contain measures to protect the most vulnerable in our society, to secure jobs that we already have and to prepare the economy for the future. Canadians demand fiscal responsibility, and that is why we are granting conditional support.

Just today, Statistics Canada released data, and now the Minister of Finance is asking Canadians to prepare for a substantive drop in GDP. Economists are predicting a 3% to 4% drop in GDP, but this should not have come as a surprise to the government or to the Prime Minister, who claims to be an economist.

The stimulus package should have been done in October 2008, right after the election, but the Prime Minister was busy telling Canadians to buy stocks. There can be only two reasons the Prime Minister did that, either he was totally misleading Canadians or he was totally incompetent and does not know the economic environment and does not have an economic vision for the country.

If the Prime Minister and the finance minister were serious about the economic situation in Canada, they would not have called an illegal election for October 2008 and broken their own election law. They should not have been so neo-conservative in their economic statement, which had nothing, no stimulus package, and they should not have prorogued Parliament.

If the finance minister wanted \$3 billion without accountability, the Liberals could not give it to them. The government needs to grow up and take responsibility. Without a vision or accountability, it is rudderless. That is why I would like to ask my colleagues across the way what pay equity has to do with a stimulus package. What does attacking the most vulnerable have to do with a stimulus package? What does the Competition Act have to do with a stimulus package? What do navigable waters have to do with a stimulus package?

I would like to let the Conservatives know that we have put them on probation and that they cannot put a whole hodgepodge of items in the budget and expect it to go through.

• (1605)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is another opportunity for me to speak to Bill C-10, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and related fiscal measures.

This is probably one of the most important bills that we will have before us in this Parliament, although I also believe it is vitally important that the Conservative government bring forward legislation as soon as possible to deal with the unfortunate crimes that are taking place in different parts of our country. I do not want to name provinces or cities, but crime is crime is crime.

This has come to my attention because during the election there was a shooting in a school in my riding. I was asked to speak on the radio which I did. The attorney general was also on the radio. He said everything and nothing. I said to him then and I will say it again now that he should not just do the talk, he should do the walk. He should bring in the legislation. We will be there to support him. We will support good legislation that will help fight crime.

Everyone remembers that the Liberals brought in the anti-gang legislation which helped address the problems that were occurring in Quebec with the biker gangs. It helped us address problems with gangs in the greater Toronto area. I am asking the Conservatives to put their money where their mouths are and bring forward that legislation.

On the budget implementation bill, Bill C-10, my colleague, the member for Don Valley East was so eloquent in her speech. She pointed out the main reasons the Liberals are supporting the bill. We had discussions with our constituents and they told us to support the bill for various reasons.

One reason is that the economic downturn that is taking place in our country needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

As well, as I responded to the NDP members when they questioned me as to why I am supporting the government, the last thing Canada needs right now is to dish out over half a billion dollars for an unnecessary election. Our support for the bill has conditions. There is a caveat. We want to make sure that the government does what it is supposed to do.

For the last little while we have been listening to Canadians and to other parliamentarians who bring their views from their constituencies. There are some things in the budget that are merely cosmetic as far as I am concerned. For example, on the home renovations allowance of up to \$10,000, Canadians today are worried about keeping their jobs, not about fixing their basements or adding on an extension. Should Canadians go out and borrow money or use some of their savings to add on an extension, to do a kitchen renovation, to replace windows or put on a new roof so that they can get a maximum \$1,350 tax credit?

We had a similar program in our platform in the most recent election. Our program was that if Canadians wished to renovate, they would be able borrow up to \$10,000 interest free for those renovations. I do not think Canadians paid that much attention to it. They were buried by all that propaganda put out by the Conservatives. The Conservatives spent tens of millions of dollars in advertising to defame our leader at that time, to talk about the so-called carbon tax and the green economy that we wished to bring forward. Who is talking about the green economy today? President Obama. Who agrees with him? The current Prime Minister. I listened to the Prime Minister on CNN on Sunday. If my TV screen had been blank, I never would have imagined it was the Prime Minister, the leader of the Conservative government, who was speaking. Nevertheless, that is what we are dealing with today.

• (1610)

An unemployed auto worker, a gentleman by the name of John MacDonald, in talking about the retrofit program stated, "You're not going to retrofit your house if you don't have a job". He is right.

Government Orders

The most important thing today is how to get Canada moving, how to make the right investments. Most important, the budget talks about putting billions of dollars here and billions of dollars there, but that money has to get to the specific areas. We talk about shovel-ready programs. That is the new term nowadays, shovel ready. That means the shovel is ready to go in the ground. Great. If we assume that is the case, then let us explain to Canadians what the delay is in getting the money for a new recreation centre, or for upgrading a road, or for repairing a bridge. What is the delay? Proper due diligence should be done, and I think the system is there to make sure that is the case.

The Conservative government knows very clearly that we on the Liberal side are prepared to support this budget bill. We are standing here expressing our views constructively to ensure that Canadians understand why we are behind this budget bill. Canadians are applauding what the leader of the Liberal Party and the entire Liberal team has said, which is that we need to look after the nation today given what is going on. We are putting our differences aside and we are working for the good of the nation. We are stepping up to the plate.

As I said earlier on the crime and justice issues, it is very important to all of us, or at least to us on the Liberal side, that we ensure that the legislation is brought forward as soon as possible. The Minister of Justice stood the other day and a lot of hot steam came out of his mouth, which is fine, but bring forward legislation. Nothing is stopping him. I can tell him right now that the Liberal team is here to stand and support good legislation.

I also have a concern. When we talk about shovel-ready programs, moneys have been allocated in previous budgets, but to this very day, these moneys have not been delivered. I want to put some figures into the record. The Conservative government, for example, has left unspent \$88 million that was meant for two specific areas. The government had allocated \$140 million for disaster relief, but \$76.4 million is unspent. The big sheriffs from the west want to fight crime. The government allocated \$43 million in its last budget for crime prevention. The government has spent \$19.3 million and \$24 million is still sitting there.

An hon. member: No, it's gone. It has been re-spent.

Mr. John Cannis: Oh, it's been re-spent, Madam Speaker. Where did it go? It could not have gone to the arts. It could not have gone to our cultural communities, because the government cut them as well. It could not have gone to our cities, because the cities are having to raise levies. For example, there is an increase of \$60 per car registration in the city of Toronto. A young person who wants to go to a swimming pool has to pay an extra levy. Property taxes have gone up in the city of Toronto by almost 4%. How are the seniors going to afford it? The government is not spending the money where it should. These are just some examples. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which we all support, is complaining and saying to give the municipalities the money to do the work.

In closing, we have to change the system because there are cities, towns and other areas that cannot afford to put in their one-third share. We have to find ways and means to help those areas get their share of infrastructure funding.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member, who just gave a passionate, heartfelt speech about the Conservative government—with some criticism, of course—what he thinks about a very recent story in the weekend media.

During his speech, he said that he and his party are standing up to defend good legislative measures. I have my doubts because as recently as this weekend, Saturday to be more precise, more than 100 unionized public service workers demonstrated in front of a Halifax hotel where Liberal Party members were meeting. The leader of the Liberal Party of Canada was there to speak. But the crowd was not there to demonstrate against the government, but against the Liberal Party, which supported Bill C-10.

According to the representative of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which was also present, Bill C-10 contains three poison bills, namely a public service wage cap, a rewrite of the federal pay equity legislation and a complicated new employment insurance process.

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

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Madam Speaker, between 1993 and 2006 when the Liberals governed this country, I do not recall one demonstration against the government by the group the hon. member talked about. Why? Because we worked with them.

With the previous Mulroney government we all remember demonstrations. We all remember what happened with the seniors. We all remember the Prime Minister meeting with Mrs. Joyce Carter, the widow of a veteran, and how he, in essence, misled her. I cannot use the word "lie"; I will just say that he misled her.

The Liberals have a record to stand on. When it comes to pay equity, we know our record. It is there, but I do not have time to go into the details. When it comes to the civil servants, we had harmony, we had dialogue, we found ways to solve our problems and we did not have one demonstration.

•(1620)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member remonstrates about the lack of attention in the Conservative budget to support for renewable energy development and implementation and to energy retrofits rather than simply building decks. Around the world the International Energy Agency, the European nations and now the Obama administration are shifting their budgets over to the development of green energy. Why on earth is the member voting for the budget which includes none of that?

Government Orders

Mr. John Cannis: Madam Speaker, we have to look at this given what is happening to our country and given what is happening globally.

I do agree with the hon. member that it is an important issue. It is something we had mapped out, outlined and committed to in our platform in the last election. We are committed to making sure that green policy is part of the Liberal policy.

That is what the Prime Minister was saying the other day on CNN to my surprise. That is what he has been discussing with the President of the United States. To everyone's surprise, all of a sudden, the Conservatives are hugging trees along with everybody else.

The answer is that I cannot speak for the Prime Minister and his government. I can only speak on behalf of my constituents and what I am hearing is that, unlike the NDP, Canadians do not want an election right now. They want us to work things out. They want us to move forward to help maintain and improve the job situation in Canada. They want to make sure our institutions are solid and that our companies are solid.

Today, GDP was down 3.1% or 3.2%, so we have to find a way to turn that around, to bring back the good days of Liberal management and manage the economy well.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as it is my first opportunity to talk about the budget, I am pleased to rise to speak not just on the amendments that have been presented but to attempt to capture the budget's themes and relate them to the residents in my constituency of York South—Weston. Hopefully, members will find that there are some similarities with respect to issues across the country because that is why we are here. We are here to extract the best from the provided legislation, the budget in this case, and to criticize the shortcomings.

For those who are watching, this is Bill C-10, the budget implementation bill. There are hundreds of amendments that have been moved to varying degrees, exercising the will of the opposition to impress on the government those shortcomings. The shortcomings in the areas of pay equity and employment insurance have been discussed and commented on much better than I could. I am going to let it rest on the record that the government has been listening. It has listened from the very beginning, when the opposition indicated in the budget overview that there was no response to the kinds of issues that Canadians across this country could see on the horizon.

I would like to talk about 10 areas as briefly as I can. First, I think that it behooves us to talk about the manufacturing sector. There is probably no area in the country that has been harder hit than Southern Ontario. We were told years in advance that there was a crisis brewing within the manufacturing sector in Ontario. I do not need to dwell on this, but a huge amount of the disposable part of the gross domestic product comes from Ontario and that goes toward equalization. We have just been informed that the GDP is dropping very rapidly, notwithstanding the situation in Ontario. If there is a gap between the growth and the GDP, that impacts on our regional ability to contribute to equalization.

That was a case that was made. None of us come to the House with clean hands. That is an issue that was not addressed. My hope is

that out of this discussion, the issue with respect to equalization and its impact on Ontario is placed under the microscope of concern. However, the creation of a regional authority providing \$1 billion for a community adjustment fund that will look at manufacturing, particularly in Southern Ontario, and attempt to stabilize, reinvest in and revitalize the sector is a step in the right direction.

Small businesses are reeling in my constituency, especially those related to the automotive sector. Those that are not employed by the Big Three but are peripheral to the automotive sector, involved in various used parts and creating new parts for the industry, are being hurt very much. I am encouraged that, with more funds being allocated through the Canada Small Business Financing Program and the Business Development Bank, some of my constituents and the small businesses in the area I represent will find that there is hope in this budget. The sooner we can ignite that hope and bring it from the declaratory stage to the implementation stage the better.

When we talk about a more sustainable environment, we cannot help but look at the transformation that is occurring with respect to industry. We have talked about green jobs and green technology. There is no question that there is capacity built into the budget to develop integrated technologies across this country.

● (1625)

The natural resources committee is looking into this with ongoing hearings. We must begin bit by bit contributing to a more integrated and technologically transformative and green economy, certainly producing climate change results that will excite Canadians and that will begin to be part of this global transformation that is taking place.

I would like to think that in York South—Weston, for example, in the Kodak plant that is no longer in existence, that 60 acres would find an incubating taking place that would see high value added activity on that site, and that it would contribute to the city of Toronto's green plan and to green plans similar to it right across the country.

There is no question that local and community investments in cultural, sports and community centres are part of the budget. In York South—Weston the boards of education have been reeling, along with the city, in trying to continue to rehabilitate their recreational facilities. It is the proverbial caucus race. They are investing but they are falling further and further behind. We now have an opportunity, through cooperation with cities like Toronto and cities and communities across the country, to make a substantive change in retrofitting those buildings and bringing them up-to-date. The legacy from that will be that future generations will benefit.

Government Orders

Investments in federal infrastructure projects through the federal infrastructure programs are high on the list for municipalities but this is where I have one criticism. It relates to the one-third, one-third, one-third that has been discussed. Many municipalities are going through a credit crisis in looking at their fiscally sustainable future and possibly not being able to participate in the programs that have been etched out as partnership programs. The suggestion we would put forward in this regard is that we do have the mechanism, for example, of the commitment of the federal gas tax and the ability to front-end load that by using it and taking hopefully the revenues that might come from it and reinvesting them back in as a revolving form of financing into infrastructure programs that are going to stimulate the economy. There is absolutely no question about that.

The government has to listen to the critiques that are being made of these programs and in the mechanism that has been suggested by the opposition where there are quarterly reviews coming forward. If that part of the stimulus program is not working, then there has to be a recalibrating of that mechanism, so that we can extract the highest value in the shortest amount of time from our partners at the municipal level.

Regarding the whole matter of investments in housing in my area, there are many social housing units. It is a very high needs area and this budget makes it very clear that investment in housing, social housing in particular, and the rehabilitation of old housing stock, is a high priority.

Finally, I would like to talk about students and an aging workforce and what the budget provides, but I want to finish with two issues that are really time-fused issues. That is the issue of private pension plans and the issue with respect to deposit insurance with respect to our banking institutions and so on. These are two areas that the government must take under greater scrutiny because the whole issue of private pensions and deposits will become more and more an issue as the actuarial differences between existing investments and their ability to cover both deposits and pensions is strained to the limit.

• (1630)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his reflective and well thought-out discussion, as well as the previous member.

They both talked about companies and housing. Last week I met a taxi driver who proudly told me he had earned his bachelor's degree at 19, his master's at 21, and has since run a construction company and a real estate agency. In the last two months, both of those businesses have failed.

I asked him what we could do to help, and I will put that to my hon. colleague. He wants to know what the government could have done? What would help him is to restore consumer confidence.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Madam Speaker, there's no question that we have a huge potential that is both undervalued and underutilized in our human capital. The government has talked about making eligible loan amounts for small businesses, talked about a different form of capital allowance and how that is charged back, and the taxable chronology within which that has to be paid.

There are many mechanisms that can help small business. There is one that I find is absolutely necessary, and that is to recognize that

the support services for a small business, the accounting services, the advertising services, the ability to access provincial and local, municipal support mechanisms, the information that is available, the supports that are available are not there.

The idea of building local business incubators, where those services can be provided, is kind of looking at the national issue but thinking locally. Providing that kind of infrastructure will help those young people and those who have been working with corporations or are having a career change, and help them to start their own business. The capital and the credit access is important, but the actual infrastructure that will help them maintain and carry that business on is absolutely necessary for their success.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would simply like to remind my hon. Liberal colleague that, unfortunately, there is sometimes a huge gap between words and actions. In terms of words, I find the member's ideas very interesting, but in terms of actions, how can we make things better for society, especially in this time of economic crisis, and support a bill like the one before us today? Ultimately, they are maintaining a little latitude, but, really, there are no specific measures, particularly concerning pay equity for women.

In that regard, how can the member be so interesting in terms of what he says, but then, in terms of what he does, so ready to support a budget like this one?

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Tonks: Madam Speaker, there is an old Yogi Berra phrase that says either "When you can do it, it ain't boastin'" or "When you do it, it ain't boastin'". The question is well put.

The mechanism that has been suggested generally by the opposition with respect to quarterly reports is really an attempt to galvanize Parliament and its apparatus to deal with those reports, and then to make substantive changes if that stimulus package is not working as my colleague is afraid will occur.

It is our challenge to mobilize the capacity of Parliament through our committee structure, I would suggest to take those reports and where the value-added that was calculated into the stimulus package is not being achieved to suggest mechanisms that would change that, that would change either the formula or the programs that are being put forward, if they are not successful.

That would be the approach that I would use. Rather than approach the budget and say that it cannot and will not work, I would suggest that the way we should approach it is that we must make it work. It is within Parliament's capacity to do that. We are accountable to do that.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): No other members have risen, we will move on.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The recorded division on Motion No. 1 stands deferred.

[*English*]

The next question is on Motion No. 2. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Savoie): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Savoie): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Savoie): The recorded division on Motion No. 2 stands deferred. The recorded division will also apply to Motions Nos. 3 to 6.

[*Translation*]

The question is on Motion No. 66. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The recorded division on Motion No. 66 stands deferred. The recorded division will also apply to Motions Nos. 67 to 86.

[*English*]

I will now propose the motions in Group No. 2.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 317.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 318.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 319.

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 320.

Motion No. 11

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 321.

Motion No. 12

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 322.

Motion No. 13

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 323.

Motion No. 14

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 324.

Motion No. 15

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 325.

Motion No. 16

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 326.

Motion No. 17

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 327.

Motion No. 18

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 328.

Motion No. 19

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 329.

Motion No. 20

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 330.

Motion No. 21

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 331.

Motion No. 22

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 332.

Motion No. 23

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 333.

Motion No. 24

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 334.

Motion No. 25

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 335.

Motion No. 26

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 336.

Motion No. 27

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 337.

Motion No. 28

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 338.

Government Orders

Motion No. 29

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 339.

Motion No. 30

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 340.

Motion No. 31

That Bill C-10 be amended by deleting Clause 341.

He said: Madam Speaker, we are presently considering the second group of amendments to Bill C-10, the budget implementation bill. We want to delete one of the Conservatives' deplorable provisions concerning the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

[*English*]

It is a bit disarming to listen to the Liberals stand, one after the other, and explain that they are actually in favour of protecting the environment, women's rights and collective bargaining rights but they will vote against them.

It is worthwhile to take a moment to give context to the amendment that is before us and see what has happened in terms of the economy in Canada and with regard to the actions of the Conservatives over the past couple of months.

We remember that during the election campaign the Conservatives kept saying that there was no problem in Canada, until the wheels started to fall off the economy in the last two weeks of that campaign. Then they really did not have any place to hide. All through the rest of October, after they were elected into a minority situation here in Parliament, and in November, they kept insisting that there would not even be a recession in Canada. Then they invented the term "technical recession", whatever that was supposed to mean. It meant that we were in a recession, of course, like the rest of the world.

On November 27, in what was supposed to have been an economic update, a fiscal and financial update for the government, the Conservatives, instead of taking care of the economy and recognizing that we were in dire straits like the rest of the world, decided to go after their reform base, go for some of the nuggets of the extreme right and embed them into this fiscal and financial update.

Some of the things it contained were an attack on women's rights by removing a woman's right to have equal pay for work of equal value and an attack on collective bargaining rights. They were taking away the right to collective bargaining and to enforce collective bargaining, even though 104,000 civil servants had just signed. It showed utmost bad faith by the government.

Finally, the Conservatives were taking out the clean financing of political parties that was brought in, in the wake of the Liberal sponsorship scandal. We remember that when the Liberal Party of Canada stole millions of dollars of taxpayer money it was necessary to bring in a cleaner form of financing for political parties.

It was interesting that two months later, day for day, January 27, 2009, two of those things were still there: the attack on women's rights was still in the budget, and it is here in Bill C-10; and the attack on union rights and collective bargaining rights is still in Bill C-10. The only thing that was changed for the better was that they took out the attack on the clean political party financing.

In November, the Liberals were willing to vote down the government, supposedly for all those issues, saying that it was not a stimulus package, that it had all these horrible things in it like the attack on women's rights, the attack on unions and an attack on clean party financing. The only thing that was changed with regard to all of that in the January budget was that the Liberals got their beefsteak back.

We must remember that the Liberals rely more on direct public financing of political parties than any other political party in the House. Almost as if to prove that it takes at least three odious measures to make the Conservatives and their troglodytes happy, they replaced the removal of the party financing with something else that is equally odious, which is what we are about to deal with now, the removal of the essence of the Navigable Waters Protection Act, a protection for the environment that has existed in Canada for over 100 years.

My colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona has already had an occasion in the last few weeks to demonstrate that there are documents to prove that the Conservatives want to remove environmental assessments for projects that are under \$10 million. Those were clear documents that the government was never able to deny.

What is so absurd there is that it is not the value of the project that matters. If we are back-filling a precious wetland for a project that is worth \$9.9 million, it matters not. It is the value of the ecosystem we have to look at, which is why we do an environmental assessment.

● (1645)

We must not forget that in these tough economic times, everything becomes an excuse for the Conservatives to bring in their right-wing agenda. They are going to remove environmental protections, especially the safeguards provided by an environmental assessment.

They always talk about the need to streamline. This is their new leitmotif. They say that things will be more flexible and a bit faster. This is the thing that they are talking about again with regard to the \$3 billion slush fund that they want to bring in for Conservative ridings.

What the Conservatives forget is that some of us have actually been in a position to do something about these issues. When I was Quebec's minister of the environment, we signed a deal with the federal government. David Anderson was the minister at that time. The deal was a model. That was streamlining. We made sure there would be only one hearing and that responsible federal and provincial people would be present because they had different jurisdictions and different things they were competent to look at. There was no removal of the process and no lessening of the safeguards for the environment, but it made it go faster.

Government Orders

This is an old canard that one often hears. I heard the former minister of the environment and current transport minister repeat in the House something he had already said in committee. It is an anecdote but it shows his mindset. He claims, based on what he heard from the Premier of B.C., that the Navigable Waters Protection Act is the greatest job killer in Canada. Can anyone imagine the absurdity of a statement like that? He says that with a straight face, which proves that either he is very good at saying things that are contrary to the truth and not letting it show or that he is just too dim to realize that what he is saying does not make any sense. It is like when he used to tell us that he was bringing in a fixed ceiling for greenhouse gas emissions when in fact he had intensity targets. It is just possible that he did not know the difference between the two, which was the conclusion I finally came to.

A new subsection is being brought in to the Navigable Waters Protection Act that would allow the minister to create new categories of things that would no longer be subject to the normal protection of the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The enabling provisions would allow not only orders in council, but ministerial orders. An order in council at least needs to go through cabinet. There is a vetting process. A ministerial order is something generated within the department. This would remove large numbers of waterways from the purview of the Navigable Waters Protection Act, the statute that has been a model.

If we look at what we have done in Canada to protect our waterways compared to what has been done in Europe, in the south we have had our problems but, general speaking, across this country we have done relatively well. Navigable and floatable waters have always been the responsibility of the federal government. I can say that there are a lot of mayors across Canada who are waiting for nothing more than to see this type of protection disappear so that their pet projects can go through. They often talk about that.

This has no more to do with stimulating spending than removing a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value and no more than removing a union's right to collectively bargain effectively by having it be applicable. This is what the Conservative government is all about. It is deeply cynical to use the vehicle of a budget in tough economic times to slip in the continued poisoned pills of its doctrine.

This should in fact be two bills. In committee, the New Democratic Party of Canada tried to take out the part on navigable waters, as did the Bloc Québécois, and tried to take out the reprehensible part that would remove a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value.

It was interesting to listen to the government on the weekend. The statute that we are debating right now runs 528 pages. It went through committee in a single morning. Does anyone know what the government was saying on the weekend? It was saying that it was being held up in committee. Can anyone imagine the temerity of making that type of representation?

• (1650)

[Translation]

That is quite simply false. The Navigable Waters Protection Act is part of a collection of legislation developed in Canada over the last hundred years. Canada once had the well deserved reputation of doing things right.

A moment ago, I was listening carefully to the hon. member for York South—Weston. He said the quarterly reports currently requested will galvanize Parliament.

[English]

The last time I heard a Liberal use the word “galvanize” it was Eddie Goldenberg, the former chief of staff to Prime Minister Chrétien, when he admitted that when the Liberals signed Kyoto it was supposedly to galvanize public opinion. They had no plan and no intention of meeting the targets. Instead of reducing the targets by 6%, they increased them by 30%. That is the Liberals. They have no principles. They are voting with the Conservatives. No one should listen to a word they say. At least the NDP is in the House standing up for Canadians and for principles.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I listened to the member for Outremont, I accept that it is probably very bad for him to put some contraband in the back of the ambulance, in other words, to piggyback changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act onto Bill C-10.

I do not think the hon. member or his party realize that this is not exactly about legislative purism. This is not about the NDP, or the Liberals, or the Bloc or even the Conservatives.

Bill C-10, in a relative sense, is massive legislative initiative to create investment for the Canadian economy. There are warts in the bill, but I urge the hon. member to talk about the stimulus package. If there are warts and mistakes in the bill, we should be able to fix them later.

Could he comment on that?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): 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 of Etobicoke North, Agriculture; the hon. member for Yukon, Arctic Sovereignty.

The hon. member for Outremont.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, the bill makes it contingent that to have the money flow on infrastructure, municipalities and provinces must match the funds. I have heard a series of people from the Liberal party say that the municipalities and the provinces do not have those funds.

The NDP proposed a change to ensure that the money would flow. It would not have required a single dollar more, it was not a confidence motion and it would not have changed the budget, but it was ruled admissible in committee.

Those members voted against it. They do not have any principles. It is not a question of legislative purism to evoke rights. There once were a certain number of people in the Liberal Party of Canada who believed in rights. I remember famously Clifford Lincoln saying that rights were rights were rights and always would be rights.

There is a new young member from the Liberal Party whose father brought in the Charter of Rights. They have the word “liberties” in their title, but the Liberal Party no longer represents any principles and it does not understand the notion of rights.

Government Orders

•(1655)

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear the member for Outremont hold forth on things like ideology and his need to contain the Conservative ideology.

He has a higher duty in the House to find relief for people who need help. No member in the House is sacrosanct or immune from that responsibility. The House has gone on for a time. Some of that time may be required. Issues may need to be resolved, but there is also that responsibility.

By not mentioning the salient difference between a \$5 billion cut in November and an \$18 billion stimulus package in January, the member fails to inform his constituents and others that this is the essential difference that we need to find a way on which to agree. We need to get jobs out there for people who do not have them. Fix these problems, assert the principles, but find a practical means to do that.

I appreciate the member may have found some frustration in doing that, but how he is going to help us get those jobs happening in a timely manner—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Outremont.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, let us talk about principles, shall we?

The budget bill claims that there will be \$4 billion in savings from as yet identified government cutbacks, this from a government that increased program spending by \$40 billion a year, or almost 25% in less than three years. It also claims that there will be unidentified sales of assets. That is supposed to be stimulus spending. How will that provide any stimulus to the economy?

The problem with the intervention from the person who just spoke from the Liberal Party is he is trying to give himself a clear conscience as he votes against women's right, the environment and social and collective bargaining rights. He deserves none.

He is the embodiment of the cynicism in the Canadian population with regard to the political class generally. He is not just letting his constituents down; he is failing the party that he represents, as party that once believed in rights and clearly no longer does.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the next collection of proposed amendments, specifically on the subject of navigable waters. I know that quite a number of my colleagues are concerned, some of them very concerned, so I will illustrate very briefly the nature of those concerns.

First, I might refer to my colleague, the member for Outremont, whose assumption about Liberal voting motives was entirely incorrect. He seemed to believe that our voting the budget bill through was motivated by the removal of the political financing component, which was present in the November economic statement. However, I would point out for my NDP friend that while economics is not the strong point of the NDP, never is, never has been, the motive of my party to support the budget is entirely and 100% economic.

If we go back to the November economic statement, there was what could be called negative fiscal stimulus. There were \$2 billion to \$4 billion of cuts in that statement and on those grounds alone it was entirely unacceptable.

Let us flash forward to the January budget. Inadequate though it was in many ways, and I will get on to that in a minute, at least it put \$18 billion of stimulus into the economy at a moment when the economy was in great need. The NDP might not understand the difference between a stimulus of minus \$4 billion and a stimulus of plus \$18 billion, but that shift alone was sufficient for members on the Liberal side to support the budget. Right now Canada is in the middle of an economic crisis and we need to get that money out the door.

Returning to the subject of the amendments, my concerns and the concerns of my colleagues, some of whom are more knowledgeable than I, is that under these the minister of transport can declare any waterway in the country unnavigable. In so doing, he or she thereby bypasses a possible trigger for environmental review. Some of my colleagues are concerned that this will water down or weaken environmental protection in general, specifically for navigable waters.

The Liberal Party put limits on this. At hearings, the Liberal Party was successful in getting committee agreement on time limits and sunset clauses so these measures, if adopted, would not be permanent. I might point out that under the suggestion from our party, we devoted an evening of hearings recently in the finance committee to those who were concerned about navigable waters.

If we go to the most fundamental point, the concerns with this amendment is that it potentially interferes with a right going back to Roman times, and that is the right of all Canadians to travel unimpeded on all waterways. For many Canadians, this is a right about which they are passionate. Sometimes it might be a view held by urban types who are avid canoeists, but also many rural people, including the Conservative base, fishers, anglers, rural people who also care deeply about navigable waters.

This is the nature of some of the concerns that my party and my colleagues have expressed in terms of these amendments.

Some members may ask why the Liberal Party is voting against this amendment and voting for the passage of the budget. The reason is very simple. Canada is in the middle, hopefully the middle, possibly the beginning, but we do not know the end, of a major recession. Today statistics showed that our gross domestic product in the fourth quarter of last year fell at a greater rate than at any time in nearly 20 years.

The government has done nothing to support the economy. For months the government was in a state of denial. The Prime Minister back in September said that if we were to have a recession, it would have happened by now. Today, if there is one thing we have learned is that statement was entirely wrong.

Government Orders

•(1700)

The government has delayed and delayed. It delayed through calling an election. It delayed through its disastrous November statement. It delayed through proroguing Parliament. Finally, we have a budget before us. We are saying it is time to get the money out of the door because so many unemployed Canadians and future unemployed Canadians need support. We need those infrastructure programs. We need those other injections of money to support the economy at this very difficult time.

We believe Canadians want politicians, all of us in this chamber, to focus single-mindedly on the economic crisis that, unfortunately, has engulfed the world, and the world includes Canada. That is why, notwithstanding concerns we have in the area of navigable waters and concerns that we have in many other areas of the budget, we have nevertheless decided to support the budget for the one and only one simple reason. The economy needs help. The budget, inadequate, reprehensible though it is in many ways, does move in the direction of providing that help, and that is why we support it.

However, we are not giving the government a blank cheque. Our leader has announced that the government is under probation and that there will be a series of quarterly reports, which will hold the government to account. We, and presumably other opposition parties, will see whether it has done what it said it would do in getting money out the door. We will see how the economy evolves and judge whether the actions the government has proposed have been sufficient or whether more actions are needed. We also will judge it according to the five criteria that our leader has established with regard to the budget and economy.

First, does the budget have adequate measures to support vulnerable Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Because it is always the most vulnerable who are most likely to feel the negative effects of a recession.

Second, does this budget give us the means to create jobs today? Will the funds promised for infrastructure be spent appropriately? Will this budget create jobs for the future?

In our opinion, this budget is inadequate because it contains almost nothing for science, for education, to help students, or for innovation and research. In fact, there have been cuts to research. So in terms of creating jobs for the future, this budget is inadequate.

Lastly, there are two more criteria. Is the budget regionally balanced? Do we have a guarantee that deficits will not be permanent?

•(1705)

[*English*]

We will judge the budget, the economy and the government according to those five criteria. Over time we will make a judgment as to whether additional measures are required and we will watch like hawks to see the government gets the promised money out the door.

There are many bad parts of the budget. Navigable waters may be one. The government's action on pay equity is another. Many

Canadians, not just big business but small business, object to putting through fundamental changes to the Competition Act with essentially no debate. Whatever the merits of the content, the process is egregiously bad.

As I have said at least once, as politicians today in the midst of arguably the worst economic crisis in a generation, our minds must be focused on job number one, which is to support the Canadian economy. That is why, despite all the warts and inadequacies of the budget, the Liberal Party will support the budget.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):

Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. Liberal colleague. On one hand, he is promoting the need to adopt budgetary measures as soon as possible to stimulate the economy, but on the other hand, he acknowledges that the budget contains some rather negative measures. If I understood his speech correctly, these measures would have led him to vote against it in other times. I would like him to explain how it is that he is more or less willing to go back on his previous commitments in order to support such a budget. Indeed, we know that, among the projects that are supposed to begin immediately, there is a very good chance that those involving navigable waterways could cause considerable damage to the environment.

How can he reconcile these two situations? He is for environmental measures, but at the end of the day, he is in favour of this budget and the environmental measures go out the window. I do not understand.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, in politics as in life, we have to make choices and set priorities. For us and for the vast majority of Canadians today, since we are in the midst of an economic crisis, the priority must be the economy, government support for the economy and for protecting and saving jobs. My colleague will agree with me that in Quebec, as in the rest of the country, there have been huge job losses, and economists predict that more jobs will be lost in the future. Even though some other aspects of this bill are unsatisfactory, we have to strike a balance and make a choice. For us, notwithstanding the negative aspects of this bill, the priority must be to support the economy. That is why we support this bill.

•(1710)

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has said that his top concern in how we will vote on the budget is that many people are out of work and that many people in Canada have the right to have well-paid work.

He also admits that he does not know much about environmental assessment. Let me take the opportunity to inform him that the very purpose of an environmental impact assessment is to address impacts that communities downstream may suffer. The whole purpose of the process is to identify those impacts and to order those who will cause those impacts to mitigate them so that people egregiously impacted do not have to bear that cost. It is a very direct financial implication.

Perhaps he could address the fact that he thinks it is just fine that we use this backhanded way of amending a very critical federal law that is intentionally meant to make sure that those who bear the brunt of the impact do not bear the cost.

Government Orders

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I said I knew nothing about environmental assessment. I think I know a certain amount, but I would be the first to acknowledge that there are those in my party who are experts in this area and certainly know more than I do, just as I think I know more than some of my caucus colleagues in certain other areas, such as economics. It is not a statement that I am totally ignorant, but a statement that I am not expert in this area.

I would make the point that thanks to Liberal efforts when this proposed legislation was in committee, we did manage to put time limits and sunset clauses on these activities. I certainly could not rule out the possibility of a bad decision, but if a bad decision were taken under this bill, and with the discretion of the ministers in the government, at least the decision would not have a permanent impact, because there would be a time limit. There would be a sunset clause, and that would at least mitigate any damage done.

The other point, at the risk of being too repetitious, is that job one has to be to get the dollars out to support the economy and support jobs, and that is why we support—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

• (1715)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the amendments put forward by the NDP to eliminate the amendment to the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Last week, a number of witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance said they disagreed completely with the government's plan to introduce such changes in the Budget Implementation Act, 2009. The arguments we heard were quite commendable, in my opinion. The witnesses explained that many infrastructure projects will no doubt be carried out without an environmental assessment. We know that infrastructure projects that involve navigable waterways affect the environment, and not just for one, two or three weeks. Eventually, we will create problems that will do permanent damage to the environment.

Building a bridge where there should not be one, rather than making changes to a structure to take into account the specific environmental conditions and the navigability of these waters, will lead to major problems in future. In the name of development, and to the detriment of the environment, projects will go ahead that, one day or another, will be counterproductive. People are saying that we have to move quickly even if we contravene the Environmental Protection Act. It will be future generations who are affected and who will pay the price. Yet, to be productive globally, corporations must increasingly look at the big picture.

The second reason why the Bloc Québécois will support these amendments is because it is obvious that the Conservative government knew that the Liberals would support this budget implementation bill. They took advantage of this and included a series of measures that have absolutely nothing to do with the budget process. I am referring to pay equity as well as navigable waters. It

makes absolutely no sense for the Conservative government to have included in the budget implementation bill a clause to amend this act.

The Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities carried out important studies of amendments that could be made. This issue should have gone back to that committee. These amendments do not belong in the budget implementation bill. That is the second reason why the Bloc Québécois will support the NDP amendment to eliminate these changes.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at this stage in considering Bill C-10, we are looking at amendments proposed and discussed earlier. The particular focus of these amendments relates to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, which is contained in part 7 of the bill.

As I mentioned in some questions and comments earlier, this bill is very much about the economy. In fact, everything is about the economy. The amendments proposed now, while arguably rational, were or are calculated to distract from the economic aspects of this bill.

I will admit that I too had prepared amendments in relation to this particular aspect, and to some other aspects, of this bill. I did not proceed with them on the order paper, because my party is of the view that the economy and Canadians who are now at financial risk in the economy deserve greater attention from all of us in the House than do some of the more technical aspects of this bill.

However, in discussing these amendments, I want the record to show that I have some degree of discomfort with the methodology adopted by the government in its decision to include as part of the stimulus package amendments to this very old piece of federal legislation.

It is there for very good reasons. The Navigable Waters Protection Act assures federal jurisdiction for shipping on our navigable waters, an area that continues to be of huge importance to us. These changes are arguably needed in the act, but why has the government chosen a stimulus package and placed technical amendments in the updating of a very old statute in a bill like this?

There actually is a reason, and I think I can see it. It is that the government has seen that there may be some infrastructure investment in bridges, wharves, canals, navigation buoys, levees, dams, docks and other types of structures. These could be the targets of infrastructure spending. Some of the provisions of the Navigable Waters Protection Act might delay or stall the investments in these works.

Government Orders

There are two aspects to this piggybacking of the Navigable Waters Protection Act in the stimulus package: the measures being put forward for adoption may arguably speed up investment, but they may directly or indirectly reduce the potential for protection of aspects of our navigable waters. Most of us around this place will have an eye for that, and we understand it. It is not as if we do not have environmental protection legislation out there. It is not as if we do not have real scientists, engineers and architects preparing this stuff. However, at the end of the day it is very important that we not lose sight of the proper way of doing things with respect to the environment, with respect to access of our citizens to these waters and with respect to the recreation industry. A lot of us have received information from the Canadian Rivers Network. That perspective is very legitimate.

The policy aspect of a minister doing end runs around environmental protection legislation and other legislation that might provide for the public interest but that might also delay investment in a stimulus package is a very important consideration. We are not inviting our government here to be stupid, but we are nervous that the legislation will provide some fast-tracking that places the public interest at risk.

● (1720)

In addition to that, there are clauses in the bill that have actually removed the right of Parliament to review the government and ministerial activity after it has taken place. I cannot for the life of me figure out why the government has done this. We may regard this as just technical, but I do not regard it as technical.

There are actually seven clauses in the bill. I will put them on the record right now: clauses 244, 275, 279, 287, 292, 328 and 453. Each of those clauses purports to remove from Parliamentary scrutiny the administrative regulatory action of a government minister or the governor in council. Some of those involve the Navigable Waters Protection Act and other provisions involve other aspect of legislation in the stimulus package. That is simply unacceptable.

Some may say that the impact was inadvertent because the real purpose of putting these provisions in the bill was to avoid the slowing down by the regulatory process at the front end, the prepublication, the consultation, et cetera. Not only is the government trying to remove that pre-enactment scrutiny but it also has the impact of preventing Parliament from reviewing the regulatory actions to begin with, and that involves a whole slew of regulatory activity, which includes orders and exemptions, certificates, rules and directions.

Bill C-10, in these clauses, authorizes either the governor in council or ministers to take these acts and then says to Parliament that these are not statutory instruments and it cannot look at them after. That is absolutely wrong.

It is more than likely that someone from the other place will read some of the debate and more than likely that someone in the other place, that is the Senate, may take an interest in this issue. But at some point, these particular Bill C-10 enactments, including these provisions involving the Navigable Waters Protection Act, will have to be turned around. They will have to be fixed.

I cannot continue comfortably here in the House without trying to do something to fix this. It is now a question of a number of members in the House holding their noses while we pass this economic stimulus package. I cannot stress enough the stupidity of tagging onto economic stimulus legislation a whole lot of contraband in the back of the ambulance. It is not the right place to do it.

I recall another bill in a previous Parliament, also Bill C-10 coincidentally, where, in making a change to the Income Tax Act, this particular government thought it might want to test the waters on what many regarded as a censorship issue. That was just as dumb. We should not be using finance and economic stimulus legislative enactments to deal with other issues like updating the Navigable Waters Protection Act. This should happen in a piece of stand alone legislation.

The bill also has amendments involving the Competition Act. Those amendments should also be stand-alone legislation so the House can truly sink its teeth into it. The problem now is, and I hope Canadians realize it, that we have one bill with all of this in it. The main thrust of the bill is economic stimulus, but we have all of these other add-ons in the back of the truck and a lot of these add-ons, we do not like.

The amendments here are, in part, calculated to get rid of some of that extra baggage, but we are in a situation now, if we are to get the stimulus package moneys through Parliament, authorized, out on the street and creating jobs, we have to pass the bill the way it is now. I regret that, but that is a political reality.

● (1725)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in essence, what we have before us in the amendment to which the hon. member for Outremont spoke, and I seconded, is a matter of both substance and process.

It is a matter of process in that the members of this House either support a Bush-type way of making law in Canada similar to the way that it was formerly done in the United States where they would secrete amendments to significant laws in things like a budget bill or they believe in openness and transparency. Either the members of this House believe in supporting the kinds of open transparent processes of developing environmental law in Canada that have gone on, or they do not.

Government Orders

There has been in place in Canada, since the enactment of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, a process called the regulatory advisory committee. It is a process where representatives of industry, provincial governments, the federal government and the public come forward to talk about whether changes needed to be made to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and its associated acts, like the Navigable Waters Protection Act, CEPA, the Fisheries Act, or whether they believe that we should simply sneak it into a bill where there is no opportunity for transparency and participation. Either this Parliament believes in the laws that we pass and are in effect or we do not.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act very clearly prescribes that there will be review of the act within five years to be delivered by a committee of the Senate or a committee of Parliament. Do we believe in what that law says, or do we not?

The government across the way is following a completely different procedure outside the scope of what the law provides. A review of our Environmental Assessment Act is going on somewhere today, and we do not know where. It certainly has not been referred to the parliamentary committee on the environment where it is supposed to be referred.

What about the substance of the budget? What the budget is doing is taking various actions that it would like to do to amend significant law and policy in Canada, and just slip it through in a budget bill.

So, either the members of this House believe that substantive matters should come before this House and be openly debated and, in turn, turned over to the parliamentary committees and provide the opportunity for all affected parties, whether they are industry, whether they are municipalities, whether they are provincial officials or federal officials, to come forward and discuss proposed amendments to those laws, make decisions and recommendations which would then come before this House where a decision would be made, or they do not.

In this case, if the members do not support the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Outremont, then either they believe that we should not follow the democratic traditions that are supposed to rule this House where significant amendments to laws come before this House, or they do not.

What is the Navigable Waters Protection Act? It is not a historic law, but it is a very significant law. It is not just whether we paddle a canoe down a river. The Navigable Waters Protection Act was the subject law in one of the most precedent-setting Supreme Court of Canada decisions on the environment in Canada; that is, the Friends of the Oldman River Society case. What had happened was a dam was being built in southern Alberta and the federal government had not come forward and done its proper environmental assessment before that dam was approved and so, affected farmers and affected citizens had to go to the court, yet again, to force the federal government to enforce its laws on the books.

What did the Supreme Court of Canada hold? It is a precedent-setting decision: both the federal and provincial governments have authority over the environment.

So, it is very clear that we as legislators, we as members of Parliament, have an important responsibility here, similar to the

provincial legislators. It is critical that we enact strong laws for the protection of the environment. It is also important that we make sure that those laws are being effectively enforced.

What has happened in this process? The government nefariously puts through a very substantive amendment to a critical law that is upheld to be a constitutional federal authority without referring it to the House in the normal way, through the five-year review of CEAA, which would allow for it to be reviewed thoroughly by the parliamentary committee, the public, industry, municipalities, and the provinces. Do we think that is inappropriate? Absolutely. It must be removed from the bill.

However, this is not the first time this matter has been raised by the Conservative Party. There was a precursor to this. It was the NDP that raised this when the fiscal update was raised in the fall. In that fiscal update, the government not only slammed women's rights and the rights of government workers to strike, it also said that it was going to remove red tape so that we could fast-track economic development and not have delays of things like environmental impact assessments.

● (1730)

The other parties in the House did not appear to pick up on that. Well, this was the next step forward, which we suspected was coming, that the government had a long-term plan that it was going to undermine environmental laws in Canada. This is exactly what it has done by slipping this through a budget bill and making it very difficult for the parties to try to move forward on dollars to support Canadians who are out at work and at the same time protect the environment.

What is the purpose of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act? It is not minor. As I mentioned earlier in a question to one of the members, it is absolutely critical that we have a process where we identify well in advance what the impacts might be on people downstream of some kind of barrier in a navigable water. Either we order that they be mitigated or that the person who is doing those damages or that barrier to the navigable water pays for those impacts and not the person who is impacted.

It is very critical. It goes to the heart of who should pay. It is the polluter who should pay. Canada has signed on to that international principle. So we need to uphold the laws that we put into effect to implement that provision.

What do we believe in? Do we believe in piecemeal amendments to our environmental laws, or do we believe in the holistic approach, working co-operatively with the provinces?

More than a decade ago, the federal and provincial governments agreed on the harmonization accord. The whole purpose was to come together with the public and industry to talk about ways that we could move forward in a coordinated approach to keep down the costs and keep it effective.

Nobody is hurt more than an affected community by having separate environmental reviews. The public has to spend its own resources to hire lawyers and experts to deal with those potential impacts. There are agreements between the federal government and the provinces which are working very well.

Government Orders

Why, one might ask, is it necessary for the government to come forward in this nefarious way to remove one of the key triggers for federal environmental assessments? There are three, one is federal spending. Clearly, we are talking about federal spending here. The other is the federal law list. Clearly, the Navigable Waters Protection Act is on that law list after discussions with the provinces and industry and the public, and any federal licences or approvals.

What are we doing? We are going to say, well, projects under a certain value do not have to be assessed anymore. The last I looked at that legislation, it is all about taking a look, as the hon. member for Outremont very clearly pointed out. It is all about assessing how significant the impacts are going to be of that development, not about the cost of the development itself. It is completely the wrong trigger point for deciding whether or not there should be an environmental impact assessment.

I would also point out to the House that just because the act is triggered does not mean that there is an extensive, long, drawn-out public hearing. In fact, in very few cases does the federal government even call for a federal hearing. In most cases, there is simply what is called an initial assessment. There is a review by the appropriate agencies to see, should this act be triggered and should we require the proponent to do more work.

What are we doing? Through this backhanded amendment, we are simply saying there is no need to look at all, apart from the fact we may be violating a constitutional obligation to at least consult in advance and accommodate impacts on first nations.

This amendment, which the government says is just very minor, just to fast-track development, is in fact extremely nefarious and undermines the basis of what we are supposed to be doing in Canada, which is saying that the environment and economy are inextricably linked.

The government is saying it is in sync with the Obama administration. Nothing could be further from the truth by trying to fast-track through this kind of an amendment in a nefarious way. Contrary to what the Conservatives have asserted, that they will have an open and transparent government, through a budget bill, they are nefariously trying to make a significant amendment to a critical environmental law.

For this reason I speak strongly against this provision in the budget, and support the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Outremont.

• (1735)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if we take sustainable development in its simplest expression as being government's obligation to take care of future generations to make sure that they have the right to the same standard of living and the same environmental standards that we have, could the member for Edmonton—Strathcona tell us what she thinks this is saying about the Liberal Party of Canada? It would support a measure in a budget that will not only saddle future generations with a financial burden but will do nothing to leave them a legacy that they can use in terms green, sustainable energy, for example.

Instead, we are going to depreciate and destroy the environment by removing the protections of the Navigable Waters Protections

Act, and by removing environmental assessment. Could she tell us what that means with regard to Gro Harlem Brundtland analysis of what it is to have an obligation to take into account the effects on future generations, what we call sustainable development?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, indeed this is not a minor provision in the budget bill. It goes to the very heart of what this Parliament believes in. We believe that the environment and the economy are inextricably linked and that we need to be making sure that whether they are fiscal measures or whether they are new laws or policies, they have actually had an environmental or green screen.

In this case, what is being said is that we need to fast-track economic development and we need to create jobs, but let us just throw out environmental considerations. What that is doing is ensuring that we do not have a sustainable economy into the future, unlike what the rest of the planet is working toward.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's remarks. She has very clearly flagged a problem in Bill C-10, but the problem is going along with the bill as additional baggage.

She has talked about principles and the environment, which almost everyone in this place would subscribe to, but could she please address the fact that the Prime Minister has told Parliament that if there is any change to this bill, there will be an election. Is she prepared to tell Canadians she would prefer to go to an election now rather than deliver a stimulus package? That is the choice we have to make.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I did not run in an election and get elected by my constituents simply because I want to get elected. I told the people of Edmonton—Strathcona that I was running because I was going to bring the federal government back to Alberta. I am sick and tired of members standing in this House and making excuses for why we are not going to apply the rule of law, which is the law that is passed by this Parliament, to Canada, so that we ensure the protection of communities.

It is all about whether or not we believe in the rule of law and in actually asserting our powers and enforcing Canadian environmental law in Canada.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona gave an excellent response to that last question.

I just received an email from a constituent in my riding, Tony Rodgers, who is working with an outdoor network of 25 hunting, angling and fishing groups across Canada. They have come together to work on decoupling the Navigable Waters Protection Act from Bill C-10. They have asked me to stand in this House and speak out against this issue.

Has the member received similar demands from members of her riding and also from environmental groups, angling and hunting groups around Canada? Is she getting this kind of response?

Government Orders

● (1740)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, indeed the member is receiving inquiries from concerned citizens in Nova Scotia. I have been receiving questions and hearing concerns from people right across Canada.

People are deeply concerned about this. People in Canada have given of their time and effort voluntarily to participate in the development of effective Canadian environmental legislation. They are absolutely furious that significant changes have been made to this law in underhanded ways.

Yes, I am hearing from people and that is why I stood today in the House to speak.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really miss my good friend, Rahim Jaffer, in this House.

We are into the second series of amendments on Bill C-10. Bill C-10 is a 528 page document.

There are parts of this bill that we are not comfortable with. As my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, clearly pointed out, if we try to amend or change the bill, that will trigger an election.

My constituents keep telling me that these are difficult and trying times but what do I tell John MacDonald, the unemployed auto worker? Do I tell him that we do not care that he is unemployed, that we do not care that he cannot pay his mortgage, that we want to go to an election? We know how principled people are, and I am going to get into that as well. The member for Outremont talked about principles. This is the arena where we sometimes have the opportunity to talk about those principles, so let us put them on the table.

Part of these amendments have to do with the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The last thing I want to do is to go to Rice Lake and say that we cannot do this and we cannot do that. I do not want my constituents to be prevented from canoeing in certain areas that they use for recreational purposes. It is a difficult situation. However, as my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River said, maybe improvements are being made to the marina, or a bridge or other infrastructure related to the area and we do not want that to be impeded.

Earlier on the member for Outremont talked about the Liberals having no principles. In order to appreciate where we are today we have to go back in history, because he is saying that we have no principles because we will not defeat the government on the budget. This Liberal team today is putting Canadians first and not our vested interests. That is why we are putting some water in our wine. There are areas in the budget that we do not agree with. There are flaws, if I may describe them as such.

I want to give the member for Edmonton—Strathcona a history lesson, because she is newly elected. I want to give the member for Outremont a history lesson as well. If we try to make amendments, it has been clearly spelled out that this will be a confidence vote and it will trigger an election which Canadians do not want, and more important, cannot afford.

What Canadians have told us repeatedly, what my constituents have told me repeatedly, and we are here to speak on behalf of our constituents, is they want us to do what we can to stimulate the economy, to bring back those jobs that have been lost.

In my province of Ontario hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost. The auto industry is hurting badly. The city of Toronto cannot repair its roads. It is having to impose levies and increase taxes continuously.

Seniors in my riding are hurting because they live on fixed incomes. They are not income generators. When we impose on their pensions by \$10 a month, that is a lot for a senior. When students want to go on to college and university but they cannot afford it because tuitions have gone up, that impedes Canada's future.

● (1745)

The member for Outremont talks about principles, but let me remind him and the member for Edmonton—Strathcona of budget 2005. Members of the New Democratic Party, the principled party supposedly, came to us when we were in government. It was a good budget. We covered every area, but they said they wanted amendments to it in order to support the budget. They wanted more money for housing, to which we agreed. They wanted more money for urban transit, to which we agreed. They wanted more money for the environment, to which we agreed. They wanted more money for post-secondary education, to which we agreed.

It was a historic moment for the old democratic party; after all, it has been called the New Democratic Party for the past 60 years. Someone might ask why I am picking on the New Democratic Party and not the Conservative Party. We have the Conservative government today thanks to the NDP members. I hope the member for Edmonton—Strathcona and the member for Outremont are listening. Members of their party were in cahoots with the Conservative Party and they defeated the Liberal government prematurely and all those programs went down the drain.

Let us fast forward to today. There is *x* amount of money on the table, money that we agree with, money that was discussed by my colleagues earlier, money that needs to get out there as soon as possible. Imagine if we were to stand here as the Liberal Party and defeat the government. We would be back to square one. We would be into an election. We might get the same result, or a minority Liberal government. It would take three months to do it at a cost of over half a billion dollars. Meanwhile the John MacDonalds of the world would still be unemployed. Who is principled here, I ask the NDP?

John MacDonald is sitting there unemployed, worried about how he is going to put food on the table and there are a bunch of politicians who cannot get their act together. Well, we Liberals have our act together and we are saying that for the good of the country, for the good of Canadians, we will put some water in our wine. The day will come to address some of the draconian initiatives that have been put in the budget and which really do not make sense. There is no need for those types of initiatives in this budget. I can hear President Obama say that we are going to address the economy, but there is a caveat here and a caveat there.

Government Orders

I am really puzzled with the NDP's position. The member for Outremont talks about principles. The member for Outremont used to be minister of the environment in the Quebec National Assembly. He made a comment that he was in favour of selling Canadian fresh water. If he is here, he can stand after I finish my speech and deny that. Who is more responsible and more principled here?

The first conference I had the honour and privilege of attending was in New York. I attended with the then environment minister, Sergio Marchi. It was at the UN and was on sustainable development. We all know what sustainable development means, but I was very impressed. The minister hosted a reception and there were representatives from all over the world. They put Canada right at the top. I felt so proud to be a Canadian and representing Canada. They told me that Canada had it right, that Canada was on the right track.

Environmental issues are not something for which we can flip a switch and they are solved. It is an ongoing process. Things that did not happen 20 years ago are happening today. Technologies that did not exist then exist now. Yes, it is more costly. Yes, we have to make changes to legislation, et cetera.

In closing, I wish that members of the NDP would finally get their act together, be responsible and do the right thing. Let Canada move forward positively.

• (1750)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I always enjoy listening to one of my favourite Liberals in the House of Commons and a long-time member. I have one very simple question for the Liberal Party.

Liberal members stand in the House and criticize the government for the budgetary process, for what is not in the budget and for everything else but what do they give us? They have put the Conservatives on report. They are telling the Conservatives that if they do not deliver the goods they will write a letter and tell everybody about it.

They had an outstanding opportunity and if they had pushed harder I am sure they could have made changes. The member and his party must be getting the emails and questions about the Navigable Waters Protection Act. This could have a very devastating effect on the future of our waterways in the country.

Instead of a report card system, why would the Liberals not have pushed for something as significant as changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act which would have protected the integrity of our natural water systems?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, one would ask why a member of Parliament would have an interest in waterways? We have the beautiful Scarborough Bluffs that are part of Lake Ontario. People go canoeing and boating. I am only an hour's drive from Rice Lake where I used to go fishing as a young boy. We do have an interest.

We come here as hon. members and we are described as hon. members. We should at least give the government the benefit of the doubt and give it the opportunity for the benefit of Canadians.

I will go back to when the NDP brought forward its wonderful proposals that we agreed with and supported. Having agreed with the

NDP, it reneged on Canadians. What we are saying is that we want to give the government the opportunity but should it not meet its commitment, should it not keep its word, he can be assured that we will keep the government to account.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, that begs the question as to how will the Liberal Party will keep the Conservatives to account. What will the Liberals do? Will they stamp their feet, raise their arms and call the Conservatives bad people or will they actually have the courage to stand up?

We know they just celebrated their 50th anniversary, 50 confidence motions in a row of supporting the government. What will the Liberals do if the Conservatives tell them to go pound sand, that they do not care what the Liberals have to say because this is what they will do?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I will tell him exactly what the Liberal Party will do. The Liberal Party will do what its constituencies want it to do, what Canadians will tell it to do. He can be assured that the message will be clear that if the Conservative government does not do what it is supposed to, Canadians will punish it accordingly, as they punished Brian Mulroney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised to see the Conservative members, one after the other, applaud the Liberal member to show how happy they are to see him support the Conservative Party's budget proposals, which fly in the face of a rather important environmental process. We are having a hard time understanding the Liberal Party's attitude and its current position, which is to support the government in measures that are completely contrary to the process we now have in place for protecting the environment and navigable waterways. I would like to hear the member's point of view on this.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I have a simple explanation. It is called what Canada and Canadians need today.

I said this earlier and I will close with this. We have read and heard that this budget is not perfect. To use a computer term, the budget has bugs, but the government has made it very clear that if there are any amendments or changes we will go to the polls. I do not understand how the member thinks it is wise to have a national election when Canadians have told us repeatedly, in a very strong way, that they do not want an election. We should take that over half a billion dollars and put it into his community and my community.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is blessed with pristine wild rivers and lakes. I have canoed in many of them for many years, whether it is the Dumoine River, the Spanish River, the French River, the Missinaibi River, the Madawaska River, the Nahanni River or Alsek River. Canada has beautiful rivers that make us proud. It is almost a part of the Canadian identity.

Government Orders

The public's right to navigate these rivers predates Confederation. It is part of our history and heritage. It also needs to be part of our future. Why am I here talking about rivers in the middle of a serious economic downturn when today the Toronto stock exchange index fell more than 5.5%? It is because part seven of this budget implementation bill makes an amendment to the Navigable Waters Protection Act. It has absolutely nothing to do with economic stimulation. If one reads the entire 360 page budget that was presented in the House, not the implementation act, it says nothing about changing navigable water protection because it cannot justify it.

Because the Conservatives saw how weak the Liberal Party was, they snuck in these pay equity changes and changes that punish students and public servants. They snuck in changes just like they did in the 2008 budget. Some members will remember the immigration changes. They had nothing to do with the 2008 budget but the Conservatives saw how weak the Liberals were and snuck the changes in. At the time, the Liberals said that they did not want an election and that they would support the budget, including the immigration changes even though they did not believe in them.

Last June, the Conservatives tried to change this protection act but they were caught. A lot of the environmentalists saw it and wanted to know why they were not being consulted and how the government could that. The change did not pass. Then, of course, we had an election. Many of my constituents wrote to me and said that we needed to protect public access to waterways in Canada. When we do that, we are protecting the natural environment of these waterways. Navigation is entirely under federal jurisdiction. There are no laws or regulations in place, other than the federal act, to protect the public right of navigation in Canada. The provinces have no jurisdiction over navigation and no ability to protect the waters.

Millions of Canadians access our waterways for recreation. Outdoor tourism around waterways generates many millions of dollars every year. In many parts of the country, the outdoor tourism industry is a critical part of local and regional economies.

My constituents said that the proposed amendments to the act must be withdrawn from C-10 and that there needs to be meaningful public consultation because they have the historic public right to navigate our waterways. We need to protect our natural environment. We need to ensure there is access to waterways for recreation and commercial tourism. I received a letter from another constituent who said that he was a canoeing enthusiast and that he was worried that the changes would threaten Canada's natural waterways that he so loves. He said that in order for Canada to remain clean and natural for all Canadians to enjoy, the Navigable Waters Protection Act amendment must be struck out.

● (1800)

Another constituent wrote to say that he was very concerned that the Government of Canada was poised to deregulate the protection of waterways in Canada which could impact on the rights of all Canadians to navigate and enjoy free access to Canada's waterways under the guise of putting people to work. He said that they were doing so without consulting Canadians in an open and transparent manner.

My constituent also mentioned that the legislation had nothing to do with putting people to work, considering that most, if not all of the economic stimulus initiatives proposed by the government, were for municipal infrastructure and not governed by federal environmental laws. He did not see any connection with what we are talking about here with stimulating the economy and putting people to work.

Another constituent wrote to ask us not to mix these changes.

The letters go on and on. People are extremely concerned and yet we have a Liberal opposition that is so afraid of its own shadow that it is not negotiating any amendments or changes. The Liberals are assuming that any amendment will be a confidence vote. They have not even tried. It is really unfortunate that the budget makes changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, pay equity and students, which has nothing to do with the budget and stimulating the economy.

We would be making a serious mistake here if we were to pass this section of the bill. I just wish the Liberals would actually stand up for what they say they believe in and split out this section and vote against it. They would then be able to tell their constituents that they tried and that they did their best and allow their constituents to judge. If they do not to that, then it has all been empty words. They say one thing here in the House but they act totally different when the vote comes. That is not what we call leadership.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I carefully listened to the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina speak to the budget issue. She really questioned the Liberals and asked us what we believe in and why we were supporting this.

It is not only a matter of belief. It is a matter of faith. We have faith in the DFO. We have faith in the infrastructure of Canada. We have faith in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Over and above this, we have faith in the development of the consultation process with people.

We have faith in those agencies. We have put the government on probation and we will ensure those agencies are consulted and that the rights of those people who are concerned are not jeopardized. Not only that, but the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 enshrined the rights of all Canadians in the court of law, which is why the Liberals support this particular budget.

● (1805)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand this. The budget was presented and, fair enough, the Liberals want to support the budget. However, what does destroying the pristine rivers or taking pay equity out of the Canadian Human Rights Commission have to do with stimulating the economy? I just do not understand it.

Could the Liberals not have even tried at the committee level to split up the bill, to take out clause 7 in this case? They did not even bother trying. Have they tried negotiating? No.

Have the Conservatives or the Prime Minister said that they would not do it? I have not heard it.

Government Orders

The Liberals are so afraid. I do not understand it. They say that perhaps there will be an election. No, not necessarily. The Constitution experts have said that if the government falls, we may not have an election. We may have a different kind of government.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in a situation now. We have a coalition of sorts between the Liberals and the Conservatives over the budget. We hear some protestation on their part about this part of the budget.

Some of the comments I have heard today suggest that those members probably support what the Conservatives are doing with the Navigable Waters Protection Act. They are not standing up against it. Quite clearly their leader, who leans very much toward the Conservative side of the House, is supporting it as well.

I do not think we should be surprised by what the Liberals are doing here. It is part of their new leadership. As such, we have to accept that.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague across the way is probably correct. After all we have a leader in the Liberal Party that believes the expansion of the oil sands will contribute to national unity. He seems to have nothing critical to say about some of the problems, like the greenhouse gas emissions being created by the oil sands.

Perhaps I should not be surprised that the Liberals are not at all worried about the amendment on the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Even though it contains no consultation, no transparency, not one single Canadian has been asked—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Papineau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this issue, which ties into a much deeper issue of what we are doing here.

First, as a lifelong paddler, I am deeply concerned about the changes the Conservative Government has packaged into their budget on the NWP.

Before we even get around to that, let us talk about the responsibilities we hold as parliamentarians to represent our constituents and to govern adequately and for the future of our families and our people.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

The government and members of Parliament must respond to Canadians' needs. We have to be there for our fellow citizens, and we must always make responsible decisions. It is easy for the NDP and the Bloc to stand in the way, to oppose without ever having to propose, without ever having to make judgment calls and difficult decisions.

[*English*]

I recognize we had plenty of difficult decisions to take when faced with this budget. Throughout the fall, the Conservatives continued to say that there was no economic crisis, that they would be in surplus, that everything was well. We had to push them extremely hard to get them to admit it. We then had to get them to start spending, to start

giving to Canadians some of the stimulus, some of the response that they desperately needed.

Was it enough? No, it probably will not be enough, but it is a damn site better than delaying, than putting off our interventions, than dragging Canadians through another expensive election, which would probably return a very similar result of a minority Parliament of some sort, while Canadians are losing their jobs, families are struggling to plan for the future, kids are anxious about what their parents are arguing about late into the night as the bills come in and the job prospects look less and less likely.

Canada is in a crisis. The NDP members announced even before the budget hit the table that they would in no way support it.

[*Translation*]

The Bloc Québécois proposed unrealistic, unacceptable amendments.

The Liberal Party took a good look at what the Conservatives have done. This is basically a Conservative budget; we understand that. However, the Liberal-NDP coalition, with the Bloc Québécois' support, was able to push the government to take positive steps for our economy, to propose measures we really need.

At the same time, the Conservatives have chosen to sneak some measures that will not be good for Canada into the budget. For example, it includes measures that are not good for pay equity for women, not to mention some real flaws when it comes to protecting navigable waters.

Even so, the Liberal Party decided that it was in Canadians' best interest to get the money flowing right away.

[*English*]

However, navigable waters is an issue, and it is an issue for me. The powers granted to the minister would allow the government to bypass some of the triggers for environmental assessment. It removes the words “dam”, “weir”, “log”, “bridge”, “causeway” from the automatically triggering environmental assessment procedures. This is a strategy of bringing more power to the ministers. It is similar to the power brought to the minister in the Immigration Act, which the Conservatives adopted last year. This trend is absolutely troubling.

The rights of Canadians to explore their waterways is one that goes into our very identity as Canadians. Our ability to explore this great land, as generations before us have, which was allowed through our waterways, is one that predates Confederation. It goes all the way back to Roman times. To have free access to waterways is essential.

However, the NWP is over 100 years old. It was brought in 1882. It does need a little reworking, which is why the Liberals worked hard in committee last year to bring about some positive impacts. However, the Conservative government slipped in these changes without any possibility of discussions, debate, back and forth for positive consensus. Then it said if we did not accept the package it put forward in its entirety, regardless of the fact that it is not all about stimulus, we would go into an election.

Government Orders

We are facing tough choices here. We can either try to protect our jobs and not protect the jobs of Canadians, or we can say that Canadians need help and they need help now. They need us to reach out to them. They need us to stimulate them economically to allow them to have safer jobs, to allow them to train for the future and to allow communities to spend on much needed infrastructure.

Are there faults in the budget? Absolutely.

It is wonderfully easy for the Bloc and the NDP to stand on their high horses and shout out that it is terrible this is going through. They do not have to make any of the tough decisions. They have absolved themselves of responsibility that way. They are happy to oppose. However, the Liberal Party intends to form the next government. Because of that, we need to be responsible. When Canadians turn to us and ask us why we do not support the budget or the money that will come from it, we will have no answer if we block it.

Pressure by the Liberal caucus and in committee allowed for a mandatory five year review clause in the NWPA, which means this implementation is not automatically forever. Indeed, the Liberal Party feels that it is time for a comprehensive overhaul of environmental assessment to ensure that we are properly protecting Canadians, that we are properly balancing economy and environment. There is no question that the economy and the environment need to be built together in the future. However, to jump and pull the trigger right now because this is not a Liberal budget would be irresponsible.

We have to give the Conservatives credit. They went a long way in acting against type by actually reaching out to help Canadians and spending on them. For that, we applaud them. However, the challenges we face mean that we need to work together. It would be wonderful if, for once, a party like the NDP would read something before it decided to vote against it. It gives the NDP members the idea that they can stand there and be defenders of the people, the way the Bloc members are defenders of Quebeckers.

• (1815)

We need to be actual defenders of the people. That means taking action. It means making compromises. Like it or not, Canadians voted a Conservative government in last time. What we have to do is make sure that Parliament works. That is what the Liberal Party is doing. It is making sure that this imperfect budget serves Canadians. It is making sure that the naysayers who want to trigger an election or an unstable coalition do not get their way and that Canadians get the help they need.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great care to the enthusiastic remarks of the member for Papineau. I was curious about his characterization of the role of the NDP. I believe what we said was that we lost confidence in the government. From the speech of November 27 and over the following days, given what was going on, we had no confidence that the government could produce a budget or do anything that was going to please the people of this country.

The hon. member for Papineau, along with all his colleagues, signed the letter and agreed.

What I would like to ask the hon. member is this: when did he actually regain confidence in the government? He is concerned about reading things, so was it after he read the budget, after he read the documents that were put out, after he read the section dealing with pay equity with all the detail there? The budget said we will fine a union \$50,000 if it assists any of its members in pursuing a pay equity claim. Is that when he got confidence in the budget and decided to support the government? Can the member tell us that?

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the member would like to know when we regained confidence in this government. It is quite simple. We did not have high hopes that the government would be able to put forward an attractive budget, one that would help Canadians. Throughout the fall, Conservatives were in denial about the problems, the environmental challenges, the need for Canadians to spend, and we were no longer confident that this government could act accordingly.

So we applied pressure. We formed a coalition that was ready to take back power if the government could not meet Canadians' needs. After consulting with Canadians and those who support us, we saw that the budget they presented was not perfect but that it did provide tangible assistance to Canadians. Yes, there are big holes in this budget. However, the challenge is to get money out to Canadians and that will be done.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Papineau is speaking with a great deal of emotion. His voice is trembling.

There are huge holes in the budget, but they are not big enough for the Liberals to vote against it. On Saturday, in Halifax, unionized public service employees held a demonstration about the huge problems in the budget. They told the Liberal leader that the measures in Bill C-10, including the pay equity measures, made no sense. That is just one of the issues they raised.

I would like to hear what the member has to say about this, about the fact that he is supporting such a budget and such a government, which reneged on its promise to the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador. It also went back on its promise to Quebec. We know that the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously passed a motion about equalization.

All these people cannot be wrong. It is the Conservative government that is wrong. That is what the member is saying, but at the same time, he is going to support this bill. I would like the member to explain this glaring contradiction.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, that is the contradiction, that is what makes it so difficult to make responsible choices as a member of Parliament. The truth is that we have to make choices here. We have to act in the best interest of the people we represent and the whole country.

Yes, pay equity is a real problem, and the Conservatives should be ashamed of what they are doing. Yes, unions are right to protest many of the things in this bill, but they are protesting against the Liberals when they should be protesting even more against the Conservatives.

Adjournment Proceedings

The challenge is finding a balance, figuring out how we can best help Canadians. The truth is that we have to accept this very imperfect budget because we have to get money flowing to Canadians right away. We have to help them find jobs, keep their jobs and get ready for the future.

However, when it comes time for an election, everyone will see that we are only too ready to get rid of the Conservatives and form the next government.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the amendment to the budget implementation bill.

I would like to take up a little of what the member for Papineau was saying when he was concerned about the options that are available to the House at this time. He talked about one option being supporting the budget, supporting the government, showing confidence in the budget, making a compromise, et cetera. He referred to the alternative as an “unstable coalition”.

On the other hand, the argument that was made, and made quite quite strongly, was that the coalition proposed between the Liberals and the NDP had a very stable form of government that would have got us through two budget cycles without the threat of the kind of thing that is going on now, the so-called compromises against principle that the member is being forced to make. We would have an agreement that would last us through two budgets and we would have stability.

We have members from the Liberal opposition now saying that in June they will call an election. They will call an election in June, or at the first opportunity—not March, but June. They were saying they did not read the budget and were going to vote against it, but now they are saying that in June they will trigger an election.

What kind of stability is that? What kind of stability do we have with this government in power and the Liberals ready to pull the trigger at any time it suits them? When the terms of their probation are not being met, they will pull the trigger.

Every day we see members opposite, ministers, and the Prime Minister rubbing the Liberals' noses in the support that they are giving to them. I cannot believe they can get away with it. I am here every day. I hear the Liberals complaining about the government. Then I hear members of the government say that the Liberals are voting for all this stuff and that they are supporting them. They are not even thankful for the Liberals' support. They are not even giving the Liberals anything, not a crumb, even though they are asking the Liberals to go against their principles.

The member for Papineau should read this letter. I am sure he has a copy. It is a letter from CAUT complaining about pay equity. What do they say? They say that there is a breach of Canadian commitment to international conventions. They say there is a breach of section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was brought in by former Prime Minister Trudeau. It is a breach of constitutionally protected labour rights. It is a breach of the principles of democracy and all those things.

The government is rubbing the Liberals' noses in it, making them vote for it and support it. Why? Is it in the interests of stable government? This is not stable government. According to the Leader of the Opposition, this government is on probation, the terms of the probation can be broken at any time, and they will pull their chain. I do not see any chain pulled by the members opposite. In fact, they are so secure that they are ready to rub the Liberals' noses in it every single day.

The people of this country are able to watch that. They know what is going on. There is a lot of talk about being responsible and compromising and all that, but the people of this country see what is happening here. They know that prior to the budget being brought down, our leader said that if the government came up with a budget that had any merit, we would easily adapt those matters into a budget for the coalition. That could be done very quickly and could implement any measures that were desirable.

The motions before the House today to amend the budget, to remove these odious provisions in relation to pay equity, the Navigable Waters Protection Act and other things, are an opportunity for the opposition members to stand on their feet and support the principles they say they believe in, but we do not see any evidence of it before the House.

I know I have a few more minutes and the House will be moving on to other business. If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I can end here and let you move to other business, or I can keep on till the time is up. I see it is *comme ci, comme ça*. I can keep going. I might not get as enthused, knowing that I will be cut off in a minute or so.

The Navigable Waters Protection Act is now being gutted by the government, gutted in provision after provision. Even to determine whether a waterway is a navigable waterway is now at the discretion of the minister. Each and every step of the way, it is up to the minister and the opinion of the minister. If the minister makes such an order, he can do so. That takes away the protection of the waters my colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, was talking about, in her experience in canoeing on navigable waters throughout this country. The changes that can be made to those waterways will now be at the discretion of the minister, instead of being subject to a proper evaluation and an environmental assessment, and that is wrong.

I urge members on both sides of the House, even government members, to vote against it.

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's East will have five minutes left to conclude his remarks the next time this bill is before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1830)

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the 20th century, influenza threatened the world, in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The latter two pandemics killed a total of three million people. In stark contrast, the Spanish influenza of 1918 killed upwards of 50 million people.

Today the World Health Organization and influenza experts fear a pandemic flu is inevitable and that we are closer to it than at any time since 1968. As of February 27, 2009, the H5N1 influenza virus had infected 408 people and killed 256. Experts estimate that between 11,000 and 58,000 Canadians could die in a future pandemic.

Given the seriousness of the present threat, experts must determine why avian influenza broke out in British Columbia's Fraser Valley in 2004, 2005 and 2008. Therefore, what regular testing is the government undertaking in wild birds and in what species? As over 100 wild bird species carry low pathogenic avian influenza viruses, is the virus being spread from wild birds to domestic birds?

What might low pathogenic influenza strains found in Canada mean in the long term? Recent research shows that H5 and H7 viruses of low pathogenicity can, after circulation for sometimes short periods in a poultry population, mutate into highly pathogenic viruses. What might flyway data suggest, if anything, for the spread of the virus in North America? Some species of migratory waterfowl are now thought to be carrying the H5N1 virus in its highly pathogenic form and introducing it to new geographical areas located along their flight routes.

These are important questions because when wild migratory birds mix with domestic flocks through the sharing of habitat, there is an enhanced potential for genetic re-assortment of avian flu viruses resulting in novel genotypes which could trigger a human influenza pandemic. Once avian influenza is established in domestic poultry, it is a highly contagious disease. One gram of contaminated manure can contain enough virus to infect one million birds.

Is the virus being spread by airborne transmission if birds are in close proximity and with appropriate air movement? There are 600 poultry producers in the Fraser Valley.

Is the environment serving as a source of infection and what monitoring is taking place? When birds visit lakes along their paths, they shed virus into water, the lakes freeze and thus they preserve the virus for months, years, and perhaps much longer. Or is the virus being spread through trade, for example, from flock to flock by contaminated equipment, egg flats, feed trucks, et cetera?

Finally, what specific measures have been taken to look at the intensity of poultry farming in this region? What measures have been taken to reduce the risk of transmission? What specific measures are being taken to protect producers and the \$1 billion industry? Most important, what specific measures are being taken to protect civilians from avian influenza in the Fraser Valley when Canada will welcome the world in 2010?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be here today to bring some comfort to the member's troubled mind.

Canada's ability to prevent, prepare for and respond to an outbreak of avian influenza is a key priority for us. Regarding the source of avian influenza in the most recent outbreaks in British Columbia, extensive testing of the commercial poultry farms within three kilometres of the infected flocks has not found another flock that may have been the source of the low-pathogenicity virus. Broader surveillance of commercial poultry flocks is set to start within the next week.

At this point in time, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is looking at the wild bird population, which is the natural reservoir of all avian influenza viruses, as the most likely source. However, the investigations are ongoing, and until our investigations and sampling procedures are complete, we will not be able to state with certainty a probable source of the virus.

In previous avian influenza outbreaks in Canada, extensive testing was done in the domestic poultry population, with no further detection of the virus. As a result, a wildlife reservoir was determined to be the most probable source of this virus.

This government takes avian influenza and the associated risks to animal and human health very seriously and is well prepared to react quickly in these cases. Response protocols have been developed and allowed rapid reaction regarding the current findings. The response is focused on containing and eliminating the virus in order to avoid spread. Cooperation between federal and provincial jurisdictions, including diagnostics support, public health protection, and environmental assessments related to containment and disposal, has been of the highest order.

I would like to give a few details of the restrictions that have been put in place. In order to limit any potential virus spread, the CFIA has applied restrictions on the movement of poultry and poultry products from commercial poultry operations within a three-kilometre radius of the two infected premises and all contacts outside the three-kilometre radius that have been assessed as high risk due to the movement of people, products and equipment. All premises with birds within three kilometres of each infected premises, and all quarantined locations, will also be monitored for signs of illness for a minimum 21-day period following the last possible date of exposure.

The respect of the international community for the integrity and competence of the CFIA's management of these detections is reflected in the decision of the vast majority of countries to limit any trade restrictions to either the three-kilometre surveillance zone or the province of British Columbia.

Adjournment Proceedings

Avian influenza preparedness and effective response is a top priority for this government. We have developed, in consultation with the poultry industry, a comprehensive and robust avian influenza surveillance program for domestic poultry. This is key to the CFIA's avian influenza strategy and to maintaining Canada's reputation as a credible participant in avian influenza preparedness, our access to international markets, and consumer confidence in our poultry products.

• (1835)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the answer is that we do not know what caused the three outbreaks in 2004, 2005 and 2009.

All owners, operators and workers on poultry farms should take steps to protect themselves from avian influenza. Operators should develop a response plan to complement provincial and industry plans and designate a response plan manager. All workers should practise biosecurity and know the plan and their responsibilities.

Flocks should be isolated from outside environments, wild birds and water sources that might be contaminated. All workers should know the signs of avian flu with the highly pathogenic H5N1 and the possible symptoms of avian influenza in humans.

What steps has the government taken to make sure that poultry producers have an avian influenza response plan that complements industry and provincial plans? What percentage of Canadian poultry farms is prepared for the next flu pandemic, and what economic—

The Deputy Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, many of the things that the member has suggested have already been done and are being done by the authorities.

Canada has enhanced our import control measures for poultry and poultry products and has established a national avian influenza surveillance program for domestic birds and wild birds. Before birds can be imported into Canada, they are first isolated and tested in the exporting country. If they are found to be disease-free and safe to import, the birds undergo quarantine and a second round of testing in Canada.

To counter the possibility of avian influenza entering Canada through illegally smuggled birds, Canada conducts enhanced inspections of passengers and goods from countries in which highly pathogenic avian influenza is known to exist.

The CFIA monitors international developments and ensures policies and strategies reflect the most up-to-date science. It also coordinates with other federal government departments, provincial governments and industry, which have roles and responsibilities in preventing, detecting or responding to avian influenza.

In summary, effective plans are in place.

ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for those watching at home, we are now in what is called the adjournment proceedings, or affectionately the late show. It happens every day about 6:30 p.m. If there is a question asked in the House of Commons and the member is not happy with the answer, then the member has this time to go into it in more detail.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs made a comment about talking about sovereignty with his colleagues in other Arctic nations. I rose in the House on February 3 to ask a very simple question about what he would tell them. Much to the surprise of everyone in the House, the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not rise. There was a silence for a while and then another minister rose. If people wonder why I was concerned about what he might tell them, it is because of the troubled history the government has with its promises on sovereignty.

For instance, the Prime Minister's first promise was for three armed Arctic icebreakers. All of sudden, they vanished. The navy has none of those. There is a promise of one for the Coast Guard for sometime in the future. We do not know when that will be.

Patrol boats are boasted for the Arctic policy. When the ice can be 18 feet thick, patrol boats will only be able to go through three feet of ice. Perhaps they can be used in other places or at other times of the year. That is fine. I have every confidence in the navy to do that. However, the government should not be taking the Arctic money for those purposes.

What about the naval strength and supply ships? They were cancelled. The planes for Yellowknife have vanished. A deep sea port is a good idea, but where is it? Where is the development of that? The construction of a winter training centre is another good idea, but where is the progress on that? Where is the training centre?

Another area I have been pushing for years in the House is search and rescue planes for the north. In fact, the whole fleet has to be refurbished. In credit to the Minister of Defence, he said, finally, after us bringing it up so many times, that the fleet would be refurbished. However, there has been no mention of it or no announcement. I have no confidence that any of those planes will be placed in the north to protect the lives of northerners.

One only has to read the front page of today's *Globe and Mail* about another aspect of this failed northern policy. Researchers talk about the fact that they do not have the money to conduct their work in the north, especially now that the IPY funds that we had initiated are running out. The chief scientist of the Polar Environmental Atmosphere Research Lab in Eureka, in Nunavut, James Drummond, stated that his lab was threatened by poorly directed funding.

Adjournment Proceedings

The lack of commitment for the north and Arctic policy can be seen by the fact that the government cancelled the ambassador of circumpolar affairs and has never replaced him in a time when there is more and more attention of the world on the north because of the melting waters and the opening up of such a fragile ecosystem.

At last week's meeting of Arctic parliamentarians, I had the opportunity to discuss the great strengths of our Arctic sovereignty, the greatest strength being the people, and the fact that the northern and aboriginal peoples, who have made up our history for eons, were our highest priority and we would continue to support them.

● (1840)

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to speak in response to the question from the hon. member for Yukon.

Our government firmly asserts its presence in the north on multiple fronts, sending a strong message to the world on Canada's right and resolve to protect its territories.

Measures taken include committing \$720 million for a new polar class ice breaker, the John G. Diefenbaker, to replace the Canadian Coast Guard ship CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent*, scheduled to be decommissioned in 2017. The new ship will have increased ice breaking capabilities and be dedicated to the protection and studying of Arctic waters and, by extension, securing Canada's sovereignty in the north. This will increase our ability to patrol.

We will be launching the RADARSAT-2 satellite for monitoring and mapping. We are committed to amending the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act to extend its application to 200 nautical miles. We are creating the Canadian Forces Arctic training centre in Resolute Bay, Nunavut.

We are committed to purchasing new Arctic offshore patrol ships and building a new deepwater berthing and refuelling facility at the eastern entrance to the Northwest Passage in Nanisivik, Nunavut; to expanding and modernizing the Canadian rangers program, a very important presence in the north and part of Canada's reserve force responsible for providing a military presence in remote, isolated and coastal communities in Canada; undertaking sovereignty related military operations in the north, such as operation Nanook; working on the northern watch technology demonstration project, which seeks to identify the best combination of sensors for a cost-effective surveillance system in Canada's Arctic; and investing \$40 million over four years to carry out the comprehensive mapping of Canada's seabed in the Arctic and North Atlantic Oceans to support Canada's submission to the UN's Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in time to meet the UN deadline of 2013.

It is abundantly clear that our government supports a vision of a new north that realizes its full social and economic potential and secures its future for the benefit of all Canadians.

Through the integrated northern strategy, we focus on strengthening our Arctic sovereignty, protecting the north's environmental heritage, promoting social and economic development and improving and devolving northern governance.

What is more, budget 2009 continues the implementation of this government's vision for a new north with new measures that will protect and secure Canada's sovereignty and create more economic opportunities in the north.

These include \$50 million over five years to support economic development through the creation of a new regional economic development agency for the north; \$90 million over five years for a renewed strategic initiative for northern economic development; \$200 million over two years for new and renovated social housing for low income Canadians in all three northern territories; \$87 million over two years to support the government's commitment to Arctic science; \$38 million in support of environmental assessments, regulatory coordination, science and aboriginal consultations related to the Mackenzie gas project; and up to \$17 million to accelerate the construction of the Pangnirtung, Nunavut, small craft harbour.

● (1845)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy the member opposite, but unfortunately he provided a list with a lot of the same things that I provided of the broken promises or not yet achieved promises.

He started out with the three ice breakers, but there will only be one. I am glad the Prime Minister is so enthusiastic about Pierre Trudeau's Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act and has extended it. That is excellent.

However, there is no mention of the dispute and negotiating of the Northwest Passage, no mention of the dispute at Hans Island and no mention of how we will sit down and resolve the dispute in the Beaufort Sea. I see we have a new senator who is also now supporting that we get on with this. Hopefully the government will follow up on that.

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the government is getting things done that the previous government did not get done.

Let me repeat. Our government continues to put the north on the agenda like no government before us. In fact, the northern strategy calls for us to harness the resources and energies of all federal departments and agencies to work towards achieving four core objectives: strengthening our Arctic sovereignty; protecting the north's fragile environment; promoting economic and social development throughout the north; and improving and devolving northern governance.

Adjournment Proceedings

We are determined to make tangible practical progress in enabling stable prosperous communities in the north and an improved standard of living for northerners.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

I look forward to the member's support in all these endeavours.

(The House adjourned at 6:49 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, March 2, 2009

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Service Canada

Mrs. Mendes	1119
Motion	1119
Mr. Obhrai	1120
Mrs. Beaudin	1121
Amendment	1122
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	1122
Amendment to the amendment	1123
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan)	1124
Mr. Abbott	1125
Mr. Lévesque	1125
Mr. Cardin	1126

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Budget Implementation Act, 2009

Bill C-10. Report stage	1127
Mr. Szabo	1127
Mr. Crête	1128
Ms. Faillie	1129
Mr. Merrifield	1129
Ms. Faillie	1129
Mr. Bagnell	1130
Mr. Roy	1131
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	1131
Mr. Crête	1132
Mr. Marston	1133
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	1133
Mr. Marston	1134
Mr. André	1134
Mr. André	1134
Mr. Roy	1136
Mr. Bagnell	1136
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	1136
Mr. Lévesque	1138
Mr. Lessard	1138
Mrs. Lavallée	1138
Mr. Szabo	1139
Mr. André	1140
Mr. Bevilacqua (Vaughan)	1140
Mr. Crête	1141
Mr. Savage	1142

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Carly MacNeil Bunyan

Mr. Carrie	1142
------------------	------

The Environment

Ms. Neville	1142
-------------------	------

Quebec City Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Paillé	1143
------------------	------

International Women's Day

Ms. Leslie	1143
------------------	------

Retirement of Red Deer College President

Mr. Dreeschen	1143
---------------------	------

Gang Violence

Mr. Dhaliwal	1143
--------------------	------

Aurorasaurus

Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	1143
------------------------------------	------

Forestry Industry

Mr. Bouchard	1143
--------------------	------

International Women's Week

Mrs. Davidson	1144
---------------------	------

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Mrs. Zarac	1144
------------------	------

Bloc Québécois

Mr. Petit	1144
-----------------	------

East Coast Music Awards

Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	1144
------------------------------------	------

Seal Hunt

Mr. Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	1145
-------------------------------------	------

Minister of Public Works and Government Services

Mr. Cardin	1145
------------------	------

Government Accountability

Mr. Brison	1145
------------------	------

Carbon Tax

Mr. Uppal	1145
-----------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Economy

Mr. McCallum	1145
Mr. Harper	1145
Mr. McCallum	1145
Mr. Harper	1146
Mr. McCallum	1146
Mr. Harper	1146

Research and Development

Mr. Garneau	1146
Mr. Goodyear	1146
Mr. Garneau	1146
Mr. Goodyear	1146

Afghanistan

Mr. Duceppe	1146
Mr. Harper	1146
Mr. Duceppe	1146
Mr. Harper	1146
Mr. Bachand	1147
Mr. Hawn	1147

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1154
Criminal Code	
Mr. Kramp	1154
Bill 332. Introduction and first reading	1154
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	1155
Committees of the House	
Scrutiny of Regulations	
Mr. Kania	1155
Motion for concurrence	1155
(Motion agreed to)	1155
Petitions	
Income Trusts	
Mr. Szabo	1155
War Resisters	
Mr. Silva	1155
Grandmothers for Grandmothers in Africa	
Mr. Brown (Barrie)	1155
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Wrzesnewskyj	1155
Revenue Canada	
Ms. Foote	1155
Omar Khadr	
Ms. Chow	1156
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	1156
Emergency Debate	
Tackling Violent Crime	
Ms. Fry	1156
The Speaker	1156

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Budget Implementation Act, 2009	
Bill C-10. Report stage	1156
Mr. Laforest	1156
Mr. Savage	1157
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	1159
Mr. Lee	1159
Mr. Mulcair	1159
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	1159
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	1161

Mr. Mulcair	1161
Ms. Ratansi	1161
Mr. Cannis	1163
Mr. Bellavance	1164
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	1164
Mr. Tonks	1165
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	1166
Mr. Blais	1166
Division on Motion No. 1 deferred	1167
Division on Motions Nos. 2 to 6 deferred	1167
Division on Motions Nos. 66 to 86 deferred	1167
Motions in amendment	
Mr. Mulcair	1167
Motions Nos. 7 to 31	1167
Mr. Lee	1169
Mr. Kennedy	1170
Mr. McCallum	1170
Mr. Laforest	1171
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	1171
Mr. Laforest	1172
Mr. Lee	1172
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	1173
Mr. Mulcair	1175
Mr. Lee	1175
Ms. Leslie	1175
Mr. Cannis	1176
Mr. Stoffer	1177
Mr. Laforest	1177
Ms. Chow	1177
Mr. Dhaliwal	1178
Mr. Bevington	1179
Mr. Trudeau	1179
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	1180
Mr. Bellavance	1180
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	1181

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Agriculture	
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	1182
Mr. Anderson	1182
Arctic Sovereignty	
Mr. Bagnell	1183
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	1184

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

En case de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :**
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

**Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgscc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

**On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires ou la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgscc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**