



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, March 31, 2009**  
**(Part A)**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

### CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to table the 2008 annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(e) this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to two petitions.

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### INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE PA, to the fifth economic conference of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held in Andorra la Vella, Andorra, May 24 to 26, 2007.

Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE PA, to the annual fall meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held in Portoroz, Slovenia, at which it was my privilege to attend, September 29 to October 1, 2007.

Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian

delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE PA, to the Bureau of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held in Madrid, Spain, November 28 to 30, 2007.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology entitled, "A Study of the Crisis in the Automotive Sector in Canada".

[*English*]

This is pursuant to the motion adopted by this House on February 26, 2009.

I just want to point out to the House that there was a premature leak of some of the information contained in this report but, unless the individuals responsible come forward, I believe there is little that this House can do to address that matter.

I would also like to take this opportunity to briefly highlight the important work done by members of this committee over the last couple of weeks. We heard from 28 witnesses, received 13 briefs and met over 24 hours in a very short two and a half week period, often meeting until midnight and, on some occasions, meeting for four, five or even six hours in a row. I want to thank members of the subcommittee for their efforts.

Understandably, the report is not as definitive in its five recommendations as it might be due to the still unfolding nature of the auto crisis, both in Canada and in the United States.

The hearings, however, were useful in that they revealed some new information to not only members of the committee but to Canadians. We learned about the new vehicle incentive programs that some of the manufacturers wish to have. We also learned of General Motors' indication that it had pledged its worldwide assets, including those in Canada, for its access to American loans.

Finally, the committee requests that pursuant to Standing Order 109 that the government respond to the report and the recommendations contained therein.

*Business of Supply*

●(1005)

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join the member for Wellington—Halton Hills in reporting to the House the findings of the subcommittee on the automobile industry in Canada, a committee created by the direction of the House at the behest of the Liberal opposition.

The purpose of the subcommittee was to help Canadians better understand the auto sector and the serious issues facing it and the government when dealing with the industry.

The opposition must note, however, its dissent with certain limitations of the report. These include opinions found in the report that were not, in every case, arising from opinions of the witnesses before the committee, such as the effects of a scrapage program or a tax holiday to stimulate car sales.

While drawing attention to the cyclical and structural issues facing the auto industry, what became obvious throughout the study was the government's lack of a comprehensive auto industry strategy.

Canada is part of a fully integrated North American auto industry. That in itself calls for the development of a North American auto forum that would more meaningfully and formally provide governments and industry stakeholders a venue to collectively monitor the industry and would, through engagement, enable governments to develop harmonized continental policies and regulations affecting the industry.

It is strikingly clear that the absence of such a structured meaningful engagement between all stakeholders has been detrimental to the industry in the past and, looking forward, such a forum is critical for the long term sustainability of Canada's share of the North American auto market.

In closing, the issue is about protecting Canadian jobs, the good jobs that are the lifeblood of communities right across this country. It is also about protecting taxpayer money and ensuring an investment in the auto industry today will provide results for taxpayers in the future.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Madam Speaker, as well, we in the New Democratic Party oppose the actual report officially, which is different from all other parties, because of the lack of recommendations and would—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I regret to interrupt the hon. member for Windsor West. I recognized him in error.

It is only a member of the official opposition party who can respond to the committee report. I apologize.

\* \* \*

**PETITIONS**

## INCOME TRUSTS

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the Clerk of Petitions, I am pleased to present yet another income trust broken promise petition from Burlington, Ontario and from my own riding of Mississauga South.

The petitioners remember 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 by imposing a 31.5 % punitive tax that permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

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

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**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

●(1010)

[Translation]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—CBC/RADIO-CANADA

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)** moved:

That this House recognizes the indispensable role of CBC—Radio Canada in providing national, regional, and local programming including news coverage and services to linguistic minorities throughout Canada, and therefore regrets the financial hardship and substantial lay-offs that CBC—Radio Canada currently faces; and urges the government to provide CBC—Radio Canada with the bridge financing it requires to maintain 2008 staffing and service levels.

He said: Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

It is unfortunate that we are obliged to move such a motion here today, in another attempt to draw the attention of the government to the issue of funding for our public broadcaster. If the government had done its homework, and if it had listened and understood to some degree, it would have already grasped the importance of the role played by CBC/Radio-Canada and it would have acted accordingly.

As we all know, the corporation is being forced to cut 800 jobs and sell nearly \$125 million in assets just to balance next year's budget.

*Business of Supply*

The Conservative government has known for a very long time that the public broadcaster has had a budget shortfall of \$171 million and has done nothing to prevent the lay-offs, program cuts and selling of shares. The corporation got no help whatsoever from the government. In fact, it was as if the government were pleased with the way things were going.

The CBC has never—and it is important to point this out—asked for more money from the government, as it has pointed out. What it did ask for was greater financial flexibility in order to get through this advertising revenue crisis, which affects all of this country's broadcasters, we should add.

So far the federal government has refused a loan or an advance on next year's envelope. This inaction has forced CBC/Radio Canada to make heart-wrenching choices that will have absolutely disastrous consequences on its work as a national public broadcaster and imperil its very future.

According to CBC President and CEO Hubert Lacroix, the corporation will have to manage to sell \$125 million worth of assets if this downsizing plan is to work, or else it will be back to square one. If it is unable to sell assets worth \$125 million, and to keep that money, there will end up being more cuts at the CBC.

Mr. Lacroix also indicated that the sale of assets was necessitated by the Conservative government's refusal to help the CBC through the current economic upheaval. As well, according to him, this loan would have meant a considerable reduction in the number of people laid off and would also have avoided having to sell assets. He commented on how sad it was that CBC-Radio Canada had been left with no other choice but to mortgage its own future in order to balance its books.

I can state that the Liberal Party would never have turned its back on the fate of CBC-Radio Canada. We would have backed it up in order to allow it to obtain the necessary leeway to get through this crisis. As a result, the layoffs and reductions in service and programming could have been avoided.

But because of the government's inaction, jobs are going to disappear, not only in major centres like Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, but also in many Canadian cities and regions. I am thinking of such places as Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Quebec City, Moncton, Sydney, Saint John Nova Scotia, Corner Brook, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Regina and many others. The list is getting longer because of this inaction.

The cuts that have been announced mean specifically—to give clear examples—the transformation of the Windsor station to a production centre, and the elimination of programs: the noonday *Téléjournal Acadie* and *L'Ontario aujourd'hui*.

I do not think that francophones in minority communities are impressed by the government's work on this issue. I do not think that there is one single francophone who is impressed by its work on this issue. If the government sincerely believed in linguistic duality and in promoting and respecting our two official languages, it would invest the necessary funds. Without that investment, the government is all talk and no action.

Our public broadcaster is very important to all regions of the country, and I am extremely disappointed and angry that the government has chosen to get rid of television, radio and new media journalists, producers and artists. Despite its claim that it wants to create new jobs, it has put the CBC in the position of having to cut 800 jobs.

The government needs to make up its mind: is it going to invest to get us out of this crisis, or is it going to do nothing, as it has done for the CBC?

• (1015)

The fact that the government's inaction has resulted in cuts that affect French-language services to francophone minority communities is unacceptable. We know that these communities count on the CBC to disseminate and promote their culture across the country. The government has a major responsibility toward both of our official languages, and it must shoulder that responsibility instead of trying to duck out.

Let us consider the CBC's mandate. First, its programming must reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions. Second, the CBC must actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression. Third, its programming must be in English and in French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities. Fourth, its programming must strive to be of equivalent quality in English and in French. Fifth, the CBC must contribute to shared national consciousness and identity. Sixth, its programming must be made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means and as resources become available for the purpose. Last, the CBC must also reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada.

How can CBC/Radio-Canada carry out that important mandate when it faces a \$171 million shortfall? How can it maintain a presence in the regions, in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba or British Columbia if it is not provided with the tools to do so? That is what this motion is about. In view of the Conservative government's inaction and insensitivity, this House must act.

It is clear that the government has wanted to do away with CBC/Radio-Canada for a long time. The current Prime Minister had this to say on March 28, 1995, when he was a member of this House:

If we look at the Canadian television industry we see two private national broadcasters that both manage to make a profit most years. Then we have the CBC which is mortgaged to the hilt and costs over \$1 billion a year. The major reason two are winners and one is a loser is based on incentives or lack of them.

Reform policy would place the government sponsored loser [the CBC] in a situation where subsidies are weaned away and the future of the company is based on consumer satisfaction.

*Business of Supply*

In short, he is talking about abolishing CBC/Radio-Canada. It is clear that this government, which is very firmly led by this Prime Minister, who controls everything, wants to do as much damage as possible to the public broadcaster by using the current economic crisis for its own purposes. The government wants to use the current economic crisis to slash funding for the CBC and get rid of the corporation. We know what the Prime Minister thinks of the CBC, but it is interesting that some of his own members recently voiced quite a different opinion.

In February 2008, in its report to the government, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage recommended stable, long-term funding for CBC/Radio-Canada. These two recommendations were supported by the Conservative members. Obviously, the government did not act on the report's findings. In fact, it did not lift a finger to help our public broadcaster. Now, the situation is critical and action is urgently needed.

That is why I said and will keep on saying that in view of the government's inaction and insensitivity, this House must act. That is the reason for the motion and the debate today. I ask all my colleagues to support this motion.

• (1020)

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I guess it is of benefit in the House from time to time to have a short memory, but I would like to jog the member's memory and take him back to the 1993 Liberal red book. I know the individual was not a member of the House at that time but I imagine he was still a proud Liberal.

Let me outline a couple of things that were in the 1993 red book. Better health care, we know about that. Shorter wait times, we know that doubled under the Liberal government. Better access to post-secondary education was in it, but tuition fees doubled under the Liberal government. The Liberals were going to cut the GST and now they want to raise it. I do not understand. Of course, they did not cut it. We know national child care was a major failure. The Liberal Party did not get that done.

In the very last paragraph of the 1993 red book the Liberals said they would support the CBC at current funding levels. They cut \$414 million from the CBC and 4,000 people lost their jobs. Does the member remember that? Where was his passion from 1993 to 1997 and, in fact, in 1998?

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** I was a proud Liberal then and I am a proud Liberal today, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

We could always go back 10 or 20 years. The member, in answer to a question on the CBC, talked about child care and the GST. He will talk about almost anything to smother debate and try to shift the attention to other things. Simply stated, in the current situation, the Liberal Party of Canada would never have abandoned our public broadcaster as the Government of Canada is doing.

I read the comments made by the Prime Minister as a member of this House. At the time he thought, and even today he thinks, that

they would cut, cut and cut some more and end up making the CBC disappear. That is the government's position.

[English]

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the issue we are dealing with is similar to many other major concerns before the House today, including when the previous government refused to ensure a solid foundation for certain programs. This created ripe conditions for the Conservatives to come along and erode them even further.

The CBC is no different than any other issue like that. The problem we are now facing is due to the fact that the Liberal government did not ensure proper support for the CBC over the last decade. We now have this erosion of our public broadcaster.

My question is specifically the following. In the past, when the Liberals cut back or targeted CBC, specifically with respect to Ukrainian broadcast services under CBC, the community spoke up and caused that cutback to be rescinded. Today we are facing a situation with the Conservatives where they are doing the same thing.

I want to ask the Liberals, what was the benefit? What did the lobby do that caused the Liberals to change their minds on this so we can apply that logic to the Conservatives today?

[Translation]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Madam Speaker, we must never give up and we must debate the future of the CBC, as we are doing today. The reason for the motion is quite simple: we have to ensure the future of our public broadcaster.

How can we change the government's mind? By having this debate today. By stating loud and clear that we want a public broadcaster and that it should have the money to fulfill its mandate. It must have a presence in every region of the country—including New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia—in both official languages and it must provide Canadian content.

That is the CBC, our public broadcaster. It is presently experiencing a serious crisis and rather than helping, not only has the government thrown its hands in the air but it has decided to take advantage of the situation to knock down the CBC. That is unacceptable and we will not take it.

• (1025)

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this debate and I thank my colleague from Honoré-Mercier for his motion and for sharing his time with me.

Allow me to first set the stage. We know that last week the CBC announced cuts including the elimination of 800 positions by the end of September in order to save some \$171 million. We also know that the Conservative government, through its Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, has been saying for some time now that it has no intention of providing a long term loan, advancing funding or, frankly, lifting a finger to help the corporation.

In the course of my remarks, I will discuss primarily the report entitled *CBC/Radio-Canada: Defining Distinctiveness in the Changing Media Landscape*, which my colleague mentioned and which was tabled in the House in February 2008. It is the product of over a year's hard work conducted in a most responsible fashion by all the members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I must mention the real cooperation existing at that time among the representatives of the various parties who were working to establish a solid footing for the future of our quality public broadcaster.

[*English*]

Ever since I have been elected as a member of Parliament for Ottawa—Vanier, I have been involved in cultural matters, more particularly, in the well-being of our national broadcaster.

[*Translation*]

As I have said in the past, I totally support the existence of a public broadcaster in Canada. Furthermore, I believe that its existence is essential and I am resolved to defend the mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada and to improve its role. In my view, with the increase in foreign television programs, we have the task as parliamentarians to promote Canadian content, first through its creation and then its broadcast. To do this, I repeat, we must have a public broadcaster.

Examples of countries with a public broadcaster are many. There are at least 18, including Australia, Great Britain, Sweden and France. In France, for example, the president has called for an end to advertising on French public television, which will in future be funded from public coffers. So regardless of the situation in a given country, I sincerely believe that our government should provide CBC/Radio-Canada with more appropriate funding. The report I have just mentioned recommends a number of solutions.

I will mention, essentially, four main points from this report. The recommendations were based on five broad themes.

[*English*]

The first theme was on limiting, and eventually, gradually decreasing the importance of advertising revenue. I will mention recommendation 4.8. It states:

The Committee recognizes the current necessity and value of advertising revenues from television and on new platforms, and accepts that the CBC/Radio-Canada continue to pursue those revenue streams. However, the Committee also recommends that the Government of Canada and CBC/Radio-Canada work toward decreasing CBC Radio-Canada's relative dependency on advertising revenues for television programming.

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

This recommendation was accepted by everyone. Today, we find ourselves in a situation where the members of the government caucus appear not to share the opinion of the government at the time. Longer term planning must be ensured, because there has been a crisis in the Canadian and world economies and advertising revenues have declined. It is up to the government to intervene and support our national broadcaster, something the government does not seem to want to do.

### *Business of Supply*

[*English*]

There were recommendations on being reflective of all Canadians, and there was unanimity that CBC has to keep doing a better job of improving its ability to make sure Canadians identify with their public broadcaster in all regions of the country and in all spheres, be they public affairs, arts and so forth. There were a number of recommendations in that area which were supported by all parties. One would expect therefore that the party in government would follow up on its recommendations at the time.

There were recommendations on securing CBC Radio-Canada's autonomy. I will mention one in particular, which is recommendation 1.13:

The Committee recommends the ratification of a seven-year memorandum of understanding between the Government of Canada and CBC/Radio-Canada, setting out the respective responsibilities of the signatories. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage would be responsible for reviewing the memorandum of understanding and will conduct public consultations as required.

This was the subject of a lot of debate and was at the core of our report. Essentially we wanted to start borrowing from the model of the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and perhaps give our broadcaster a greater stability, autonomy and predictability, not just on funding but also on what government and Parliament expect from it. That was supported by everyone.

We talked about the new media. There was a recommendation that the legislative mandate of CBC be amended, the only recommendation to that effect, to make sure that CBC Radio-Canada had a mandate to incorporate in its planning digital technology, of course, and any new emerging technologies, and not be shut out of that as some of the private broadcasters would hope to do.

There was also a recommendation on funding. Here I will quote recommendation 4.1:

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage recommends that the Government of Canada commit to stable, multi-year funding for CBC/Radio-Canada, indexed to the cost of living. Funding should be for a period of not less than seven years and be established by means of the proposed memorandum of understanding.

We had a report which, although we did not have unanimity on every proposal or recommendation, was supported by all parties. In many instances recommendations were supported unanimously, but today that is not the case.

We also recommended that the base funding of CBC be increased from today's level of about \$33 per Canadian to \$40 per Canadian. I want to quote what the president of Radio-Canada, Mr. Lacroix, said about that on Thursday.

[*Translation*]

In a speech before the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, he referred to a comparative study of public funding for broadcasters in 18 countries and had the following to say:

The study revealed that those countries spend on average \$76 per capita for public broadcasting. Canada ranked 15th, with a grand total of \$34 per capita for CBC/Radio-Canada, which broadcasts in two languages. For comparison, France will soon spend \$77 per capita, and England, \$124 per capita—and in both cases, for unilingual broadcasting that is therefore much easier to manage.

[*English*]

We have a situation where all the broadcasters in our country are experiencing severe difficulties.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

This government is entertaining the notion of helping private broadcasters. The minister talked about that recently. No one yet knows just how the government intends to support private broadcasters like CTV, Global and TVA. We expect to hear an announcement soon from the government, explaining how it will help private broadcasters, while its public broadcaster has asked for assistance but was denied. We have every reason to wonder about the nature of the government's true intentions concerning the public broadcaster.

I echo my colleague's question: Is the government using the financial crisis to effectively cut off CBC/Radio-Canada's lifeblood? I hope that is not the case.

However, if the Government of Canada goes ahead and helps private broadcasters, but refuses to help the public broadcaster, while they are all suffering from the devastating effects of the financial crisis, one might conclude that this government has no interest in supporting the public broadcaster, contrary to what its representatives have publicly repeated over and over again while working on the report I referred to.

• (1035)

[English]

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to engage in this debate, because the member and I were on the same committee and I am very familiar with the report to which he refers.

I would suggest that the position the Liberals are taking today is, to use the English expression, "as bold as brass". The definition of "as bold as brass" is "shameless, audacious, impudent". The synonym is "shamelessness".

It is impossible to believe that the member and his party would come into this place, having cut historically \$400 million from the CBC to the point that 4,000 employees were put out of work and the president resigned, by comparison with the Conservatives who have put \$100 million over the last four budgets into the CBC and the president of the CBC in fact is saying there would have to be these redundancies within the CBC whether or not this magic plan the Liberals are talking about today would happen.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on that history.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order, my hon. colleague just said the Liberals cut \$400 million in the mid-1990s, when in actual fact it was \$500 million they cut from the CBC.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I do not believe that is a point of order. I think that is a point of debate.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Madam Speaker, numbers can be made to say anything. But since we are talking numbers, I will add a few. When the Liberals formed the government in 1993, they inherited a \$42 billion deficit. All kinds of budgetary restraints and cuts were imposed.

The member opposite forgets or neglects to mention that the government also created the Canadian television fund for the development of programming. Personnel moved from the public broadcaster to the private sector and with double the critical fund the result was an upsurge in the creation of Canadian programming. So we have to understand what went on.

The question I want to ask is this. If the government presents a program in one or two weeks to help the private broadcasters while refusing to help the public broadcaster, will Canadians be able to conclude anything other than that the government has no intention of helping CBC/Radio-Canada?

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I have a question for my Liberal colleague from Ottawa—Vanier.

I am very sorry to have to say it, but the Liberals do not have much credibility with their shrill demands for more funding for CBC/Radio-Canada. Back when they could have provided it, they did exactly the opposite. They instituted cuts and cost a lot of people their jobs. Just recently they voted in favour of the government's budget, which was not very generous toward CBC/Radio-Canada, despite the posturing of the parliamentary secretary.

Apart from their criticism of the current government, what promises can the Liberal Party make to do any better?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Madam Speaker, I would like to refer my colleague to the report I mentioned during my presentation. Some of her colleagues helped produce it and supported it. When we form a government, I hope it will base itself on this report and move in the direction suggested there, that is to say, develop a multi-year agreement covering at least seven years with predictable funding in place so that our public broadcaster knows what it is dealing with over this period. The complexity of programming development requires such a multi-year commitment. That is the direction we will move in.

We want to follow up seriously on all the work parliamentarians have done in consultation with Canadians. When we form the government and my colleague is in the opposition, I hope she will support these initiatives.

• (1040)

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Madam Speaker, let us cast our memories back to a few months ago, to September 2008. Canada was in the middle of an election campaign. The then Liberal leader challenged our current Prime Minister to be honest with Canadians and admit his dreams of closing the CBC. There is only one problem with this. It was actually Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau who once threatened to put the key in the door of Radio-Canada. Subsequent Conservative leaders actually increased the CBC's budget, but not for long, though. By the time the Chrétien Liberal government came into power, the CBC funding would eventually be slashed hundreds of millions of dollars. But I am getting ahead of myself here. Let us start at the beginning.



*Business of Supply*

I am happy to speak today about the CBC. The member for Honoré-Mercier has moved a motion regarding the role of CBC Radio-Canada in promoting national, regional and local programming services to linguistic minorities throughout Canada. The member wants the government to provide the CBC with bridge financing to maintain 2008 staffing and service levels.

First, I would like to say that while we are always saddened to hear of job losses, when the president of the CBC referred to the readjustments of the national broadcaster, he said the CBC would have had to undergo them regardless of whether there was bridge financing.

The broadcasting industry in Canada is undergoing substantial hardship and, like any other industry, has had to adjust. All broadcasters have had to work within budget constraints, whether it is through a loss of advertising revenues or from other realities in this age of new media. They have had to make tough choices.

We have much faith in those in management at the CBC. We strongly believe they will be capable of making the right decisions and will be able to continue to operate and serve all Canadians, including official language minorities across our great country. They understand they need to tighten their belts, just like all Canadians are doing right now, and be cautious with taxpayers' money.

We hope that the CBC will ultimately be able to deliver the services and trust that it will be able to deliver these services and news products that Canadians expect from it. We will be monitoring the decisions of the board members very carefully to make sure that they respect CBC's mandate and treat the employees fairly.

The CBC receives over \$1.1 billion per year from our government. The management should be able to manage the company with this unprecedented level of government support. In fact, the budget allocating these funds was just passed by a majority of the members of this House, including the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier, who voted for the bill at all stages.

Our funding of the CBC has increased annually since we took government. In fact, in four successive governments, we have increased the funding to the CBC each and every budget.

We have made some very specific promises in our party platform. We have followed through on our campaign promises. We have made that commitment in our budgets. We have not changed anything. Our Conservative government has increased its support for the CBC year after year.

The Liberals suggest we should be providing the CBC with bridge financing to help it survive the current economic crisis. The current Liberal leader suggested that this would enable the CBC to maintain its current number of employees and that there would be no job loss. I guess he should speak to some of the executives at the CBC.

In fact, Richard Stursberg, executive vice-president of English services, said just last week that when the CBC asked the government for bridge financing, it was for the same amount of money. He said, "It was for \$125 million, and with that amount of money, if they had given us the bridge financing, we still would have had to cut 800 people". This is regrettable, but it is the reality broadcasters are facing.

CBC President Hubert Lacroix also spoke to his employees last week on the state of the affairs at the CBC. He outlined its economic status and told them of the changes that were going to take place at their office. He spoke very highly of our Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. He said:

I have met with [the minister] on several occasions. He is a man that I could get along with and respect, and with whom I could build a business relationship. We seem to share a number of convictions regarding what Canada's public broadcaster should be, including, ... the need to review the public broadcasting model to eliminate the reliance on advertising revenue to fund some of its activities.

● (1045)

Allow me to take members on a walk down memory lane, just a few years back in time. Let us go back to 1993 and the Liberal red book, where the Liberals promised they would make no cuts to the CBC.

I just heard a member saying they would like to bring in a multi-year funding model, blah, blah, blah. It sounds a lot like the 1993 red book. However, let us see what the Liberals do when they promise no cuts.

We remember Jean Chrétien crossing the country, waving the red book and campaigning on all the promises. On the very last page of the book, in the very last paragraph, it says:

a Liberal government will be committed to stable multiyear financing for national cultural institutions such as...the CBC.

One would think they would be able to remember this, because the last statement of a book is often what one takes with oneself.

I think I heard a member quote that almost identically just a few minutes ago. I think he has read his 1993 Liberal red book. I did not believe them then, and I do not believe them now.

Of course, none of the promises that were made in the red book were ever kept. I have outlined some of those this morning.

Giving credit to the hon. member of the NDP who raised a point of order just a few minutes ago, between 1994 and 1997, the Liberals cut the CBC's budget by at least \$414 million, cutting 4,000 positions. It was so much money that the president of CBC quit his job. He was so offended at the Liberal cuts that he left.

I defer once again to former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. Everybody remembers Peter Gzowski. He was a great Canadian. When former Prime Minister Chrétien was on the late Peter Gzowski's radio show, he said that if CBC were to close its doors tomorrow morning, nobody would be in the street protesting.

Moving on in time, we see the Liberals in a bit of a bind. Many have publically spoken out against the CBC, people such as the member for Pickering—Scarborough East, who was talking to the *National Post* in February 1996. He was discussing his opposition to tax increases in order to fund the CBC. He said:

It's my belief that the Canadian people have had enough of the GST and the PST. They don't want a CBC-ST.

*Business of Supply*

By 1997, the Liberals were campaigning with another red book. Do we remember them waving red book two? It had another promise. Tucked away in the back pages of their platform, they had a preamble this time, admitting their failure on their promise of multi-year funding that was not realized. It read exactly this:

In 1993 Liberals made a commitment to stable multiyear funding for national cultural institutions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

Given the severe constraints the government has faced in dealing with the deficit, we have not fulfilled this commitment.

The member for Mississauga South talks about a promise not kept. I do not think the Liberals kept any promise in the 1993 red book, but I digress once again.

I will continue the quote:

As we restore health to the nation's finances, our financial commitment to Canada's public broadcasting system will grow.

What happened next? We can guess it. Their election promise was ignored. Cuts continued after the 1997 election, with the CBC budget reaching a low of \$745 million in 1998-99.

Today, under a Conservative government, it is \$1.1 billion. That is record funding for the CBC. It was \$745 million under the Liberals, and \$1.1 billion under the current Conservative government.

In 2000, we heard about programming cuts and so forth. What did they do in 2000? They cut supper-hour programming right across Canada.

I will bet some Canadians valued that programming. The Liberals cut it.

However, they did not stop there. Members such as Roger Galloway continued to introduce motions to cut the English network's government funding.

Former Liberal cabinet minister Stan Keyes spoke about the CBC and said that the CBC has become a monster, quite frankly. He said that it's a billion dollars we have put towards CBC television and we witness direct competition between a public broadcaster and the private sector.

It is not only the Liberals who are against the CBC, though. I just wanted to highlight them since they brought the motion and they are showing the most hypocrisy on this issue. They are also the only other party that has ever formed government in the House, so we can only look to their record.

When we look at the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, what can we say about them? Members of the NDP say that they support the CBC, yet on every occasion they have had to prove it, they failed. They have voted against every Conservative budget since 2006.

Here is the problem with the NDP's position on the CBC. In 2004-05, this Parliament increased funding for the CBC, and the NDP voted against it. In 2006-07, we increased the funding for the CBC, and they voted against it. In 2007-08, we increased the funding for the CBC, and the NDP voted against it.

●(1050)

In 2008-09, we increased the funding for the CBC; the NDP voted against it. Then there was our 2009 economic action plan. One gets the picture.

As for the Bloc Québécois, its members have also voted against recent increases to the CBC. The Conservative government is delivering the goods, but the Bloc Québécois is voting against it.

The CBC has been around for quite a while. Its mandate and role have been defined and redefined over the years.

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage studied the CBC on a number of occasions with a variety of differing views on what the role of the broadcaster should be. There is a consensus amongst most members that the CBC should provide services to all regions of the country in both official languages. There is also agreement that minority linguistic communities also depend on the reception of news and information services provided to them in the communities in which they live.

At the end of the day, political members of all stripes have pondered the issue of the CBC and broadcasting in general. The present Liberal leader and member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, for example, in pontificating about the role of public and private broadcasting in North America, in a *Toronto Star* article in 1989, said:

I see our efforts as a struggle against the fragmentation of the broadcasting system in North America and against the assumption by existing public broadcasters, including CBC, that their audiences are fools who can't think for themselves.

Editorialists have weighed in on the debate as well. Across our country there have been a number of opinion pieces written regarding the public broadcaster.

The *Chatham Daily News*, in November, said:

The CBC gets 60 per cent of its funding from taxpayers. Spending frugally should be a given.

The *Hamilton Spectator*, in February of this year, said:

Whether it's called a bridge loan, a bailout or supplementary funding, the CBC request for federal money to tide it over is simply not fair to other struggling broadcast organizations...The CBC must...reinvent itself for the future as a condition of additional funding.

[*Translation*]

In Saturday's *La Presse*, Vincent Marissal reiterated the comment by his colleague, Nathalie Petrowski, saying that:

...Jean Chrétien's Liberal government made severe cuts to the corporation's budget 10 years ago or so. The former Prime Minister... had gone as far as to contend that losing CBC-Radio-Canada would not be a big loss to Canadians.

Earlier, in the days of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Liberals [referred to] Radio-Canada [as] "that separatist nest" and dreamt of cleaning up that subversive outfit.

Marissal concluded with a question:

...how come the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, despite numerical superiority in the Commons, failed to act sooner, before the budget was passed for instance, to force the government's hand?

It has been known for at least three months that CBC/Radio-Canada was walking a tightrope, but answers obtained from all three parties yesterday suggest that they did not see the crisis coming.

The opposition is raising quite a ruckus, but it is rather pointless for the cavalry to move in once the battle is over.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

André Pratte in a La Presse article over the weekend said, “if the CBC has hit a dead end today, it's not because the Conservatives were cheap, but as a result of a decline in advertising revenue as a result of the recession. In addition, the public broadcaster is facing the same structural problems that the private broadcasters are generally experiencing: costs are increasing, but demand is decreasing as a result of the appearance of new media on the broadcast landscape. Some people say that the Government of Canada should simply give more money to the CBC. However, who believes the CBC is managed on a tight leash? If the government has to support them, then with it must come the assurance that taxpayers' money is well invested”.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the work and representation the CBC provides to many Canadians.

There are serious challenges facing the Canadian broadcast industry, and representatives in this industry, including the CBC, have to tighten their belts. As most Canadians can attest, there are tough choices that need to be made.

As with most Canadians, personal budgets must be established and followed. The same goes for the CBC. We are confident that the management knows how to make the best decisions for the future of the public broadcaster, keeping in mind the responsible spending of hard-earned taxpayer dollars and the service that is important to all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

• (1055)

[Translation]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the government's view is rather peculiar. When it is not making cuts to culture, it thinks that it is increasing funding. Talking about yearly increases is incorrect. There have been no increases in the government's budget, but rather a scheduled 1.5% per year increase from Treasury Board. So, let us stick to the facts.

Let me read another very important quote, which states, “Reform [their party] policy would place the government sponsored loser [the CBC] in a situation where subsidies are weaned away and the future of the company is based on consumer satisfaction.” That is a quote from the Prime Minister, and I would like to know if the parliamentary secretary agrees with his leader on that.

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Madam Speaker, the member wants to talk about quotes. I quoted from the 1993 Liberal red book. It was shameful what the Liberals did in 1993 and then again what they did in 1997.

In terms of the Reform Party, there is no party of that name anymore. There is the new Conservative Party of Canada, the Government of Canada, Canada's party. That is who is in the House. That is who governs this country.

But let us look at what the Liberal Party said. It called for “stable, multi-year funding”, and then it made cuts. The president quit his job, with 4,000 people thrown out of work because the Liberals took the money from the CBC and put it in their own pockets with the sponsorship scandal. That is their record.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I find the speech delivered by the member for Peterborough, the parliamentary secretary, rather surprising, not least because this is the first time he has chosen to address the House in French. This is the first time I have heard him do so, in any case. I would like to congratulate him and encourage him to keep it up.

I am also surprised by the content of his remarks and his tendency to criticize opposition parties even though the government is the party in power, the party with both hands on the wheel, as the expression goes. If the government wanted to, it could help CBC/Radio-Canada. This budget provides an increase of 1.5%, which is not even enough to cover pay increases. Taking into account cuts to the Canada media fund—formerly the Canadian television fund—there is no actual budget increase. Worst of all, the government is simply not interested in helping CBC/Radio-Canada. That comes through loud and clear in its remarks.

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Madam Speaker, of course, there have been annual year-after-year increases to the CBC under our government. We stood behind the CBC. We have provided it with support and have given it the arm's-length relationship it needed to run its business effectively. We have not tampered with the CBC in any way. We believe in its individuality as a network. We are providing record support to the CBC.

The member referenced the new media fund, a great announcement that the minister made just a few short weeks ago. It was celebrated by CBC President Hubert Lacroix at the time as a magnificent step for content in Canada in support of Canadian artists. It is another great announcement made by this government.

However, I would say to the member with respect to the CBC, the member well knows that the difficulties the CBC is encountering is not because of government funding. The government funding is in fact at record levels. Advertising revenues have declined, as they have for all broadcasters, and that is why the broadcaster is experiencing difficulties.

We have given the CBC an increase at a time when many Canadian families have experienced a decrease. Canadians expect the CBC to take the money that it has been given, that increase in funding, and deliver the services that Canadians have come to expect.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I do not disagree with the member for Peterborough at all when he talks about the unmitigated gall of Liberals to introduce this motion after they, in the mid-1990s, cut 4,000 jobs from the CBC and in fact did cut things like the supertime news hour in centres like Winnipeg, something that we are still missing today.

However, if we are going to go back in history, let us go back to the Conservatives in the election of 2004, when John Reynolds said that CBC Television would be completely cut loose to compete and would have to depend entirely on its own advertising revenue; or Stephen Rogers, the Conservative candidate in Vancouver Quadra, who allegedly called the CBC the “communist broadcasting corporation”.

*Business of Supply*

Does the member and his colleagues in the Conservative Party care about the CBC at all? Does he believe in the need for a public broadcaster? Why not embark on bridge financing, which is a cost-effective way to ensure that this national institution, so important to Canadians, is able to survive?

• (1100)

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Madam Speaker, the member of the NDP is one that I have a great deal of respect for. We do not agree on everything. In fact, we probably disagree on a lot of things, but I have a lot of respect for this member.

I would say to the member that of course I support the CBC. Of course, I support the role of the public broadcaster.

I grew up in Peterborough. We have an affiliate of the CBC, CHEX-TV, which has always been a major contributor to our local community. It always carried local news and local content, and all the CBC programming that has meant so much to me.

In fact, if I go back to my childhood, I think I was watching *Hockey Night in Canada* before I could talk or walk, and that was all carried on CHEX-TV, a great affiliate of the CBC. This is a network that we intend to see succeed, and continue to survive and thrive into the future.

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC):** Madam Speaker, I find this a very interesting conversation. I can say that CKCO-TV in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge region is having some difficulties as a result of the times. DAVE-FM, a radio station in my riding of Cambridge, is having difficulties.

What I am hearing this morning is probably the epitome of hypocrisy from across the floor. The Bloc just voted against funding for Radio-Canada. The NDP voted against this recent budget that increased. We just heard the litany of broken promises by the Liberals who gutted the CBC. They say they will not and then they do. That is typical pre-election promises.

However, the key question for the member, who just gave a great lucid speech that was well researched, deals with the fact that the management at CBC has stated that bridge funding will not help it.

Why is it that the Liberals have chosen to use this as a way to again say things that they have no intention of doing? Did the management at CBC say that this bridge funding would or would not help?

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Madam Speaker, a number of executives of the CBC's board specifically indicated that this bridge financing would not have helped the CBC. Let me clear, it would not have prevented the layoff of 800 employees at CBC. It would have had to make those changes anyway.

The board of the CBC worked within its budget and it came up with a plan on how it was going to bridge itself through it. That is responsible. It is the right thing to do.

Canadian taxpayers ultimately are the ones who are providing the bulk of the support to the CBC. They want it to provide the broadcasting and the content that they have come to expect. They want the CBC to do it in a manner that is financially and fiscally responsible.

Believe me, we are very saddened by the job losses at CBC, but a bridge loan would not have changed that.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I have two questions. Why is there such fear of the CBC, our national public broadcaster, when it celebrates Canadian culture, our two official languages, and reflects Canadian regions? Why is there such resistance to fund arts, history, journalism and science, which is internationally acclaimed on the CBC?

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** The member has either been sleeping since 2006 or is deeply confused, Madam Speaker.

We have increased funding to everything that she just mentioned, absolutely everything. I can back that up with documentation. There is not a single thing that the member just mentioned that we have not increased the funding to, whether it is the CBC, health care, post-secondary education, the arts, Canadian culture, everything. There is nothing the member can point to that we have not increased support.

We just heard from the Minister of State for Science and Technology. Has the member heard how much money the Minister of State for Science and Technology is investing on behalf of this government into scientific research in this country? The member needs to pay a little more attention to what she is voting in favour of when she supports this government's budgets.

This government's budgets have in fact increased funding to all of the areas that she just mentioned.

• (1105)

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, pursuant to Standing Order 18 it states briefly that no member shall speak disrespectfully of the Sovereign, the Royal Family, the Governor General and so on, or use offensive words against either House or against any member thereof.

To impute that some member is sleeping or not paying attention or not doing their job and so on, is—

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

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** If the member wants to heckle, that is fine, but we have to pay attention to Standing Order 18 and to reflect on another member's work when he or she has worked so hard on matters like this, I believe is inappropriate under the Standing Orders.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I would agree that the comment was not very nice, but I do not think it meets the standards of unparliamentary language.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert has the floor.

*Business of Supply*

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, at the outset, I would like to say that I am fed up with the Conservative government saying that the Bloc Québécois has always voted against it. That is simply not true. On May 10, 2006, and March 27, 2007, the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of the Conservative government's budgets. I would therefore ask my Conservative colleagues to stop singing the same old tune and to check their facts. Every time they get the facts wrong and base their decisions on that kind of fundamental information, we have reason to doubt everything else they have to say and all of the facts they bring up in the House.

This past weekend, I heard someone say that CBC/Radio-Canada is the GM of the news world. Initially, I thought that that was an interesting analogy, but upon reflection, I realized that it did not apply with the Conservative government. If CBC/Radio-Canada were the GM of the news world, the government would have helped it long ago. I heard the parliamentary secretary say that the corporation was having problems with advertising revenue. Maybe, but GM had problems with car sales revenue. The government is ready to help GM and Chrysler, but not CBC/Radio-Canada. That is the message we are getting from the parliamentary secretary and the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. This government does not want to help CBC/Radio-Canada for ideological reasons.

The corporation's problems did not begin yesterday, but long ago. In 2007, the opposition parties reacted and called upon the government to take the necessary action. Contrary to what the hon. member for Peterborough says, the opposition parties, and in particular the Bloc Québécois, demanded that the government take action. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage did a study which began on March 1, 2007 and continued for a year, until February 2008. Hundreds of people testified, 45 meetings were held, and 710 letters and emails were received from Quebecers and from Canadians all over the country. That report details all the problems of CBC/Radio-Canada, those from last year and those of today, that have resulted in the crown corporation's present difficulties. I will quickly recount the solutions that were proposed. I reread this report recently. Not only are the same problems recurring, but the solutions proposed are those that everyone is now considering for CBC/Radio-Canada.

First of all, we need multi-year funding that is stable, indexed and planned over seven years, with certain conditions and a memorandum of understanding. An envelope of \$60 million has been suggested. I will turn in a moment to the famous discretionary envelope of the minister which he will allocate as the mood strikes him. We need a budget of \$40 per capita. Mention was made just now of the studies being done elsewhere in the world which show that \$40 per capita is not too much. We also need less dependence on advertising. The hon. member for Peterborough spoke of the loss of advertising revenue. The corporation should not have trouble producing its programming because it is having trouble finding advertising. One situation does not necessarily flow from the other.

In last year's report, the Bloc specified that the French network should receive all the attention and all the solutions it deserves. There are two broadcasters, one anglophone and one francophone, and they are faced with different problems requiring different

solutions. We should also have a public television system that reflects Quebec's values. Radio-Canada should in particular reflect the values of the Quebec nation: this is something that has been recognized by everyone here.

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage thus took a cold hard look at the problems of the crown corporation which is today in hot water. The committee members sat down and came up with some solutions in a calm atmosphere, an atmosphere not subject to the stresses of today created by an extremely difficult situation of at least 800 looming layoffs. The document is over 200 pages long. It is indeed a very serious piece of work. Involved in it were my colleagues Maka Kotto, who is now making a contribution in the National Assembly of Quebec, the hon. member for Ahuntsic, who will be speaking to you this afternoon, and the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, who also took part in last year's study. This member so appreciates the world of culture that he has put forward a motion in this House calling on this government to restore funding for the arts and culture programs that were cut last summer for ideological reasons.

● (1110)

As I mentioned earlier, there are two distinct broadcasters: Radio-Canada on the French side, and CBC on the English side. Their problems are different, which means that the solutions must be different. It is a mistake to put everything together, to try to create a single entity, and then to try to fix the problems and find solutions. That does not work, and that is one of the problems right now.

As I mentioned, unfortunately, CBC Television remains in a constant state of crisis. I am not the one who makes that claim. One of the numerous reports of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage says:

90 per cent of all the drama that Canadians watch on English-language television is foreign, mostly American.

This is from the report entitled "Making A Place for All Canadians". And it is true that CBC, because of the English language and the proximity of the United States, has problems that the SRC does not have. That is not difficult to understand, but that is a fact. Canada is being invaded by American television.

When a Canadian decides to watch television in the evening, he chooses the network that is most likely to provide big budget programming, which often means, although not always, better quality. Therefore, he is tempted to choose American drama. Not only is he tempted, but he actually chooses them, as confirmed by audience ratings. The ratings for the CBC are, in some respects, poor or, rather, low. I will not go any further in my choice of words.

Radio-Canada does not have the same kind of problems. Let me give an example to prove my point. Earlier, I mentioned that last year the committee had tried to bunch together the problems of the French and English networks, and that it did not work. I happen to have with me a quote from the committee's report. It says: "For years now, Canadians have been witnessing the decline of CBC/Radio-Canada programming, particularly in the regions."

That is undoubtedly an issue for CBC, but not for Radio-Canada, because the French network is doing very well.

*Business of Supply*

Last week, the TV series *Les Invincibles* had a rating of close to 1 million viewers. That is quite a feat for a serial drama presented on a weeknight. It is about young and modern couples living in this day and age. It is really very interesting, it is well done, and Quebeckers can relate to that TV series. So, Radio-Canada does not have the rating problems that the CBC is experiencing.

This profound and significant difference, this reality of dissimilar challenges facing two quite separate networks, does not come through clearly in the Committee's recommendations. Faced with CBC Television's ongoing failure to attract a large audience, the committee seems to have thrown up its hands, while congratulating itself on the success of the French network.

By dividing its study on the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century into two reports, one on the French network and one on the English network, the committee could have dealt in greater depth with the different problems confronting each of them. The truth is that CBC/Radio-Canada's French-language network is intended essentially for Quebeckers, and tells Quebec stories made by Quebeckers. Quebeckers' feeling of belonging to the Quebec nation explains why they are so attached to their own television, whether private or public, and the audience ratings bear that out.

As I said earlier, the CBC has audience rating problems mainly because of competition from American networks. The French network still does have problems of its own, but is not affected by American competition, as audience ratings for *Les Invincibles* demonstrated again last week.

The problem facing Radio-Canada has more to do with fierce competition from private enterprise, which is practising convergence and fighting for the same advertising revenue. Issues such as funding for high-cost drama series, residuals, in-house production, funding for public affairs programs, respect for the mandate of Radio Canada International and the SRC's regional development would have received a great deal more attention if there had been a separate study.

• (1115)

It is obvious that even when it comes to broadcasting Quebec is a different nation and that the parliamentarians in the three other parties would have been better advised to face facts, which would have enabled the committee to do a better job. They preferred to deny the Quebec nation rather than appropriately support a multinational public broadcaster.

The Bloc took part in formulating the committee's recommendations and supported them. It is reiterating its belief in a real, national, strong and well funded public television network. First, it believes in stable, indexed, multi-year funding over seven years. That is recommendation 4.1 on page 129. Clearly, the opposition has done its homework. I must say that, last year, when the committee report was tabled in the House, the ball was in the Conservative's court government to accept the recommendations and to implement them. Had the Conservative government really wanted to do something for the CBC and resolve the problems we are now hearing about that are occurring today, it would have acted, as the Minister of Canadian Heritage reacted when he heard that CTV was having problems. He bounced up and said that, indeed, the government was going to help out. We are not hearing that from the Conservative government. We

are not hearing that it is going to help the CBC. We are hearing that it depends on this and that, that it is not their fault, that it is the fault of the Liberals or the NDP and that the Bloc voted against it. This government is doing nothing, and yet it was said last year in this House and also written that CBC/Radio Canada needed stable funding over seven years. It needed \$40 per capita, and that is really not a lot. Some countries in the world provide \$80 per capita. In the 18 countries in the industrialized world, we are at the tail end, just ahead of the United States, which has no need for the reasons we know, including the size of its population. We need \$40 per person.

When this Conservative government tells us in the House that it has never given so much for the CBC, I take a look at the budget documents. There I see that, in 2005-06, under a Liberal government, the budget was \$1.97 billion. I am not making this up; it is in the government's budget. This year, what is the government budgeting? According to the main estimates, the figure is \$1.52 billion. That is \$62 million less. "Wait", they will say, there is a \$60 million envelope. Yes, but this envelope is not a sure thing. This is the way it is year after year. The government finally announced this additional envelope a few days ago. The minister let himself be persuaded and granted it. However, it still depends on the mood of the minister. He has given it year after year. There has been no year it was not given, but why is it not part of the budget? Why is the minister obliged to hold out this carrot? He has said that, if the CBC is nice, he will make the money available immediately, if it is naughty, he will hand it out later. That is not the way it works. It makes no sense. That is not how a Crown corporation is managed if it is to be strong and healthy.

Basically, the total after the \$60 million promised this week will be \$1.1 billion. As I said earlier, compared to the Liberals' \$1.97 billion, it seems to me that \$3 million does not make much of a difference; it does not even match the 1.5% wage increase this government is giving its employees. At CBC/Radio-Canada, the wage increase might be 2%, when they are already in the hole.

Advertising revenues are lower, but that is not the whole problem. This Conservative government is not respecting the economy and the constant dollar principle. Indeed, in constant dollars, there is a \$300 million shortfall in CBC/Radio-Canada's budget as compared to 20 years ago. The Conservatives are talking nonsense. The fact is that, as we have seen earlier, the information they are providing is not right, and neither is this. When the Conservatives say that the government gave CBC/Radio-Canada the most, that is not true.

Regarding the \$40 per capita, if this government and its Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages are serious, the minister should stand in this House and say that, from now on, \$40 per capita will be provided. I must say that the Conservatives did not indicate in a supplementary report that they disagreed with this \$40 per capita amount. All they said was that they wanted to see what the corporation would do with that money.

*Business of Supply*

•(1120)

Perhaps by looking at the business plan prepared by Hubert Lacroix, the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages would realize that there is a shortfall of \$171 million to deal with even after selling \$125 million in assets. Perhaps then he would have a better idea of what to do. Even by posting a \$171 million deficit and selling \$125 million in assets, he still has to lay off 800 employees, which is not right. If the minister really wants to know what our public broadcaster would do with \$40 per capita, he need only read through the corporation's list of expenditures and it will become clear.

If this government is serious, if it truly wants to help CBC/Radio-Canada, there is a solution: \$40 per capita. Three words. It is not complicated, it just has to do it. Then we will finally believe that this Conservative government really does want to do something for our public broadcaster. To date, it has done nothing. It has done absolutely nothing

In short, as I mentioned earlier, it is very important to add the additional \$60 million. This cat and mouse game is ridiculous: I am in a good mood, I will give you the money right away; I am in a bad mood, I will give it to you later. That makes no sense.

We must decrease the corporation's dependency on advertising revenues. Almost all the emails and messages received by the committee last year recommended that all advertising be eliminated from CBC/Radio-Canada television, as it was from radio. However, not everyone agrees on that point. Some find that advertising is a good link to the community, especially in the regions. But the corporation's reliance on advertising must be reduced. The loss of advertising revenue is not a good thing right now for television as a whole. But it is true that decisions are made in times of crisis. Perhaps this decision could be made quickly.

In closing, the Bloc Québécois will continue to support the corporation and work to defend it from a government that is insensitive to the arts, culture and cultural development. That is why the Bloc is so passionate about the transfer of all responsibility for the arts, culture and broadcasting, and naturally their corresponding funding, as quickly as possible to the Quebec government, which is truly interested in and attuned to cultural and telecommunications activities. It is our hope that this would be just one element of the transition to a sovereign Quebec.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I liked what the member had to say about defining the unique role of CBC Radio-Canada across the country and, specifically, in Quebec. The member also knows that many francophones across the rest of Canada also enjoy Radio-Canada and want to see it protected.

My question relates to the unique mandate of CBC Radio-Canada. It does not have the same latitude in programming as other private broadcasters, which thrive on the programming from the United States. It is not only competing with U.S. channels and stations, but also with Canadian broadcasters that are spending big dollars to have U.S. programming, therefore giving them a chance to raise more money.

Does the member believe it is necessary to protect the unique position of CBC Radio-Canada? If the protection is not there, if the programming is not protected and if we start losing programming, it may be unable to come back when times get better. That is my concern.

Has the committee commented on the risk of losing programming services, which may, once taken off the air, never come back?

•(1125)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée:** Madam Speaker, often but not always the quality of television programming admittedly requires a big budget. The more money there is to make a program, the more chance there is of a quality program. That is not necessarily always the rule, however. There have been excellent low-budget programs and there have been big-budget programs that have really bombed. I will not name any names. But most of the time—and this is the case elsewhere as well, in the U.S. and other countries—you can manage to accomplish something with a big budget. That is why I am coming back to the \$40 per capita figure.

That strikes me as the solution. At the moment, all of us together in this Parliament can manage to do something with, and for, the corporation by giving it the necessary budget. And \$40 will not be a lot, when we have seen figures in the Nordicity report of \$80 per capita for some countries that do not have to help two broadcasters.

In the situation we have here, CBC is one broadcaster and Radio-Canada is another. With \$40 per capita, we would be helping out two broadcasters.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

[English]

I would like to explore the \$40 per capita for a minute. Forty dollars per capita for 33 million Canadians amounts to \$1.32 billion. We give a direct subsidy to the CBC of \$1.1 billion. If people watch the CBC, as I do, they will realize there is an awful lot of government advertising. I would suspect that the Government of Canada is the largest single advertiser on the CBC, and I do not know what the dollar figure is. However, at one point, \$1 billion amounts to \$33 per capita for every man, woman and child in Canada and another \$230 million or so of advertising would bring that up to the \$40 per capita about which she talked.

What is her appreciation of those numbers and does she have any idea, because I do not? How much advertising does the Government of Canada give to the CBC and how much more does that increase its cash flow?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée:** Madam Speaker, I did not get the last part of the question very well, but I did get the first part fine, the \$40 per capita. Obviously, the \$40 is a figure from last year. Perhaps this year it might be revised. I have heard of a revised per capita figure of \$44.

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

*Business of Supply*

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée:** Yes, but with the \$60 million, that makes \$1.3 billion.

We need to be able to sense a real desire by this Conservative government to help CBC/Radio-Canada. So far, however, what we have seen and heard is not helping us believe it is prepared to help it out. When the disappearance of Radio-Canada was spoken of in the House, the Conservatives applauded. It cost the Prime Minister such an effort to be interviewed by Radio-Canada, after granting numerous interviews to the private networks first.

We need to be able to feel that this government wants to help the corporation. To date, we have yet to hear any such statement or commitment from any Conservative member.

• (1130)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my dear colleague from the Bloc. This is interesting. I have represented a very small community in north-western British Columbia. The CBC/Radio-Canada has played a very important role there in bringing the community together and encouraging dialogue in the nation, not just the region.

[*English*]

With respect to the way both the Liberals and Conservatives have handled the CBC over time, the possibility of privatization, while never talked about directly, is implicated by the way the budgets are handled. In the mid-1990s, when the Liberals drastically cut the budget, the head of the CBC and friends of the CBC talk about the need for greater use of commercials and American broadcasting. The revenues became the only criteria by which to judge the national broadcaster, and that conversation continues. Over time the trajectory is towards this inevitable conclusion, as proposed by the Conservatives and Liberals, to privatize the network.

For the smaller regions in our country, the possibility of having that national conversation under the guise of exclusively a private broadcaster is no longer possible. One thing that unifies such a large and broad country as ours is the role of public broadcasting, with “public” being emphasized. We collect our taxes together and put them towards a national broadcaster, a public broadcaster, to fulfill this role of connecting the regions and playing into this national dialogue, this national story that is Canada.

[*Translation*]

It is so important for small villages and communities such as ours that there be cooperation with this in mind. I wonder if she could comment on this.

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée:** Madam Speaker, indeed, we know that public television is extremely important in small communities all across Quebec, and also Canada. For the francophone communities outside Quebec it is also extremely important. Too often it is the only connection they have to the French-speaking world.

For all these reasons, I return to my \$40 per capita, and I invite the Conservative member who made a comment to me just now to redo his calculations. For the CBC needs help in any way possible.

I understand that it may be difficult for certain governments to assist the CBC. I know it is not easy to love the CBC. When people are in power, sitting on the other side of the House, be they

Conservative or Liberal, it is not easy to love the CBC. It produces newscasts, it is objective, and it says things that the party in power and the opposition parties do not like to hear. It is tempting for a government to say it is going to shut down unfavourable criticism, or try to reduce it as much as possible. Such things should not be done in a democracy. We absolutely must help the CBC be a strong public broadcaster that is capable of complete objectivity, both in its regular programming and in its news and public affairs programs.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House representing the people in my region of Timmins—James Bay.

I am speaking with a heavy heart about what is being discussed today. I was afraid there would come a point when we would have to discuss this issue because we would come to a point where a government attack on the CBC would lead us to a situation where the future of the broadcaster would be a topic in the House.

In an attempt to forestall this day coming, I was on the heritage committee last year and it initiated a study of the CBC so that all members of Parliament would fully understand the role and importance of the CBC, and we could get all parties to buy-in to a vision of a reformed broadcaster. At that time, the NDP worked closely with its allies, the Bloc, Liberals and Conservatives, to bring forward a plan. Unfortunately, the plan that had been laid out by the heritage committee to address the many problems being faced with an underfunded CBC was ignored by the minister. The ensuing crisis is part of the problem now.

The loss of jobs that the CBC is facing comes at a time of unprecedented crisis in Canada's local and regional broadcasting markets. Private broadcasters' local television stations are being closed across the country. Once proud, independent television stations that grew into larger conglomerates are now being thrown aside as somehow having become a junk product, when for decades they built audience share and a local voice.

No better example could be given than CHCH-TV in Hamilton, which provided such a unique role. It was brought up in the Canwest chain and is now being discarded. That is an example of the kind of broadcast crisis we are facing. It is not just in terms of radio and television. It is in terms of newspapers. Many great local papers, some of which have been around for more than a century, are being bought by massive chains.

Every time we see more media concentration, the result is always clear, they cut more staff at the local level and get rid of local voices, to the point where many of the local newspapers across this country, that have served communities for decades or even a century, do not even have local editorials any more. Whoever is in the meagre stable of whatever media oligarchy is running that section of the country will present a national editorial. What happens each time is that local people feel their stories are disappearing. It happens bit by bit. Now we are in a full-fledged broadcasting crisis.



*Business of Supply*

Let us talk about the CBC. The importance of the CBC in the Canadian broadcasting context is that it is a conversation. It is a conversation between Canadians. At its best, that is what public broadcasting is supposed to be and it is a job that private broadcasters cannot do. It is not to say that private broadcasters do not have their niche in their markets and serve their roles well, but the notion of a national conversation is only possible within the context of a public broadcaster.

I will give an example. When I was much younger, I was involved in media. I ran my own independent media magazine and online service as a regional voice for the north. I worked as a broadcaster for Studio 2, a provincial service. I did some work with the CBC and went to the CBC through my work in the arts.

When I was much younger, my band recorded the first Grievous Angels cassette. Even before we had a record we had a cassette, and we had the idea that if we got the cassette to Stuart McLean, he would play it on the radio and he did. Our first national public broadcast was by someone running up to Stuart McLean on the street and saying, "Here is a cassette, Mr. McLean. Would you play this on a national radio show?" The next thing I knew the band was being interviewed by Peter Gzowski on *Morningside*. That day the group went from being a very small local band to a band that was being asked to play across the country.

I am saying this not to brag, but to say there is no other broadcaster in the country where it would be possible for a song of a band that is completely unknown to be played once on radio, and then to be invited to Vancouver, Winnipeg, Edmonton, right across the country, because people heard it and identified with it.

• (1135)

That has been the role of the CBC right across this country in terms of creating voices for new artists, new writers, new thinkers. When they are interviewed, whether it was by Gzowski in the old days or even today on Jian Ghomeshi's *Q*, or any of the other programs, people hear that and they feel they are part of this conversation. When the cuts that we are talking about today happen, they happen in a way that affects the ability of regions to speak to one another.

Nowhere do I see this more so than the cuts we are going to face in northern Ontario at CBC Sudbury and CBC Thunder Bay. In this market, CBC Sudbury represents a region that is about the size of western Europe. To cut 8 out of 16 jobs at CBC Sudbury means that the ability of this station to represent to Canada, in the multitude of communities that are as far flung as the shores of Hudson's Bay and James Bay, right across isolated communities in the north, has been terminated. It is no longer possible for that station to do that job.

The cuts will mean that we will have a morning show or an afternoon show. We will not have both. Let us say we lose the afternoon show out of CBC Sudbury. What does that mean in the grand scheme of things? It may mean nothing to people in other regions, but without an afternoon show, we now lose the one show that promoted local writers, regional artists, regional voices. Great performers like Kate Maki, who built a national name, do not get their start because they are not going to be heard on the local afternoon show. The local role of CBC Sudbury has been to cover an entire region.

The other role that CBC Sudbury plays, which is absolutely invaluable in our region, is that we have a francophone service representing the very large francophone population of the northeast, and we have English radio. It is the one format where the francophone and English populations actually speak to each other.

We have programming on CBC North where the hosts of the various shows speak to each other, so that the English milieu is hearing and understanding what the issues are in the francophone community. When we cut those wires, that conversation ceases. It has a profound impact and it draws us back to this fundamental question. What role does a public broadcaster play?

If we are going to cut regional services like this, we are essentially saying that we are turning out the lights in parts of our country. Nowhere else could I think of the effects than in my isolated communities on the James Bay coast. Those communities are served by Wawatay Cree Radio, where the communities speak to each other, but their only ability to speak to a much broader context is through CBC.

When St. Anne's Residential School in Fort Albany burned to the ground, it was a story that everyone in our region shared because CBC was there. When two young men burned to death in a jailhouse fire in Kashechewan, CBC brought that story to the nation, but now, two years later when we are actually having the hearings on what happened to those two men who burned to death in that makeshift jail cell, we will not have the budget to have CBC Sudbury cover that.

In fact, one flight now to Kashechewan, if CBC were to do its job, would probably wipe out CBC's budget for the year in Sudbury because there is no money to do these services.

By making these cuts, it has to be really understood that the lights are going out in certain parts of our country. The ability of certain parts of our regions to speak to one another is being turned off.

I was at an event in the little community of Kennebec, Ontario, on highway 65 west. An elderly woman came up to me and said, "If these cuts go ahead at CBC Sudbury, how will we speak to each other?" In that part of northern Ontario, the one unifying voice is the CBC link, so the cuts that are happening are profound and cannot be underestimated.

Let us talk about how we got here. CBC is the most underfunded public broadcaster in the world. When we look at the motion of my colleague from the Liberals, we will certainly be supporting the motion, but we need to address the elephant in the room, that bridge financing alone would not have gotten us out of this problem.

*Business of Supply*

●(1140)

Bridge financing and a government that was willing to work would have helped address the immediate problems in the crisis. However, it would not have addressed the overall systemic problem we are facing, and that is years of underfunding, years of respective governments undermining our public broadcaster to the point that we were at the tipping point with this recent crisis. My colleague said that bridge financing would maintain 2008 staffing and service levels. I wish that were true. If the government had been willing to work with the CBC early on, we might have addressed many of the job losses.

It has to be pointed out that if we go back 10, 12, 14 years and look at the government's response to the obligations to a public broadcaster, it has been to undermine it. It has been to ridicule it. It has been to make it come and beg every March for the \$60 million extra appropriation, and the government leaves the public broadcaster dangling and does not tell it until the very last minute. It is a situation that no other public broadcaster would ever face. It has undermined the ability of the public broadcaster to do its job.

Even with the years of underfunding and the lack of commitment toward the role of the public broadcaster, Parliament, the heritage committee, Canadians in general have asked more and more from our public broadcaster. In response we have CBC TV, Radio-Canada, Newsworld, Radio 1, 2, and now 3, RDI, and *Première Chaîne Radio*. We have a network that is on in five and a half time zones with eight aboriginal language services. That is outreach no other public broadcaster in the world would have to face. BBC plays to one time zone with one English market. It is much more concentrated than what CBC is having to face.

Yet even with all these challenges, we see that in the last few years, English language television now has the number two market share in the country on the 8 to 11 spot at night. All-Canadian fare is beating the all-American lineup on Global. Radio-Canada television is seeing a market share of almost 20% in prime time and it is continuing to increase. CBC radio services are enjoying historic highs, almost 20% for Radio-Canada in each market, 14.1% for CBC radio. With respect to the CBC website, we have called for CBC to get involved online and now it is getting four million hits a month. Two million podcasts are being downloaded every month. The online CBC.ca program has a quarter of a million members.

As Hubert Lacroix, the president of CBC, said, if we go back 40 years, we will not find an example of a public broadcaster being this successful. It has been successful, despite the fact that it has been doing it on a shoestring. It has met all the requirements that parliamentarians, politicians and the audience have pushed on it. Not only that, but when I was on the heritage committee, it would be regular to say that we wanted a new plan for expanding television or for expanding radio, but there was never a commitment at the government level that addressed the fundamental problem which is the underfunding.

When we look at the recommendations that were brought forward by an all-party committee in order to address the CBC, if the government had accepted the recommendations that were offered to it by the heritage committee, we would not be in this situation now.

There were numerous recommendations in terms of the mandate and how to ensure accountability at CBC, but there were a couple of key benchmarks that needed to be met. One was the ratification of a seven year memorandum of understanding between the Government of Canada and CBC that would set out the respective responsibilities and obligations. That seven year memorandum of understanding would allow the corporation to note clearly what Parliament expected in terms of its regional services, its commitments to the arts, its commitments to official languages, and then it would have the financial appropriations to be able to do its planning over seven years. The Conservative government never accepted that motion.

One of the other motions was that we have multi-year funding and that the one-time funding of \$60 million, which comes at the end of every March, and the minister has just announced it, would actually be added to its permanent core funding so it would not have to come and beg and it could actually make the planning.

Recommendation 4.4 I think was the key one, that after consultation with broadcasters, consultation with experts, we settled on the figure that we need to move the core funding to \$40 per capita. It did not have to be done in one year, but that was the benchmark we needed to move toward.

●(1145)

Funding of \$40 per capita is still much lower than the funding that is offered to public broadcasters anywhere else in the world. To get from \$34 per capita to \$40 per capita over a three- or four-year timeline would give us the resources to put CBC in the position where we want it. We did not get that from the government. We have seen a rather cynical approach to an institution that the government has been very ambivalent about. Many of the government members have ridiculed CBC. Many of them have said that they oppose the public broadcaster; they think the private sector would do it better. Yet, they have watched this public broadcaster try to bend itself in circles in order to address the competing mandates of the government.

One of the arguments always is that it should compete with the private sector, go more to the private sector. Our public broadcaster is becoming increasingly dependent on advertising revenues and when it is completely dependent on advertising revenues, the Conservatives ask, "Why does it need to be a public broadcaster? It is acting like a private sector broadcaster. Why does it not do what a public broadcaster should do?"

The CBC is caught in a television simulcast war against the U.S. giants, in which we are actually doing very well, thanks very much. It is the unwillingness of the government to set a clear course.

*Business of Supply*

What would \$40 per capita mean? If we could move CBC television out of the advertising game wars, that money would be freed up for the private sector. That would be one way of helping to address the crisis. CBC television would be able to provide Canadian content all the time. There has been much ballyhoo about the fact that it had to buy a few American shows like *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* and I am certainly not interested in watching Vanna White on the CBC, but I recognize it is having to buy programs because it cannot afford to make programs on a limited budget. There is no commitment from the government to make it possible.

If we had moved up the appropriations to \$40 per capita, and we did that over a number of years and we set in place the other all-party recommendations, we could get CBC where it needs to be, which is to play a role that no other broadcaster in this country plays. That role is to make it possible for regions to speak to one another and to understand one another. It could let the young writers from Acadie be heard in other parts of the country, in order to allow a discourse about ideas and culture that is simply not available from the private broadcasters.

At this point we are looking at a government which has sat back and allowed a unique and proud institution to start to crumble because of the government's unwillingness to provide the bridge financing and its unwillingness to commit to a long-term vision. We are at the point where, because of all the cuts that have come before, because of what is happening now, if any further downturn happens, the future viability of this public institution and public commitment will be so challenged we are going to have to talk about the potential death of the CBC in certain parts of this country. It is having to sell off its assets. It has to be dependent on the minister to support it in those sales. Those assets are being sold at a time of market collapse. If it does not get the value for them, then more cuts are coming; that is the reality. I am not really clear where else we can cut at this point in terms of the loss of regional programming, the loss of what we are seeing in terms of the television market.

This is a debate I am very sorry we are having in the House today, but as members of Parliament we need to stand and say that we do believe in a revitalized commitment to a full and strong public broadcaster. That commitment has to be made. The cuts that are starting to affect our regions and our television and radio services are not acceptable, because once those things are gone, there will be no replacing them. The private sector is not moving in to deal with the losses we are seeing at the CBC.

We need a strong public broadcaster. We need to send a message from Parliament that we commit to CBC, we want to rebuild CBC and we want to make CBC the broadcaster for the 21st century that it should be.

• (1150)

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member and I have worked on the committee together and we have crossed swords from time to time, but I found his speech this morning to be quite thoughtful.

As opposed to the Liberals who cut 4,000 jobs and cut between \$400 million and \$500 million out of the CBC budget to the point that the CBC president resigned, under this Conservative govern-

ment, which is committed to a public broadcaster, over the last four budgets that we have had the opportunity to present to this House, we have seen an increase of approximately \$100 million. I wonder if he would acknowledge that.

Although that might not be as far as the member would like to go, there are things that constrain any party when it is in government, which is something regrettably for the NDP members I doubt will ever happen for them, otherwise they might be faced with exactly the same challenges we face. While we can have reasonable and responsible increases in pursuit of our goal of ensuring that we have a public broadcaster, on the other side of the coin, we have to make those increases in a fair and responsible way as a government.

• (1155)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague and I worked together on the heritage committee and it was a lot of fun crossing swords with him many times. I hope we will be able to cross swords many times in the future.

I think my colleague is partially correct and partially muddying the waters. In terms of the hits to CBC, as I said in my speech, the reason we are here today is the years of chronic underfunding that go back to the massive cuts that were made by Chrétien and Martin in the 1990s. As my colleague said, the cuts damaged the CBC to the point that the president of the CBC at the time actually resigned.

We have been digging out of a massive hole ever since. The problem with his statement is that we have been hearing repeatedly from the Conservatives about their commitments to record funding, record funding, record funding. It is very much like getting kissed by the crocodile in terms of telling us how much they love public broadcasting. If one looks at the increases to the CBC, it is actually flat. What my hon. colleague identifies as increases are just the standard Treasury Board increases for inflation across the board. That is not any commitment to CBC. It just means they have not cut anything.

Other costs have gone up. CBC is stagnant and it remains stagnant. The heritage minister says that they have given record support. However, the issue today is bridge financing and loan funding that would not have cost the government money and would have allowed the broadcaster to do what any private broadcaster would do, which is when there was a shortfall, they could have gone to get financing to get through it. The government pulled the rug out from under them. Now, on top of the previous shortfalls, we are seeing a major hit to their bottom line.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech and his comments. With the inaction of the Conservative government, we are seeing massive cuts of 800 jobs and the necessity of selling assets. I am afraid not only because of these job losses, but also with regard to the ability of our public broadcaster to play its role in the future.

*Business of Supply*

Does my colleague share this fear that these cuts and these program and service cutbacks will affect the long-term future of the CBC/Radio-Canada?

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Madam Speaker, the real issue facing us is that we are in an unprecedented crisis in broadcasting in regional and local voices right across the country. The minister stood back and refused to come forward and say that we should have a plan and we should find bridge financing. The government left CBC dangling until the last minute and then pulled the rug out from under it. The government blamed the CBC and said that it should live within its means.

There are going to be cuts that are so deep there will be no turning back from them, especially in terms of the regions. There have been no stations closed, but stations have been bled so much that they are anemic and can no longer do their job. Strong, smart, young journalists are being given pink slips. They will not be coming back. Because of the government's indifference, we are going to see the loss of the broadcasting voice of this country to the point of no return.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I have listened to this morning's speeches about the CBC. They are interesting. The CBC has announced that 800 positions will be abolished shortly. Hubert Lacroix has said that the shortfall would be about \$171 million in 2009-10. The Bloc Québécois is proposing that the grant to the CBC be increased from \$34 to \$40 per capita.

There has been a \$45 million cut to culture in Quebec. That was an issue in the election campaign. The CBC also broadcasts in French in all the francophone communities of Canada.

I would like the hon. member to tell me why the Conservatives are attacking Quebec culture in this way while at the same time investing so much in military procurement and all sorts of things. We are talking here about \$170 million. The Conservatives seem to have it in for anything to do with Quebec culture.

• (1200)

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely correct. We had talked about a long-term plan of \$40 per capita as a way to deal with the future needs of the CBC. The immediate problem is the need for bridge financing. It would have been a perfectly reasonable solution to get the CBC through this. Instead, the loss of 270 jobs at Radio-Canada in Montreal, for example, will be felt in our francophone communities right across Canada. The disappearance of voice, of stories, of conversation makes it more difficult to maintain a cultural cohesiveness across such a vast territory if we do not have those in place.

Regardless of the Conservatives' gibberish about how the private sector will do it, nobody has filled these gaps. The ability of the francophone regions to speak to one another can only happen in the context of a public broadcaster. I believe this is the direct result of a government hiding behind an economic crisis to carry out an ideological vendetta.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for mentioning the situation we are facing with CHCH-TV. We are facing similar situations with our local newspapers and radio stations.

This may seem a little out there, but a lot of us have been working for years on a CBC radio station for Hamilton so we can be part of that national dialogue. Now, with the current situation, how long until that dream and goal for Hamilton is set aside under the policy direction of the current government?

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Madam Speaker, the million-plus people in the Hamilton region, who have been left out of the national discourse because they do not have a CBC radio station, have at least been able to point to their regional television network. Now that is in question.

Again, this is the problem with the crisis we face at both the private and public broadcast level. The refusal of the government to understand that they are intertwined and that there needs to be a solution to ensure local voices is leaving large sections of our country, urban, rural, isolated francophone and anglophone areas, out of a national conversation. It is simply unacceptable in a country like Canada in the 21st century.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

At the outset, I am pleased to speak to the motion and I will support it.

This is a very important issue for all Canadians from coast to coast, particularly for Canadians who live in the regions, Canadians with linguistic minority communities, Canadians from remote communities and Canadian who live everywhere.

I am very pleased we are having this dialogue today. The issue of CBC and how it serves our country is tremendously important to all Canadians. I do not think we can look at the CBC and talk about the individual budget. I believe we have to look at it as to the role it plays in Canada.

Canada is an exceptionally large country, the second largest on earth. It is the most diverse country in the world. We have three founding nations. It is much stronger and much larger than its remarkably diverse and unique parts.

On the other side of the equation, we need the glue to keep us together. There is a social contract, for want of a better word, a shared destiny. As a country, we have to be cognizant of our history, our past and we have to go forward with a clear understanding that we build on that. We are different than other countries that surround us.

It is my premise in this debate today, and I am very pleased we are having this dialogue, that our national broadcasting corporation, the CBC, is one part, but not totally, of the glue that keeps the fabric of Canada together.

*Business of Supply*

CBC is a national institution with a very important mandate. It provides an objective perception of current affairs in Canada. It serves the smaller regional communities, which the private broadcasting companies could not, would not and probably would not be expected to serve. It serves the linguistic minorities from all parts of the country and is responsible for the preservation of our culture, which makes us Canadians.

Many people are trying to create a looser federation, a federation of self-autonomist units, each driven by the ideology of the government in power. However, my vision of Canada is larger than that. We need a strong federal government and a national broadcasting corporation.

That brings us to today's debate. I will not argue that there has to be a large dose of reality in this debate. I will not argue today for large increases to the budget of the CBC. It has to live within its means. We have economic realities in the country. I do not suggest for a moment that there should be a 10%, 20% or 30% increase in the CBC's budget. Its advertising revenues dropped dramatically. It knew it was faced with belt tightening, but it wanted to have a dialogue with the government of the day. Its proposal was that it be given \$125 million bridge loan so it could make the cuts and the changes easier, more equitable and phase them in.

However, that was not the case. The CBC was met with total silence. As a result, we see the loss of 800 jobs, 393 jobs at CBC and an additional 336 at Radio-Canada. It is probably the case that this thing could not totally be avoided, but a lot of it could have been if the government had listened to public opinion on this issue.

•(1205)

I do not believe it is an unreasonable request. We all see what has happened to the economy over the last six to eight months. There was a dramatic decrease in its advertising revenues. It is my premise that the government should have entered this dialogue with CBC and probably should have granted the interim financing, the loan, to get it through this very difficult situation.

What has happened here is the continuation of the toxic relationship that has existed between the CBC and the Reform-Alliance wing of the Conservative Party, going right back to their constating meetings in 1994. A lot of those people who were part of that movement and part of those attacks on the CBC sit in cabinet, across the aisle.

I have a few quotes.

The first quote is, "There are subsidies to bloated crown corporations like the \$1 billion annual subsidy to the CBC". That is from the Minister of Immigration.

The second quote is, "The Liberals decided to throw millions and even billions in non priority areas, while ignoring vital ones....For example, the CBC will receive \$60 million". That is from the present Minister of International Trade.

The third quote is, "Do we need the CBC, in its current format, when there are so many private broadcasting channels available?" That is from the present Minister of Industry.

The fourth quote is:

I've suggested that government subsidies in support of CBC's services should be to those things that...do not have commercial alternatives...I think when you look at things like main English-language television and probably to a lesser degree Radio Two, you could look there at putting those on a commercial basis.

That is from the present Prime Minister.

I do not attribute any of these quotes, this ideology, this thinking to the Progressive Conservative wing of that party. That was not the case during the times when it was in power.

I see this as a continuation of the toxic relationship. I am sure if we spoke to many of the Reform-Alliance members, we would probably be dealing with a lot of happy campers here today. It started in the founding meeting and has continued every day.

As a member of Parliament, as a Canadian, I am disappointed with this attitude. It continues this attitude, this ideology that the federal government has no role in broadcasting or in culture, that it should withdraw its mandate to the narrowly defined issues of defence and foreign affairs and become a federation of 13 semi-autonomous units, having no shared destiny, no common purpose, no social contract.

As I said before, I am very pleased that we are having this dialogue. It is important for the fabric of Canada and what it means to be Canadian. I hope the public is watching.

It is my hope the House will support the motion as presented. It is also my hope the government will respect the will of Canadians, if the motion does pass. It is my hope a dialogue can then start between the government and CBC so we can sort of ease out some of these temporary problems. It is my hope this impasse can be overcome.

•(1210)

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate much of what my friend had to say and I share his ideology when it comes to the question of Canada being more than just a collection of provinces. When it comes to the question of Canada standing together and finding ways to cement our unity, I do share his ideology but I recognize it as an ideology.

Too often we hear across the floor accusations of ideological approaches without realizing that they are mutual. What we really ought to do is set aside our ideological bent and look at the practical issues of benefits and costs. In that respect, actions speak louder than words.

I wonder if my friend will agree that whatever has been said or done ideologically on either side, the CBC went through a serious set of cuts in the 1990s under the Liberal Party, and that the Conservative Party, under our current leader, has done a good job in maintaining funding for CBC, in spite of what are now becoming very hard economic times.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Mr. Speaker, I yes, there were cuts made to the CBC back in 1994-1995. However, I want to remind the member that when the Liberals came to power in 1993 the annual deficit was \$43 billion, interest rates were around 10%, unemployment was at 11% and debt to GDP ratio was 73%. Over a 10 year period that was resolved. A lot of tough decisions were made, not only by the government, but by all Canadians.

*Business of Supply*

However, guess what? We are right back to where we were then. Unfortunately, I think the debt will be \$43 billion this year. Unemployment is going up. It is like we are in a time warp here.

On this lowering of taxes for the rich, this method of governing did not work in 1993 and I can tell this House and Canadians that it will not work in 2009.

At the time, there were cuts to all Canadians. The Reformers who were in the House at the time were screaming across the aisle for us not to cut the CBC but to eliminate the CBC.

•(1215)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party will be paid back in spades in the next election for the massacre they are committing at CBC/Radio-Canada. Quebeckers will make them pay dearly.

I was looking at some statistics and have a question for the Liberal member. The British pay about \$124 per capita for their television and radio networks. The French pay \$77. We in the Bloc Québécois want to see \$40 per capita in support for CBC/Radio-Canada, which is hardly the end of the world.

If the Liberal Party should take power, what would its position be? It had this proposal today in its motion on opposition day. But what is its position? Are you going to reinvest in CBC/Radio-Canada? How much will you reinvest, or are you going to cut CBC/Radio-Canada as you did back in the 1990s? You just bashed it too.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would ask the hon. member to address his remarks to the chair and not directly to other members.

The hon. member for Charlottetown has the floor.

[*English*]

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the formula used in Great Britain with the BBC and in France. Other countries use different formulas. One of the points the member did make was that they all have one commonality, which is that they all have national broadcasting corporations.

When I started my speech I indicated that I was not here advocating in these tough economic times some large increase to the funding of CBC. All the motion talks about is the dialogue to assist the CBC to get through a very temporary period. The request was for a \$125 million bridge loan. That dialogue did not take place and I was very disappointed. However, I am supporting the motion that the bridge financing ought to have been granted.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the essential role that CBC/Radio-Canada plays through its national, regional and local broadcasts, including information and news for linguistic minorities all across Canada.

I know that the Conservative government does not believe in CBC/Radio-Canada and that nothing would please it more than to see the end of public broadcasting in Canada. That is an ideological view that ignores the situation in our northern communities in Canada.

Francophone culture in northern Ontario is very reliant on CBC/Radio-Canada to communicate its messages and transmit its news. Northern Ontario is a vast, diverse place where minority groups would not be served at all if not for the corporation.

In northern Canada, as in northern Ontario, there are simply no private networks. CBC/Radio-Canada ensures that the people of the north do not feel completely isolated and feel that they are part of a united country. The people living in the north all know they face major difficulties and obstacles.

The ministers in the Conservative cabinet, however, do not think so. The industry minister claims to be from the north but in an interview with the *National Post*, he wondered whether we need CBC/Radio-Canada in its current form when there are so many private networks. Those are the words of someone who fails to understand the reality of people living in northern Canada and northern Ontario.

•(1220)

[*English*]

When the Minister of Industry states that there are so many private broadcasting channels available, I have to wonder in what world he lives. It is certainly not in northern Ontario.

Not understanding the living conditions of northern Canada is but one of the shortcomings of the Conservative government. Ideologically, it feels that it can sell everything, all of our national assets, to the highest bidder and everything will take care of itself. It is just a laissez-faire attitude that lets everything rule itself.

That, unfortunately, is not the reality for the people of northern Canada and it is not the reality that they live from day to day. More and more, the people of Canada and the people of the world are realizing that this is a fantasy land that exists only in neo-conservative minds.

The people of northern Ontario, for example, rely on CBC Radio to get their local and regional news. We have seen a slow decline in service over the years but the cuts that are being witnessed currently stand to have an irreversible effect on the CBC as we know it.

I could stand here today and tell members how important I feel CBC is to northern Ontario but I believe that it would be more effective if I read passages from but a few of the letters and messages that I received.

Here is what Garth Goodhew had to say from North Bay:

CBC Radio is a great Canadian institution that joins a vast area and allows us to be one Canadian nation. Cutting services to Northern Ontario will have a devastating effect. I am furious just at the thought of losing CBC in my area.

Mary from Temiskaming Shores wrote:

I am one of the many who are horrified because of the cuts to CBC Radio One in the north particularly Sudbury. Please endeavour to ensure that we do not lose this important aspect of northern life. Densely populated areas have more choices and we need this service in northern regions.

Just before coming here, Rita McDermid called from Latchford wondering what was going on with CBC. She stated how important it was and how the people of Latchford rely on CBC Radio to get their information.

Charla from Thunder Bay wrote:

CBC has been an integral part of my daily life for as long as I can remember. Growing up in Dryden, Ontario, my family listened to CBC Radio each morning during breakfast and watched *The National* news each night - I have continued this practice throughout my adult life. The combination of local, regional and national news and the stories delivered by CBC Radio and CBC Television provides a better understanding of the Canadian mosaic past, present and future. Local radio programming provides a local perspective on issues and events that would otherwise be unavailable in small towns such as Dryden, Fort Frances, Kenora and Atikokan. It is vital that this local programming continue to provide a sense of community and to highlight the "goods news stories", especially during the financial struggles we now face.

Richard Sciuk from Redbridge states:

It's painfully obvious to anyone who takes the time to understand the realities of Northern Ontario; CBC provides a public forum that bridges the distance. We need to stay connected.

Shelly wrote:

As a constituent, I would ask you and/or your government, lobby the powers that be not to cut CBC service in the North. It seems that whenever there are cuts to be made us Northerners always suffer. I don't think that we should take this lying down.

That is but a small sample of what we in northern Ontario are saying about CBC cuts.

What can we look forward to as Canadians? The reality is that the Conservative government has done nothing to prevent the reduction of up to 800 jobs. It has done nothing to stop the scaling back of local programming or regional radio and television programming, and nothing to reduce the reduction in news coverage.

What is even clearer is that even though 800 jobs have been lost and CBC Radio-Canada has been left twisting in the wind by the government, the minister remains unwilling to provide any flexibility or honesty in the face of potentially deeper and more devastating cuts to come.

Destroying CBC Radio-Canada has been part of the Prime Minister's agenda for over a decade and is a goal that the majority of his cabinet supports. They are taking advantage of tough economic times to launch an assault on a national institution. This behaviour by the Conservative government is consistent with its long-stated opposition to government support for CBC-Radio Canada.

• (1225)

In 1995, the now Prime Minister said that reform policy would place the government sponsored loser, and by loser he was referring to the CBC, in a situation where subsidies are weaned away. This is from a government that says that it does not pick winners and losers.

A while back, the Prime Minister and half of his cabinet were saying that they do not pick winners and losers. I guess it depends on when it is convenient for them.

This is not the first time that the government has flip-flopped on something.

On that note, I close with a plea to the Prime Minister and his cabinet to support CBC and to stop ignoring the fact that CBC-Radio

### *Business of Supply*

Canada is of huge importance to Canadians from coast to coast to coast and, in particular, to the people of northern Ontario.

Simply put, the role and mandate of the CBC-Radio Canada must be preserved and the Conservative government has a responsibility to ensure that these priorities remain intact.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is quite aware, in many areas of northern Ontario the CBC is the only radio station and TV station available. Eight people in the Sudbury station are being permanently laid off. That is half of the people in that station.

My office has received hundreds of emails and phone calls about these cutbacks in Sudbury, which affects all of northern Ontario.

Does the hon. member think it would be prudent to permit the public broadcaster to save some money in good times?

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Nickel Belt certainly understands what it is like to be in northern Ontario. He has communities, like I do, that really have CBC as their only source of information. We do not have the luxury that parts of southern Ontario or large metropolitan areas have where they have a multitude of stations to choose from. To cut service to somewhere like Sudbury so that northern Ontario gets a smaller service, it really hurts every Canadian and every northern Ontarian.

The thing is that there are only 16 people covering a massive area. Northern Ontario is a large piece of geography. It is not like a concentrated city where there are hundreds of people, if not thousands of people, covering events within a couple of hundred square kilometres. We have tens of hundreds of thousands of space and we are cutting the staff in half. We are cutting 16 people down to 8, which is just not enough to run a proper radio station.

Cutting this out of northern Ontario and out of Sudbury is a black eye to the people of northern Ontario.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague understands the importance of CBC for our regions, which the government does not.

[*Translation*]

The government said that it increased CBC/Radio-Canada's budget, but we all know that this is absolutely false. We also have a number of quotes from government members, from members of the former Reform Party, who wanted to systematically reduce the corporation's funding, year after year. These people are now in office.

Does my colleague agree that the government is trying to take advantage of the current economic crisis to go after CBC/Radio-Canada? Is the government not trying to do indirectly what it cannot do directly?

*Business of Supply*

• (1230)

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier. That is a very good point. We often see the Conservative government act in this fashion. It is doing what it could not do before, by resorting to private members' bills. The Conservatives are doing things through the back door. What they are doing now with CBC/Radio-Canada is a prime example. The government is using the economic situation not to make direct cuts, but to choke the corporation. It is making sure that the money does not get where it should. Personally, I call that an act of cowardice.

[*English*]

It is an act of cowardice where, when one cannot do it directly, one switches over and does it through the back door. We see that often with many of the government's actions and that is not what Canadians want in Parliament. They want a government that is straight with people and faces up to them.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé, for a very brief question.

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives all want to privatize. They love private businesses.

Does the member think that the cuts being made by the Conservatives at the expense of CBC/Radio-Canada are being made in order to benefit a private broadcaster such as Canwest Global Communications Corp., or CTV?

I have another question. I put a question to his Liberal colleague: what does he propose, in terms of per capita funding, for the CBC/Radio-Canada network?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming has 30 seconds to respond.

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind that, ultimately, this government wants to privatize everything it can. The Conservatives do not believe that they have a responsibility to protect small communities. Given their frame of mind, their wild west mentality, they hold the view that if one cannot succeed, if one experiences problems, then one should move to a large city.

In small communities, it is important to have a communication network, and CBC/Radio-Canada is the network that is serving them now and that will continue to serve them in the future—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse.

I would like to begin by reiterating this government's commitment to arts and culture. In Canada's economic action plan in budget 2009, our government demonstrated its firm commitment to the arts, culture, and heritage. The Government of Canada will invest \$540 million, that is, over half a billion dollars, to ensure as much stability as possible for this sector in these challenging times.

I would like to speak briefly about these tough times. The current global recession is affecting all sectors of the economy, including arts and culture. Once again, the government's economic action plan is a detailed plan to stimulate economic growth, restore confidence and assist Canadians during this period of global recession.

The Government of Canada has helped, is helping and will continue to help this sector. Here are some concrete examples: \$200 million over the next two fiscal years will be allocated to the creation and broadcasting of high-quality Canadian television programs in English, French, and aboriginal languages; over \$28 million over the next two fiscal years will be allocated to continue to encourage the creation of Canadian interactive digital cultural media works; \$14 million over four years, that is, \$3.5 million a year, will serve to continue to support and enhance the arts, culture and heritage within minority anglophone and francophone communities; \$7 million of additional support is earmarked to support training for Canadian artists through improvements to the national arts training contribution program; \$5 million will be invested to implement a new national translation program for book publishing. The purpose of that program is to increase the availability of Canadian books in both official languages.

We support the arts because our artists and our cultural institutions play an important role in the lives of Canadians and Quebecers within our economy. The response given recently by my colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, demonstrates that our government recognizes the importance of the arts and cultural sector in stimulating and strengthening our economy.

We also support CBC/Radio-Canada because it remains and will remain Canada's public broadcaster in English and French in addition to being one of our most important cultural institutions. How should we support CBC/Radio-Canada? By investing in our public broadcaster.

I would like to point out how important the government considers CBC/Radio-Canada to be. Our investment in the corporation is the largest of all our spending on culture, with the exception of the budget of the Department of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

According to the 2008 annual report to Parliament on crown corporations and other corporate interests of Canada, CBC/Radio-Canada's share of all budgetary appropriations received by crown corporations is 22%.

Since 2006, our government has invested over \$3 billion to enable CBC/Radio-Canada to fulfill its mandate. In 2008-09, our government gave the crown corporation \$1.117 billion to fulfill its mandate to Canadians throughout the country, in English, French and eight native languages.

Our commitment was to maintain funding for CBC/Radio-Canada, and we have kept our word. To better illustrate our commitment to the public broadcaster since 2006, we have renewed additional funding of \$60 million for CBC/Radio-Canada for Canadian programming.



Once again, by its actions and its decisions, our government shows the importance it gives to Canadian programming by allocating another \$60 million for 2009-10.

● (1235)

In addition to the votes approved by Parliament, the CBC-Radio Canada can count on three other sources of funding—advertising revenues, subscription revenues and revenues from related activities. The CBC-Radio Canada has generated over \$1.5 billion in revenues since 2006-07.

The role of a responsible government is not limited to handing out dollars. We must also ensure healthy governance, strong management and effective accounting.

To this end, the CBC-Radio Canada has a board of directors comprising 12 directors, including the chair of the board and the CEO. Although they are always appointed by the governor in council for their skills and broad experience, it is they who are at the helm of the corporation. It operates independently of government.

This board of directors is responsible for managing the affairs and activities of the corporation. Under the Broadcasting Act, the corporation is accountable to Parliament through the minister of Canadian heritage. This does not prevent the corporation from providing an accounting. Under the Act, the CBC-Radio Canada is obliged to submit a business plan to the government. This plan includes a statement of the corporation's objectives for the coming five years and a strategy for their implementation, the capital budget and the operating budget for the next fiscal year and the corporation's plans to borrow during the current fiscal year.

The capital budget has to be approved by Treasury Board, and any plan to borrow requires approval by the Minister of Finance.

The corporation is also required to submit to the Minister of Canadian Heritage a summary of its revised business plan reflecting the financial resources Parliament plans to allocate to CBC/Radio-Canada. The minister then has to table this summary in Parliament. By making its business plan summary public, CBC/Radio-Canada is clearly indicating to parliamentarians and Canadians what its priorities are and how these will be met.

While CBC/Radio-Canada is exempt from part X, it is nonetheless required under the Financial Administration Act to keep satisfactory accounting records and conduct appropriate internal audits. It has to provide the Minister of Canadian Heritage, at his request, with reports on its financial activities.

Finally, within three months after the end of each financial year, the corporation is required to submit an annual report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and to the President of the Treasury Board. In turn, the minister has to submit this annual report to Parliament within 15 days after receiving it. Again, as a public entity funded by us all, CBC/Radio-Canada has to clearly present its operating results to the people of Canada and Quebec.

The Government of Canada recognizes that CBC/Radio-Canada plays a unique role in reporting stories about Canadians, influencing our national identity and bringing people closer together.

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The Government of Canada recognizes the role of our national broadcaster within Canadian society by providing it with more than \$1 billion in parliamentary supply for the current year and renewing again for next year additional funding of \$60 million for Canadian programming.

As we can see, our government has delivered on its promises. Clearly, our government is acting as a responsible manager.

● (1240)

[*English*]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member two questions. Why is the government resisting to provide bridging loans when this is a golden time for public broadcasting in Canada? Audience numbers are at a historic high, the organization has co-operation with its unions, and all research shows that Canadians are deeply concerned about regional news. What will the closure of regional offices mean, in terms of disaster preparedness and mitigation for small towns in, for example, northern Ontario?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question and remind her that her party cut \$400 million in funding for CBC/Radio-Canada, not to mention 4,000 jobs, based on nothing at all. I certainly do not need lectures from that party.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is very easy for the government to blame the Liberals and vice versa. I would like a simple answer. The government is helping the auto industry, Canwest and Global, all private enterprises, but it is refusing to help CBC/Radio-Canada, a corporation that belongs to the people of Canada.

So, I would like to know why the Conservative government is not planning to help this Canadian industry during this recession.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Mr. Speaker, we took concrete action by giving CBC/Radio-Canada \$1.1 billion in addition to \$60 million for next year. We passed a budget even though the NDP voted against these measures to help CBC/Radio-Canada.

We are not the ones who hung CBC/Radio-Canada out to dry. They are.

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there have been many comments about the ideology of the Conservatives and whether or not they believe there should be a public broadcaster, given the kind of action from the government on the need for us to ensure that CBC Radio-Canada especially is able to reach out to the thousands of people who rely on CBC Radio to know what is going on in the world.

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The issue comes down to the ideology of believing whether or not we should have the CBC, period. It certainly raises concerns in the public as to whether or not that is the direction of the Conservative government. Is it going to continue to support the CBC and if not, why does it not supply the bridge loan the CBC requires today?

• (1245)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Mr. Speaker, we believe in Radio-Canada and the CBC. I would like to point out to the member opposite that it was not our leader who made jokes at CBC/Radio-Canada's expense. It was his former leader, Jean Chrétien, who said that nobody would hit the streets in protest if CBC/Radio-Canada were shut down.

We on this side of the House believe in CBC/Radio-Canada and are helping the corporation.

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment this member on her outstanding speech. The member has been a part of this government since 2006 and she well knows we have increased the funding to the CBC in 2006, 2007, 2008 and budget 2009.

Could she comment more on the cuts that occurred under the previous Liberal government despite promising to provide stable funding to the CBC? Could she comment on the cuts to the CBC, the \$414 million and the 4,000 jobs that were lost under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien? Could she talk about how that impacted Quebec?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Mr. Speaker, despite the economic recession we are going through right now—as we are all aware—we on this side of the House have maintained the corporation's funding and given it \$1 billion. The member's party opposite cut 4,000 jobs even though there was no economic crisis at the time.

**An hon. member:** Shame!

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Shame!

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou not only for her speech, but also for having risen here in this House at an extremely important moment when we have voted to increase the budgets of CBC/Radio-Canada, bringing its funding to a record amount since 2006. My colleague the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, and all of my colleagues on our side of the House, have supported this economic action plan to bring the corporation's funding to a record amount since 2006—and to make that funding stable, as we had committed ourselves to doing.

Radio-Canada and the CBC, its anglophone counterpart, play a fundamental role in Canadian cultural identity and in the international position held by Canada.

We have brought CBC/Radio-Canada funding to a record figure, unlike the Liberals who had slashed its funding. This is a subject which calls to mind Ms. Petrowski's comment on the contrast with the savage Liberal cuts in the 1990s: nearly a half a billion, \$440 million slashed.

The government's revenues are declining at this time, but we believe in the mission of CBC/Radio-Canada and are increasing its funding. The Liberals' cuts were not negotiated and were directed by the office of the former prime minister, resulting in the elimination of 4,000 jobs at a time of no economic upheaval whatsoever. As I have just said, not only are we providing CBC/Radio-Canada with stable funding, but we are increasing it.

It is a pleasure for me this afternoon to explain to you how important it was for us to increase the corporation's funding by \$60 million. Of course, as my colleague indicated, the investment that the Canadian government is making in CBC/Radio-Canada is one of the largest investments of the federal government in culture and Canadian content: \$1.1 billion so that the corporation can continue to fulfill its mandate.

That mandate, under the 1991 Broadcasting Act, is to provide radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains. We committed ourselves, including in our 2008 election platform, to ensuring that CBC/Radio-Canada continues its key role as public broadcaster in Canada.

CBC/Radio-Canada provides a high volume of Canadian content for the broadcasting system. It offers the entire population, from sea to sea, television, radio and Internet services and services on new platforms in both official languages, something it is extremely important to point out. In addition, the corporation also provides services in eight aboriginal languages to the Canadian population living in the north, and multilingual service in many languages on Radio Canada International. Hence its influence is felt not only here at home, but internationally.

CBC/Radio-Canada plays an extremely important role for francophones in Canada and it operates the only national French-language radio and television networks. The corporation's programming in French and in English is almost entirely Canadian. You will understand that for me, as chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, this is a very important role that is part of the mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada. One need only think, for example of CBC English radio, which in Quebec is called the Quebec Community Network, which serves small anglophone groups. Be they in Gaspésie, the Upper North Shore, the Eastern Townships or the Quebec City region, these people have a vital connection thanks to the excellent work done by the corporation in serving the minority linguistic communities.

CBC/Radio-Canada has an ambitious mandate, and that is why we have increased its budget by \$60 million. The question you are surely asking yourselves is what we are going to do with this additional \$60 million.

• (1250)

The annual report of CBC/Radio-Canada shows that this money has been earmarked for typically Canadian programming. Last year, \$27 million was spent on the English television network and \$18 million on the French network, as well as \$5 million on English radio, \$5 million on French radio, and \$5 million on intercultural initiatives—programs produced in both English and French and broadcast on both television networks.

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Thanks to these \$60 million, CBC/Radio-Canada will be able to create new broadcasts, develop bilingual programs and events, and expand its news coverage. Among its specific achievements, I could mention the advertising-free shows for pre-school-age children that are broadcast every morning and the new TV dramas and entertainment shows such as *Dragon's Den*. I could also mention the bilingual broadcasts and series, such as the documentary *Hockey: a People's History* and the development of a public affairs show that is very popular in Quebec, *Tout le monde en parle*.

We support CBC/Radio-Canada and have enabled it to provide quality programming by increasing its budget since 2006. It provides broad coverage of amateur sports and various weekly magazines. That is another example of what the public broadcaster has achieved for Canadians through the expansion of its news coverage. Radio-Canada's market share is quite large in this regard. I hear there has also been an increase at CBC television since last year.

The funding does not come from the public purse alone. It is a mixed system. CBC/Radio-Canada receives appropriations from Parliament that are approved right here in the House, and it also generates advertising revenues. In 2008-09, the appropriations for the CBC and Radio-Canada were more than \$1 billion, with an additional \$60 million announced last week by the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages in order to provide a broad range of Canadian content, such as the program I just mentioned, *Tout le monde en parle*.

These \$60 million will help CBC/Radio-Canada continue to meet its mandate by developing new programming, creating bilingual broadcasts, and expanding its news coverage from a Canadian perspective. I should mention young people too. We are well aware of the number of programs for young people produced by CBC/Radio-Canada and the challenges it faces in view of the explosion of specialty networks and the expansion of multimedia.

All these developments and the diversity of the programming and services provided with the help of the Canadian government show how these investments are used and how far our national public broadcaster has come since it was created in 1936. Since our government came to power, we have been providing record levels of funding year after year that have been stable and reliable and have enabled CBC/Radio-Canada to plan ahead, something that is very important for any corporation, as well as the additional \$60 million.

In conclusion, we are passing now through difficult economic times. It is hard to say when they will be over and how disruptive they will be. One thing is sure though: at a time when the Government of Canada's revenues are declining, we have increased CBC/Radio-Canada's funding to amounts unprecedented since we came to power. We are keeping our word, as we did in the past and will continue to do, so that our national broadcaster can fulfill its mission.

● (1255)

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the member has some nerve to come here and talk to us about culture today. The Conservatives cut just about everything they could cut, including programs like PromArt and Trade Routes. People in the cultural sector are running away from them. People in Canada's cultural sector fear the government as they fear plague. So

he has some nerve talking to us about the Conservative government's commitment.

He said that funding for CBC/Radio-Canada had been increased, but it has not. He mentioned an additional \$60 million, but there is no such thing. That money was already there.

I would like to read something and get his reaction. This person said that the government "would put [Radio-Canada]...in a situation where subsidies are weaned away and the future of the company is based on consumer satisfaction."

That is pretty clear. That was a quote from his leader, the Prime Minister. Does he agree with that statement?

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, the member's theatrics hide unprecedented actions. I have a question for my colleague. Did he support the Prime Minister who slashed the budget for Radio-Canada and the CBC when Canada was going through a period of prosperity? In 1995, public television suffered the biggest cutbacks in history under the Chrétien Liberals. That is what Nathalie Petrowski says in *La Presse*.

Who is he to talk, when he himself did not support a budget that increases funding for CBC/Radio-Canada? Why are we providing record funding not only for CBC/Radio-Canada, but for culture in general? The Conservative government believes in culture, will continue to invest in culture and will promote culture here and elsewhere.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, despite the rhetoric and the blaming of who cut more and how fast, it is important to recognize that we have real situations right now that are costing us our culture and jobs.

In Windsor, for example, CBC-Radio-Canada has been stripped to bare bones and we are losing other reporting, which is really important because in the shadow of the United States we face an onslaught of media, especially with French language. We do not have carriage outside of our discourse in the United States with use of French language. In fact, many Canadians in the United States receive French language services from the CBC and regional development.

How can my colleague continue to stand here and talk about the government giving more money when, at the end of the day, what is the result? How has the government preserved that in Windsor and other places and why is the minister not telling the CBC to get its act together and not cut regional programming, especially French language services which nobody else provides in North America?

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but I deplore the fact that he voted against the increase in the budgets for CBC/Radio-Canada when he had the opportunity to stand up in this House.

*Business of Supply*

I will answer his question very specifically using the words of the president of CBC/Radio-Canada. On March 26, 2006, he was speaking to the Montreal chamber of commerce, and he assured us that it was possible to continue maintaining a regional presence and regional programming, as indicated in a press release dated March 25, 2009. So despite the economic upheaval, with the stable funding we are giving CBC/Radio-Canada, it is going to continue to carry out its mission. Do you know what Tony Manera, the corporation's president under the Liberals, had to say? Listen carefully. In tendering his resignation, he held the Liberals directly responsible for his departure. He said, "I am resigning because the Liberals broke their promise to guarantee stable funding for Canadian public television."

We in the Conservative Party are investing in CBC/Radio-Canada.

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the selection of members to ask questions is not a matter of chance. It operates according to the number of members per party. So your decisions should be consistent. I thank you for giving me the floor. I was the only one to request it.

I would like to ask my colleague opposite a question. We on this side of the House are unanimous in asserting that there has been no increase for CBC/Radio-Canada from the government. The Conservatives, perhaps innocently, are boasting that there has been an increase, that there is \$60 million more, but that is not the case.

Do the Conservatives want to control information? They have not given TQS the opportunity to be able to continue broadcasting news in French. They are still cutting news programs. They tell us that news programs will come from Montreal and then go to the regions. Do they want to control information? That is what I am wondering.

However there is something else that is a problem for me. The president of CBC/Radio-Canada went on the public airwaves and told us that there would be cuts to positions. Can the hon. member now tell us that his government will do as the French government has done and give—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. There is little time left for the reply of the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The fact remains that my colleague had the chance to vote here in the House not only to increase the funding of CBC/Radio-Canada, but also to increase funding for culture. Unfortunately he did not do so.

Furthermore, in the economic action plan we work on the fundamentals of the economy, so that the advertising revenue of all the companies engaged in broadcasting will return. In addition, we work to rectify the economic situation. That is the long-term solution, while maintaining stable funding for CBC/Radio-Canada as we are doing.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was back in my constituency last weekend and attended a number of events. At each event that I attended, without exception, somebody would enter into the debate and ask where we were

going with the CBC and then offer their concerns about the loss of CBC services in our area.

As well, my office has received a great number of phone calls and emails with regard to this topic. To begin my remarks, I will share an email with the House from Ian McNeil of East Lake Ainslie.

He talks about the CBC and the fact that it is a vital piece of national infrastructure. He is amazed that a vital piece of national infrastructure is being allowed to decay before our eyes. What is worse, he says, is that this is happening at a time when the federal government talks about investment in infrastructure. He says that the decay has become devastation with the recent announcement of massive layoffs at CBC. He says that nothing unites this country as thoroughly, democratically, economically as the CBC. He says that it lets us talk to each other in both official languages, on radio, television and the Internet and that it holds a mirror up to Canadians every day and questions what we see. He goes on to say that it reflects and explains to Canadians and to the neighbours in the world around us, that it entertains and informs us, that it provides us with a forum for discussion and creativity, which our economy desperately needs right now.

Those are some comments that were sent to my office by Mr. McNeil and they pretty much echo everything we have been hearing about this issue and the recent cuts that were made by the government.

We grew up with the CBC. As a young guy, I remember making sure I had a nap on Saturday afternoon so I could get into my pyjamas that evening and watch *Hockey Night in Canada*. We only had the two channels in Glace Bay but the highlight of our week was *Hockey Night in Canada*. In the earlier years, we might have been allowed to stay up to watch *Juliet* or *Gilligan's Island*.

We grew up with the Peter Gzowskis and the Vicki Gabereaus and they have had a huge impact on shaping the overall culture of this country. They have allowed us to realize the great country we are. They have helped impact on our global perspective. They have helped us develop a perspective, a Canadian conscience, all those things that we probably take for granted. I do not think we will understand the significance until we absolutely lose the CBC.

That is where we are today. We are fearful that once the cuts begin, we will be on that slippery slope and we do not know where the cuts will end.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Labrador who will also speak to this because we know the impact it will have on his riding as well.

I want to talk about the impact that it will have locally. I had a discussion with the opposition House leader a little earlier today, the member for Wascana. He talked about the cuts in Saskatchewan and the shutting down of the operation in La Ronge. That station itself in central northern Saskatchewan, which services all the northern communities, many first nations communities, is the well-established voice of the north in Saskatchewan. Tom Robertson was a long-time broadcaster there of legendary proportions. That has just been extracted from those communities. A vital part of communication, a vital part of those communities has just been lost.

*Business of Supply*

It is not dissimilar to my own riding of Cape Breton—Canso. A portion of my riding will continue to be serviced by Halifax. Up by Guysborough, Larrys River and Country Harbour, that area will still be able to access the Halifax station, but in Cape Breton, with the cuts that have been made, it is looking at the loss of maybe six, seven, eight jobs. It was a station that was run on a bare bones staff anyway. There were 22 people to provide the service.

• (1305)

Once we start to lose the journalists, the people who get into the community, who dig up the stories, who share them and who put a human face on a particular issue, we lose the essence of the CBC. We lose what is vital about the CBC if we do not have those people to do that job. The end result is the quality of the program will be impacted. Once that starts to slip, people will believe it does not make a difference if we have the CBC, and then we lose that vital service to our community.

The CBC has meant so much to us in terms of our culture, history and music. I am very fortunate to come from an area like Cape Breton. I look at some of the artists who have contributed not just to the local music scene but nationally and internationally, artists such as Natalie MacMaster, the Rankins, Ashley MacIsaac, Rita MacNeil, the Barra MacNeils, Matt Minglewood and the list goes on. They can go back and speak about their first time being on the radio. When they talk about their first interview and where they learned their chops on the airwaves, they will talk about their interactions with the staff at CBC Sydney.

Getting that kind of music out gives those artists that first opportunity. Then they can tell the stories back. In their songs and words, the artists can celebrate who we are as a people. It is essential that these regional stations and services are allowed to continue to operate. Hopefully, it would have been to grow, but we are now looking at operating and salvaging. The cuts that have been announced have put them in greater jeopardy.

We have good local radio stations. A number of local radio stations are doing fairly well. However, by and large, it is music for the most part. It is top 40 music, country music or whatever the style or theme of the station is. They will do a broadcast and they can come with the headlines. However, it is very rare that they can go deep on stories. They will play the national playlist. They will support Canadian music off the MapleMusic brand.

It is great that we get an opportunity to listen to Bruce Springsteen and Ashlee Simpson, who I am sure are great people and artists. However, we are concerned about Bruce Guthro and Ashley MacIsaac. We are concerned about giving our own musicians and talent a stage on which they can play their music and get it out to the broader public. By doing so, they have an opportunity to start to build a career. The local CBC stations can do that.

Ron James is a buddy of mine. He lived in Glace Bay in his early years. He is a comedian, a great guy and a huge international success. He got his start at CBC Sydney and the local stations. They were there for the good times and the tough times to tell the stories. They were there when Canada hosted the Olympic Games in 1987. It was a great celebration and they talked about Cape Breton right across the country. Those stories were delivered across the country.

When there was a severe loss of life and tragedy at the Devco mine, No. 26 colliery, CBC was at the pithead, talking to the families and community leaders. It is imperative that we support these regional stations. It is imperative that these stations are allowed to tell those stories. The cutbacks today are going to be devastating to the regional stations.

I call upon the government to do something to ensure that bridge money is implemented so these stations can continue to operate.

• (1310)

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke about people and artists back when they were getting their start on the CBC, but where was he and what does he have to say about the late 1980s and early 1990s, when there were major cutbacks CBC budget?

I was on the CRTC at that time and I had to preside at hearings. The CBC came to us and told us that it was cutting the production centre in the Maritimes. At that time, there was a great outcry because of those severe budget cuts.

Many of the discussions I have heard today are the same discussions we had back then. Where was the opposition party then? Why did it make those cuts? Why did it allow that to happen at the time?

Consequently, where was his party then? Where was the member then? That cut was higher than what the Liberals have asked for in this motion.

• (1315)

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, we were in government then. Why did she stop with the cuts that were made to the CBC? Why did she not ask us about the cuts we made in National Defence? Why did she not ask us about the cuts we made in health, transportation, in all areas in 1995?

We sent 45,000 federal employees home, and I can stand beside that. They were tough decisions. Why? Because we had to clean up the mess that was left by the previous Mulroney government. That is a fact. I do not know what kind of mess will be left after those guys get finished.

I remind the minister as well as the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs that they were in the opposition, saying that the cuts did not go deep enough. That is the truth.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question is a simple one.

We are well aware that the Conservatives have just cut CBC/Radio-Canada's budget. The Liberal Party has today put forward a motion calling for more support for the corporation.

*Business of Supply*

I have twice asked the Liberal members how they would propose to support CBC/Radio-Canada if they were in power. What would they do to make CBC/Radio-Canada a nation-wide broadcaster, and in particular to bring it into all the francophone communities?

We have good programs and a good radio broadcaster, but at present the funding is lacking. Many jobs are being cut. Eight hundred jobs are soon to be cut at the CBC.

How would the Liberals propose to fund CBC/Radio-Canada if they were in power? I am asking the question for the third time.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, as history shows, governments are not forever, so it is how much life is left in the current government.

There is no question that we are in the midst of some very difficult times, globally and certainly nationally. Canadians are feeling it in many sectors. We are seeing record job losses now. The government's revenues are down as are the ad revenues for CBC. We are approaching very difficult and challenging times.

We should be challenging the government to put forward the necessary bridge funding so these cuts would not have to be made. I know comments have been that job losses would occur anyway, but I would hope the bridge funding would be put in place.

Any government going forward, if it wants to be serious about some kind of national plan on this, has to make a commitment to a national broadcaster. I would hope that party would do it in an upcoming platform.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is important to acknowledge that the CBC, especially in border communities like ours, also reaches Canadians in the United States. Without it, we cannot tell stories such as the Navistar truck plant announcement in which the government decided to send \$200 million worth of work to Texas instead of Chatham, where those vehicles could have been produced. Therefore, we are losing that voice not only domestically but internationally.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Mr. Speaker, that goes both ways. Border communities like Windsor have some of the best stations to help Canadian artists. We have a certain market for our artists in Canada, but to get into the American market, Canadian bands, such as the Tragically Hip, are given the opportunity to play at these—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I will have to stop the hon. member there.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Labrador.

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Cape Breton—Canso for sharing his time with me today and for his passionate and emotional plea that the government help the CBC.

I would also like to thank the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier for bringing this motion forward. I know his passion about this issue and his strong support for the work that CBC Radio-Canada does throughout the country, including in his own province of Quebec.

I would like to speak about the importance of CBC's work in my part of the country, namely Labrador, and also about the impact this

round of cuts will have on my riding and the CBC audience our local bureau serves.

Unfortunately, Labrador has seen this story before. It was under the Mulroney Conservatives in 1990 that we lost our CBC television station in Goose Bay. The journalists who lost their jobs and the community leaders predicted that it would diminish Labrador's voice on the provincial and national scene. Sadly, they were right.

We had, and have, no other alternative for local TV production besides the CBC. There is no CTV, no Global. The same is true for radio where Labrador has virtually no presence of private commercial networks. We have community stations, but our only network connection is via the CBC.

In fact, we have long argued for increasing CBC's presence in Labrador. In particular many Labradorians have called for a pan-Labrador radio signal so that people in southern Labrador could get the Goose Bay radio signal directly. Instead of increasing the presence, it is now being cut back.

These latest cuts are a case of history repeating itself. It is a trend. Conservatives are elected and they cut the CBC. It is an ideological bent on the part of the Conservatives.

Labradorians have been loyal CBC listeners for generation after generation. Our local team of producers and reporters and the entire CBC radio staff do an outstanding job on an already shoestring budget. They bring Labrador news and views to a wide audience. Many of their segments are picked up regionally and nationally. They are also the eyes and ears of Canada when news of national importance breaks in our region. Good news or bad, the CBC is there to explain to local and national audiences the whats, whens and hows of the story. The CBC fills the gap that other networks have never even tried to fill.

To give the House some sense of the work that CBC Labrador does in bringing together our region, I will mention some of the topics covered in just the past few days by its flagship show, *Labrador Morning*.

There has been extensive coverage of the controversial hunt on the Joir River caribou herd, a story which spans two provinces, ours and Quebec. The CBC has done panel discussions on the local impact of the provincial budget. It has covered a workshop on food security and the nutritional value of traditional wild foods. It has reported on plans to improve Route 389 which links Quebec and Labrador. Again, this is a local story of great interprovincial, and even national, importance. It has covered cutbacks at one of our local airlines. There is the ongoing and very popular *Jigs and Reels*, a series which regularly checks in on news and happenings in each and every one of Labrador's towns and communities.

*Business of Supply*

Unfortunately, in the past week, CBC Labrador has had to report on the impact of the cutbacks to its own service and the people it serves throughout Labrador.

This is not a matter of nostalgia. This is a bread and butter issue. This is literally about how we share and communicate with one another. It is about our music. It is about our stories. It really is about ourselves.

I have already heard from many groups and concerned individuals who are angry and upset at the cuts that are coming. The town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay issued a strong statement this morning in which Mayor Leo Abbass said, "CBC *Labrador Morning* is a vital link for our communities across Labrador. It is the only comprehensive radio show devoted to the geographic, cultural and political issues that affect all Labradorians".

A resident of Nain in northern Labrador said, "Please make sure CBC is not allowed to wither on the vine".

Another email stated, "In the name of fairness to a territory that already feels disconnected, left out and ignored, I implore you, do not do this to Labrador".

Another is from North West River which stated, "CBC is the glue that holds us together as a country and reflects our culture".

• (1320)

A resident of the Lake Melville area said, "Maybe some of those decision makers should come and stay for a winter in one of our towns. We depend on this information for our daily living".

I echo these statements and the personal attachment that many have to the CBC. I expect to hear more from many more. I hope that the Conservative government is hearing from them, too. Perhaps it will convince the Conservatives to change their minds about the decision to cut the CBC.

Unfortunately, there are too many Conservatives on that side of the House who agree with the sentiments of the industry minister who is on record as saying, "Do we need the CBC, in its current format, when there are so many private broadcasting channels available?" I challenge him to come to Labrador and say that to the residents directly.

In fact, the latest round of cuts targets many rural and northern parts of the country, many areas with large aboriginal populations, such as Labrador, northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan and northern Ontario. There are substantial cuts in Newfoundland and in two of the three maritime provinces. Of the thirteen bureaus and stations closed or cut, eight are in Atlantic Canada.

The Broadcasting Act states that CBC Radio-Canada has the mandate to reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences while serving the special needs of those regions, to contribute to shared national consciousness and identity, and be predominantly and distinctively Canadian.

The journalists at CBC Labrador strive to achieve those goals. They do an admirable job with the resources they have available, but now, due to the failure of the Conservative government to provide CBC with the resources it needs, that mandate is in jeopardy. The Labrador staff face a 40% cut. The impact on our region cannot be

measured solely in dollars and cents. Labrador will be poorer for it, and all of Canada will be poorer for it.

• (1325)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's experiences of the CBC are representative of a place very similar to mine in northwest British Columbia.

For some urban members of the House, the importance of what we are talking about today cannot be underestimated in terms of being able to tell that national story, to tell the regional stories and connecting us as a nation.

It may be much easier for the member and his party to talk about how important the CBC is when debating this motion, and the New Democrats will support this motion, but these very cuts were contained in the budget that was recently passed. The member in his speech very rightly proclaimed what our national broadcaster does, which is to tell those stories that connect our regions. The undermining of that broadcaster is contained in the budget, and that is more important than the opposition day motion which we have before us today.

At any moment when the Liberals were negotiating with the Conservatives was this issue brought up? Is the member aware of any time when the Liberals said that in order to garner their support for the Conservatives' budget, they asked that the CBC be fully and properly funded to avoid the very things that he is talking about?

As we negotiate between parties and try to make Parliament work, there are moments and opportunities available for all of us to push the things that we care about most. I do not doubt that my hon. colleague cares about the CBC and recognizes its importance, but caring and doing can be two different things.

Was there any moment when this was actually decided and promoted in those negotiations with the Conservatives?

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Mr. Speaker, I want to share with the member a personal story about growing up on the coast of Labrador.

I am only 42 for all of those who thought I was much younger, but when I was growing up, we had no electricity. Generators were shared by two or three households. That was only in the nighttime. In the daytime, we operated a lot of things by battery.

We used to watch television which was operated by battery. The only station we had was the CBC. It was such a big part of our lives as kids growing up and certainly for my parents. That was television. I can remember how upset we would be when the reception would shrink because the battery was losing power. The radio was like our toast and tea in the morning. It was what we listened to. It was what connected us.

*Business of Supply*

I have a very deep personal connection to the CBC and the service it provides to all Canadians. We have been strong supporters of the CBC over and over again in the Liberal Party. We are asking the government to listen to the will of the House of Commons, fund the CBC adequately and provide the revenue it needs to do its work and meet its mandate.

• (1330)

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the hon. member's remarks. The hon. member is aware of the statements that have been made over the years by a number of members who sit on the opposite side of the House about the CBC. I would say they are denigrating remarks. Others might wish to qualify those remarks differently.

How can we trust a government when it says that it is not singling out the CBC to weaken the CBC? How can we trust the government that has made so many negative statements about the broadcaster over the years, including the Prime Minister himself, who said, "If we look at the Canadian television industry we see two private national broadcasters that both manage to make a profit most years. Then we have the CBC which is mortgaged to the hilt and costs over \$1 billion a year. The major reason two are winners and one is a loser is based on incentives or lack of them. Reform Party policy"—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, order. I apologize to the hon. member but there are only 20 seconds left in the time slot, so I will have to give them to the hon. member for Labrador to make a brief reply.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly understand the question and there is no doubt there is an ideological bent on the part of the Conservative government. It has wanted to cut the CBC. It is cutting the CBC. It has done this time and time again. When it is in power, it cuts the CBC. It does not believe in it as a public broadcaster. It does not believe in the mandate and its value.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my charming colleague, the hon. member for Ahuntsic.

I am extremely pleased to speak today on the Liberal motion put forward by my hon. colleague the member for Honoré-Mercier. The first purpose of this motion is to recognize the indispensable role of CBC/Radio-Canada, both the anglophone and francophone sections, in providing information through its broadcasts across Canada, especially those for the benefit of language minorities, including aboriginal minorities, since there are broadcasts in at least eight aboriginal languages.

Second, the motion is intended to fault the present government for the financial hardship and substantial lay-offs that CBC/Radio-Canada will soon be facing because of its refusal to grant it any financial flexibility.

Third, the motion urges this same government to provide CBC/Radio-Canada with the bridge financing it requires to maintain last year's staffing and service levels.

There is something deeply ironic about the fact that the motion today is a Liberal motion, when they are the ones mainly responsible for the crisis the corporation is experiencing. They refused to index

its budget when they were in power, and in the 1990s they were the ones that started making budget cuts. In constant dollars, i.e. taking inflation into account, the budget for CBC/Radio-Canada went from \$900 million to \$708 million during the Liberal regime, and that was at a time of full economic growth, as has been said already today.

What more can be expected of a party that has something negative to say day after day about the multiple facets of the Conservative budget and yet, again day after day, supports what it has criticized with its votes? Day after day, that party demands more attention and more funds for the unemployed, who are the first victims of the crisis we are in. Yet, when they were in power, they systematically raided the employment insurance fund to the tune of several billions, in order to balance the books of the government of the day, while at the same time allowing the richest members of society to continue to benefit from tax havens and family trusts. Their finance minister, Paul Martin, was himself one of the biggest profiteers from the system. Our private nickname for him was "Paul, the Little Boatman", because he had his ships built abroad and sailed them under flags of convenience, reported his profits in tax havens and then had his ships scrapped in China. All that in order to help Canada.

[*English*]

There are others who say he is a man who put his mouth in Ottawa but his cash in Barbados.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

What more can we ask of a party that gets all worked up in the House and speaks very quaveringly against a government that abolishes the fundamental right of women to pay equity—a right for which the previous generation fought so hard—only to support this government's legislation after condemning it so harshly.

While these remarks put a damper on the real motives of the Liberals in presenting this motion, the Bloc Québécois will nevertheless review it on its merits. It is true that, in its forecasts, CBC/Radio-Canada announced a shortfall of \$171 million for 2009-10. That shortfall can be explained by a combination of several factors: lower advertising revenues—of course everyone is affected by that—increase in programming costs and aging infrastructures, to name but a few. It is also true that, on March 25, the corporation's management announced the elimination of 800 positions, about which we will find out more in the coming months. Finally, it is also true that, at the time when the corporation was asking for an advance—and only that—on parliamentary votes, or to borrow money from a financial or banking institution, the Conservatives rejected both options. They did so at the very time when the minister said he was prepared to help private broadcasters and media.



*Business of Supply*

After numerous delays and after being forced to do so by the three opposition parties, the Conservatives finally decided, in light of the economic crisis—the very existence of which they had first denied—to apply here the Keynesian solutions that all the other industrialized countries in the world, including the United States, had begun to implement, namely investing massively in job creation. All of a sudden, this government began announcing investments of billions of dollars in infrastructure, ports, highways, bridges, airports, skating rinks and tennis courts. It even announced the establishment of a bizarre \$3 billion fund that will be invested without any monitoring by the House, and we still do not really know where exactly.

Yet, at the same time, the government cut millions of dollars in cultural programs, thus jeopardizing hundreds and even thousands of jobs in Quebec and in Canada. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is currently reviewing this issue. It is finalizing its study, which will be tabled in the House very soon. It will not be pretty. The government refuses to support CBC/Radio-Canada, even if that means losing 800 highly specialized jobs.

I would like to give those watching a sense of how different \$1 billion is from \$1 million. Never having had that kind of money in our pockets, obviously that is foreign to us, but I will give a specific example. If I were to put in your bank account—assuming it was empty to begin with—\$1 million and asked you to withdraw \$1,000 a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, until there was no money left, it would take you a little under three years to empty your bank account. However, had I put in \$1 billion and asked you to go through the same process of withdrawing \$1,000 a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, even if you had started when Chris was born, it would still take you another seven centuries to empty that bank account. That is the difference between those two amounts.

On the one hand, we have billions in investments with economic benefits neither you nor I have any idea about and, on the other hand, millions in cuts with results that are immediately clear: hundreds of jobs lost while they claim to want to create jobs.

• (1340)

That makes absolutely no economic sense and we are forced to assume that the Conservatives made this decision for ideological reasons. In other words, they continue to apply the good old Conservative maxim, the best government is no government. Private interests take precedence over public interests.

However, the importance of CBC/Radio-Canada has long been proven. In its February 2008 report tabled last year, the Standing Committee on Heritage studied the corporation in detail and stated the following in its introduction. I will read from page 7 of the report, where it explains why the corporation was created.

The origins of what is now known as CBC/Radio-Canada date back to 1929 and the Report of the Royal Commission on Broadcasting (the Aird Commission). The Commission noted that the majority of the radio broadcasts that Canadians listened to came from the United States and worried that this would tend to inculcate young people with non-Canadian ideals and viewpoints. The Aird Commission also recognised broadcasting's immense educational and informational potential and its ability to contribute to a shared sense of national identity. The Commission therefore recommended setting up a national public broadcasting service that had the necessary resources to create truly Canadian content.

Although I am being told that I have one minute remaining, I would nevertheless simply like to add that, today, we realize,

especially in English Canada, that almost all movies watched are American movies, that almost all the music we listen to is American, that almost all television series are American and that to francophone ears, such as mine, it sounds like more and more American English and less and less British English is being spoken.

What the government needs to do right now is increase CBC/Radio-Canada activities, but it is cutting its funding. And both the Liberals and the Conservatives had a hand in that.

If the Canadian government is incapable of providing adequate funding for the survival of Canadian culture, why should we, Quebecers, trust it to ensure the survival of our culture? We will take control of our own affairs and it is about time.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Drummond for speaking so passionately about the CBC.

In my riding, Nickel Belt, CBC Radio One is losing eight jobs. This affects half the employees. Fortunately up to now, Radio-Canada has not been affected, but, in the long term, it will be.

I know how staff cuts at CBC/Radio-Canada hurt small towns in northern Ontario. I have a lot of relatives in northern Quebec, in small town like Fabre, Ville-Marie and Latulippe.

I would ask the member for Drummond to tell me how these small towns will be affected by the cuts being made today at the CBC.

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. People living in remote communities are probably affected most by these cuts, and it is they who need the CBC the most. Radio is often the only contact people living in remote regions have with the rest of the country—when they have access to it. It may not be available at times because the technical requirements to serve them are unavailable. However, when it is available, radio is often their sole contact and the only way they have to feel connected.

In addition, local television or radio gives them a sense of belonging to their community. I think the cuts will indeed affect them. The cuts are much deeper and more harmful than might be generally thought, and I think it is a real pity that this government could literally not care less.

• (1345)

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to my colleague from Drummond. I would like to know whether he agrees that the CBC needs stable funding.

*Business of Supply*

Suppose a memorandum of understanding is signed for a seven year period, and that the government provides stable funding of \$40 per capita—those are the conclusions of the study completed in February 2008—that the additional \$60 million is included in its stable indexed budget, and that serious thought is given to funding it so it can gradually reduce its dependence on advertising. I would like to know whether the member for Drummond supports these ideas.

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau:** Mr. Speaker, I do indeed. Culture is not simply merchandise, and funds must be injected to support it. I would remind you that, in France, \$77 per capita is invested to support broadcasting. In Britain—with the BBC, which is absolutely extraordinary and well worth watching—the amount is \$124 per capita. Here a mere \$34 is injected, and the government is boasting about how wonderful that is.

In my opinion, the amount should be increased to at least \$40 and provided with regularity so that the corporation can, like all intelligent businesses, manage its affairs on the basis of data that is predictable annually and not on the whim of a minister or another, who might be subject to change, or who might be catching a cold.

**The Deputy Speaker:** As there is one minute left, there is 30 seconds for the question and 30 seconds for the reply.

The member for Nickel Belt.

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from Drummond whether he knows why the Conservative government would not provide CBC/Radio-Canada with temporary funding during these difficult times.

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government currently has \$3 billion, and it has no idea where it is going to spend that money, or at least, it does not want to tell us. It could easily take \$171 million and make a one-year loan to CBC/Radio-Canada. No one would die, and CBC/Radio-Canada would at least get a short reprieve.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague from Drummond on his excellent speech. Bravo!

I am pleased to rise today to speak to this motion, which concerns the short- and long-term future of CBC/Radio-Canada.

On March 25, the corporation's president and CEO, Mr. Lacroix, announced that 800 full-time positions would be eliminated between May and September, including 335 at the French network. This amounts to a loss of around 8% of the corporation's workforce across Canada.

The positions are being cut because of rapidly declining advertising revenues owing to the difficult economic situation, rising production costs and aging infrastructure.

Unfortunately, I have to point out that it is rather odd, even paradoxical, that the Liberal Party is behind this motion today. During the final years they were in power, successive Liberal governments refused to index CBC/Radio-Canada's budget. In the 1990s, they even cut its budget repeatedly, most notably in 1998, when they slashed it by \$94 million.

More recently, on February 1, 2005, a newspaper in the greater Montreal area wrote the following:

Yesterday, all the CBC/Radio-Canada news anchors sounded the alarm. They do not accept the new \$4 million cuts to the news sector.

They were all there, saddened and asking Prime Minister Paul Martin and minister Liza Frulla to be receptive.

Those people are not Conservatives.

In constant dollars, that is, taking inflation into consideration, the CBC's budget under the Liberals went from \$900 million to \$708 million. This means that the Liberals are also directly responsible for the state of the CBC's infrastructure and partially responsible for the current crisis that is shaking the corporation. The tabling of this motion by the Liberal Party once again shows the political hypocrisy that is so ingrained in that party. This way of doing things is not the exception for the Liberal Party. It is its trademark.

I will provide an example that affects me directly, because it is happening in my riding, and also in other Montreal ridings. I am referring to the noise caused by aircraft, ever since flights were moved from Mirabel to Dorval. In Ahuntsic we are disturbed by the noise of these aircraft. That is also the case in Saint-Laurent and, oddly enough, in Lachine as well. It is rather funny to see some Liberal members cry wolf regarding the noise made by aircraft, considering that they are directly responsible for this unacceptable situation, which prevails in several ridings in Montreal. That is a small example, but I could give other ones. This shows why, when we look at the facts, both Quebecers and Canadians are disappointed by the Liberals.

But let us get back to the main issue, namely, the financial crisis that the corporation is facing. The CBC has to deal with a shortfall of \$171 million. The corporation's management has confirmed that it asked for the government's assistance, but the government refused to help. It merely authorized the CBC to benefit from the proceeds generated by the sale of some of its assets. Such a sale would take place at the worst moment, in the midst of an economic crisis. It is claimed that these assets are worth about \$125 million, but one wonders how much the corporation will get for them, in the context of the economic crisis. It is obvious that this sale will mortgage the corporation's future. The sad thing in all this is that the government prefers to invest huge amounts of money in military equipment and war, rather than preserving jobs in Canada and in Quebec. That is the reality and that is unacceptable. This government does not understand anything and it continues on its military path.

I would point out that 85% of these cuts will affect television and 13.5% will affect radio. For example, in Montreal, the cuts will mean the loss of approximately 250 jobs, including 85 in news programming. In Quebec City, about 15 jobs will be lost as a result of the cuts, and the local noon program will disappear altogether. That means two and a half fewer hours of news from Quebec City every week, beginning June 29. The 6 p.m. news program, *Téléjournal Québec*, will be shortened by 30 minutes from June 29 to September 4, and return to 60 minutes in the fall. We are seeing real cuts to news and jobs. In addition to the people who will be left without a job, Canadians will also see a reduction in the amount of information they receive. This reminds of what happened with TQS.

*Business of Supply*

Mr. Lacroix said that, beyond the CBC's walls, these cuts will also “dramatically” affect independent producers. The broadcaster has insisted that they reduce their production costs by 10% to 25%, which most have agreed to do.

• (1350)

We can therefore assume that a lot more than 800 jobs will be eliminated, if we include jobs outside the CBC, that is, jobs with private producers.

Mr. Lacroix was very clear. The Conservative government's decision to deny the crown corporation temporary financial assistance made things very difficult for its administrators. According to Mr. Lacroix, with bridge financing, the CBC would have been in a better position to manage the situation it now faces. This leads me to vigorously emphasize that the Conservatives' decision not to grant the CBC temporary assistance is unacceptable. As we know, the Conservative government has finally acknowledged the global economic crisis and admitted that it is also being felt here in Canada. They keep telling us, loud and clear, that their action plan has four main priorities, the first of which is, and I quote, “to take measures to protect jobs.” This is a little strange, is it not? They say they want to protect jobs, yet they refuse to give money, and people are losing their jobs. Some 800 people are being laid off.

Confronted with the financial crisis rocking CBC/Radio-Canada, the government is failing woefully its own test. Its inaction is a pure show of economic incompetence in these times of crisis. The fundamental role of any responsible government in these times is to preserve jobs. Through its inaction, this government which is currently in power thanks to the support of the Liberals, including my friend from Honoré-Mercier, is directly responsible for the loss of 800 well-paying full-time jobs. On the one hand, the government wants to be seen to be actively creating infrastructure jobs by pressing Parliament to support its \$3 billion plan, even though it not clear where exactly this money will go. On the other hand, it is deepening the crisis by refusing to provide CBC/Radio-Canada with \$171 million in temporary funding. I just do not get them anymore. They will hire more people to process the EI claims of the 800 plus employees losing their jobs.

On March 26, a renowned CBC/Radio-Canada journalist with 50 years' experience expressed concern about the future of the Crown corporation. He said that what was most worrisome in the medium and long term was the future of public television in Canada. He added that we can always overcome difficult economic conditions. But when such conditions are combined with a lack of political will, things get pretty rough at the shop.

What this government is doing is shameful. From a strictly financial and human perspective, the Conservatives should support the preservation of these jobs without hesitation. Unfortunately, the Conservative government does not seem to understand that or to embrace that economic truth. It would appear that the Conservatives' plan is to take advantage of the current economic situation to starve CBC/Radio-Canada and compromise its influence and future across Quebec and Canada. This is all the more shocking given that the Conservatives are apparently considering helping private broadcasters. As the saying goes, charity begins at home.

The Bloc will be voting in favour of this motion, but in reality we want more than it calls for. Since my time is nearly up, I will just list a few points. That the public funding for CBC/Radio-Canada be raised from \$34 to \$40 per capita. In other countries in the world it is far more than that. That the annual additional funding of \$60 million be maintained. That the funding be stable, multi-year, predictable and indexed. The worst part of all this is that all this was in the February 2008 report of the standing committee on Canadian heritage. Many witnesses were heard. Many briefs were submitted. There was endless discussion. It took the time it took. A fine report was produced. That report did not really question the importance of funding CBC/Radio-Canada. But now it is as if we did all that for nothing. Nothing came of it. The Liberal motion is interesting but unfortunately it is a matter of too little, too late. The demands I have listed are not part of it. As far as the government is concerned, that is not one of its concerns.

• (1355)

Moreover, those recommendations went much further than this Liberal motion. They were supported by the Liberal Party, even if our colleagues who were on the committee did not seem very comfortable with this request for increased and maintained corporation funding. I would have expected this motion to have far more teeth than it does.

Will the Liberals do the same as our Conservative colleagues? That is the major question and one for which I think the future will provide an answer.

If this Liberal motion seems to be bold in its demands of the government, it is more than timid when compared to what all my Liberal colleagues were backing a little over 12 months ago.

Unfortunately, with the Conservatives—

• (1400)

**The Speaker:** I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Ahuntsic, but I have some documents to table.

\* \* \*

[English]

**AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA**

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table the status report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

\* \* \*

[English]

**ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(5) of the Auditor General Act, the status report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

This document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

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**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**
*[English]***ORANGEVILLE LIONS CLUB**

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to recognize the 60th anniversary of the Lions Club of Orangeville. This enthusiastic club has a long history of making a difference in the community by hosting many highly anticipated events such as LobsterFest, the annual home and garden show, and Murray's Mountain. This anniversary is particularly special as it will recognize the last remaining member of the charter group of 21, who started the club back in 1949.

Mr. Bill Teeter is a 60-year member who has continued to exemplify community service and dedication. His many contributions are appreciated and our community owes him a debt of gratitude. On behalf of the Government of Canada and the residents of Dufferin—Caledon, I congratulate Bill Teeter and the Lions Club of Orangeville on its 60th anniversary and for making our community a better place.

\* \* \*

**COMMUNITY LEADERS**

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to invite all members of the House in recognizing two outstanding members of the Portuguese Canadian community. On April 18, members of the Portuguese Canadian community will gather to honour Mr. Avelino Fonseca and Mr. Joe Botelho for their years of service.

Both Avelino and Joe are very active and successful members of the business community who have achieved a great deal through years of hard work and dedication. As well as being successful business people, Avelino and Joe have worked tirelessly to give of their time and resources to assist many individuals and groups throughout their communities. They have been especially committed and dedicated to providing support and assistance to those who are physically challenged.

It is indeed appropriate that we join with all of our communities in recognizing outstanding community leaders like Avelino Fonseca and Joe Botelho.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***DESJARDINS TOURISM AWARDS**

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the 24th annual Desjardins tourism awards for the Eastern Townships were handed out on March 20.

Many of the winners in the 18 categories are from my riding.

I would like to congratulate the Chocolatière d'Hatley on its award in the lodging—bed and breakfast category; Camping de Compton in the lodging—camping category; Fitch Bay's Bleu Lavande in the agrotourism and regional products category; and the Eastern Townships tourism office in the tourism services category.

In 2008, businesses in the region took home five gold awards, more than in any other region in Quebec. I believe that our regional representatives will perform well during the national gala on May 15 in Quebec City.

These businesses have a significant impact on our region's tourism and economy. I would therefore like to wish them the best of luck.

\* \* \*

*[English]***COMMUNITY BUILDER**

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the contributions of Jack McCarthy to our community in Ottawa. On April 16, Ottawa will celebrate 20 years of Jack's work as the executive director of the Somerset West Community Health Centre.

Jack is a community builder. He is passionate for social justice. He believes in people and empowers them. At his core, he embodies a humanitarian commitment to all, regardless of race, class or gender. As a result, Jack has led our community by bringing a diversity of voices together from right across Ottawa.

From the time he began his career as a child protection worker, his advocacy for affordable housing, education, employment and health promotion has made our community stronger.

Jack embodies the notion of thinking globally and acting locally. He has used his experience in community development to benefit thousands of people here and abroad.

We thank Jack McCarthy for his commitment to our community and for making our community a healthier place to live.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this morning I met with Fire Chief Andy Thiessen of the Morden Fire & Rescue. Fire Chief Thiessen is in Ottawa this week for the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs' annual government relations week.

The CAFC is a national organization representing more than 1,000 chief fire officers in all Canadian provinces and territories.

More than 85% of the firefighters are volunteers. Volunteer firefighters in Canada fight fires, tend to the injured, search for missing people, provide emergency medical treatment, and teach public safety.

*Statements by Members*

I stand today in the House to recognize the tremendous contribution that volunteer firefighters make in communities like my riding of Portage—Lisgar, keeping us safe in our homes and communities. They give of their time and energy and put their lives on the line for the sake of their friends, neighbours and all Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

#### FAMILY SERVICES CENTRE

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the national capital region family services centre is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year.

Sister Micheline Beaulne, Father Jean Monbourquette, Father Benoît Garceau, Sister Claire Malette, Brother Maurice Lapointe and Reverend Father Roger Guindon worked together to set up the family services centre, whose mission is to create community support networks. Every day, it touches the lives of many francophone families in the region and the riding of Ottawa—Vanier. One of the centre's guiding principles is that a society's well-being depends on families.

To mark the anniversary, I would like to salute the nearly 200 dedicated volunteers who continue to make the centre's services available. They are providing the kind of exceptional community support that deserves to be in the spotlight. Congratulations to them all.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

#### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express both my anger and frustration as a father of two young daughters at the incredible decisions made at the citizenship and immigration committee today.

At a meeting earlier this month, opposition members voted unanimously to recommend that the Government of Canada not deport any individual to Sri Lanka regardless of criminal convictions. My motion today would have rectified the committee's previous error and would have shown all Canadians that we are serious about public safety. However, again, the official opposition voted unanimously against my motion to deport individuals convicted of serious crimes in Canada.

According to the Liberals, people like Panchalingam Nagalingam, implicated in the fatal shooting of two teenagers, a meat cleaver attack, the trashing of a community centre, threats, assaults and credit card theft would be allowed to remain in Canada. The Liberals talk tough on crime when the cameras are on but show by their votes that indeed they continue to put the rights of criminals ahead of victims.

Will the Liberal leader ask his MPs to support Canadians, or will he continue to sit back, smirk and put his hands in the air—

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[*Translation*]

#### LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party has boasted that he placed the government on probation. And yet, it seems that he is incapable of influencing its decisions in order to help workers. The cuts at the CBC are the most recent example.

When this government's lack of flexibility forced the CBC to cut 800 jobs, the Liberal Leader mildly lamented the situation and hoped that the decade of underfunding imposed on the corporation by the Liberals had been forgotten.

It should be noted that, under the Liberals, the CBC's budget, in constant dollars, decreased by \$200 million annually, from \$900 million to \$708 million.

As long as the Liberal leader, through his inaction, continues to endorse the measures adopted by this Conservative government, he must assume responsibility for his complicity.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

#### NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time to mark a very special occasion in our country's history.

Sixty years ago today, Canada was made complete when Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation. In the past 60 years we have grown together as a strong and united country, a country that we all should be very proud of.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador have made a tremendous amount of contributions to Canada. Their rich culture and passion for life is sewn in the fabric of this country. Without Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada would not be what it is today: the greatest country in the world.

On behalf of all members of the House, we wish to congratulate the people of Newfoundland and Labrador on the 60th anniversary of joining Canada.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

#### VISA REQUIREMENT

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud that after three long years of informing, petitioning and cajoling the Conservative government, my Motion No. 247 and its previous version, Motion No. 99, calling on the government to lift visitor visa requirements for Croatia was finally implemented.

Twenty years ago, the Iron Curtain came down, and two days ago Canada's visa curtain around Croatia came down as well. It is immensely gratifying that this Easter will be the first that families and friends from Croatia will be able to visit their loved ones in Canada and all it will take is the purchase of an airline ticket.

*Statements by Members*

It is rare for the contents of an opposition private member's motion to be adopted in its entirety by the government, and I am proud that for the second time the Conservative government has seen fit to implement one of my motions.

I am humbled by the support I received in the thousands of communications and petitions from individuals belonging to Croatian Canadian parishes and organizations from across Canada. Together we were many and we made it happen.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, someone just wrapped up his “telling them what they want to hear” town hall series out in B.C.

Someone called the forestry sector one of the “basement industries”. Someone obviously wants to abandon the resource sector.

Not only does someone not care about resource jobs, he also wants to lose the auto sector. In B.C. he told his audience he did not want to spend money to stabilize the manufacturing industry of southern Ontario. Someone would not dare say that to the communities in southwestern Ontario.

Someone may have dreams of killing the resource sector in B.C., or the auto industry in Ontario, but his real dream is to impose a job-killing carbon tax.

Since first suggesting the idea decades ago, someone has championed the carbon tax idea in the Liberal leadership and during the last campaign. If imposed by now, someone would have crippled the Canadian economy.

Someone, the Liberal leader, is bad for Canada's economy.

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**NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT**

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, constituents in Nanaimo—Cowichan were dismayed when changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act were passed.

The Conservative government is using the excuse of removing red tape to grant the transport minister unprecedented powers to decide which waterways are worth protecting and which are not.

It is unacceptable that one individual has the sole authority to approve the construction of a dam, boom, or causeway. This is undemocratic and may cause irreparable damage to our precious lakes and rivers.

Environmental triggers within the NWPA to ensure a proper assessment prior to starting a construction project over or next to one of Canada's waterways were replaced by the unilateral authority of the transport minister to grant approval for works without any parliamentary review or public disclosure.

The long-term consequences of any given project need to be carefully considered and weighed against the benefits before it can be allowed to go ahead. Navigation and environmental rights should not be abandoned in the name of expediency.

In B.C. we know badly designed dams destroy salmon runs. The transport minister does not have any responsibility to protect salmon habitat, and with no public disclosure we will not know a decision has been made that will affect salmon until it is too late.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party recently declared in a flippant tone that the forestry and logging industries are low end or basement industries, as he likes to call them. How can an intelligent person say such a thing? When he tours such Quebec regions as Abitibi, in Lac-Saint-Jean or the Saguenay, will he tell workers to get out of their basements and, like him, see the light?

The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore seems to look down on Canada's forestry and logging industries from a great height. On this side of the House, we believe that the forestry industry is an important primary industry in our economy and not a low end one.

The Liberal leader has clearly demonstrated that he is more at ease in an ivory tower than in the real world with real workers in the resource regions of Quebec and Canada.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

**QUEBEC BRIDGE**

**Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Communauté métropolitaine de Québec or CMQ recently reiterated the request made in 2003 by the mayor at the time, Mr. Allier, to the Canadian Minister of Transport that it honour its commitment to completely refurbish the Quebec bridge. Here is the gist of the resolution passed on February 26, 2009.

If the work is not completed, the bridge will continue to deteriorate, and the cost to repair and maintain it will continue to increase. Although an independent firm had estimated the cost at \$63 million, that number has since increased as a result of environmental requirements that must be taken into account as well as additional costs associated with the poor condition of the bridge structure.

Furthermore, the CMQ pointed out that the Government of Canada invested \$440 million to repair the Jacques-Cartier, Champlain and Victoria bridges, while the Quebec bridge is being left in a very poor state.

This government must reassume ownership of the Quebec bridge, complete the restoration and, once and for all, show a little respect for this “national historic site”.

*Oral Questions*

[English]

**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 60 years ago today, just before midnight, Canada gained its tenth province and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador became Canadian citizens. Today is the anniversary of our confederation with Canada.

The past six decades have brought great change. There have been ups and downs. However, on balance we are richer for being part of Canada, and Canada is richer for our presence.

In my riding of Labrador, the decision was clear. Voting in 1948, for only the third time in our history, my ancestors achieved a long-held dream. With 80% support, we chose Canada and we still do.

March 31, 1949, gave new meaning to our country's motto: *A mari usque ad mare*, "From Sea to Sea".

When the day breaks over Canada, it breaks a little earlier than it did on July 1, 1867, and we are all better because of it.

On this date we became part of this great country, this united country, the best country in the world. On this date, Canada became complete.

*Vive le Canada.*

\* \* \*

**AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, hypocrisy is defined as a condition of people pretending to be something they are not.

For example, let us say one pretends to care about the auto industry while in Ontario, but when in British Columbia one tells people that one does not support the auto industry. That is hypocrisy.

Let us say that one is the father of the job killing carbon tax and campaigns on it, but then tries to distance oneself from it. That is hypocrisy.

Or if one pretends to support the seal hunt and then allows one of the senators and top advisers to work to ban it. That could be hypocrisy.

If one signs one's name to a letter calling for a coalition government with a separatist party and then later lets on that it did not happen. That is hypocrisy.

It is clear. Based on the definition and the examples given, the leader of the Liberal Party suffers from that condition.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member may find himself suspended for making statements if he persists in ignoring the ruling I made the other day. I know that may cause some disappointment.

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I wish to advise hon. members, in case some have forgotten, the Canadian Medical Association is on the Hill today. It is offering services to members to assist them in maintaining their health. Although I am only responsible for rights and privileges, I can, of course, urge hon. members to care for their

health. In room 602 upstairs, members are able to go between now and 5 o'clock.

[Translation]

Members can have a free assessment of their risks of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. It is not necessary to make an appointment. Members are free to go anytime until 5 o'clock today.

[English]

I would urge all hon. members, particularly after question period, if they are feeling unwell, to head upstairs and get a checkup.

Oral questions, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

• (1420)

[English]

**AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we asked the Minister of Industry three simple questions about whether Conservatives did their jobs to protect Canadian auto-workers and Canadian taxpayers, and the answers were as follows: no secure credit facility right now, no corporate assets backing up our loans, and no warranty guarantees for Canadian consumers.

Is this the government's position? Because if it is, it is not doing its job.

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I indicated yesterday was that we are, of course, working with these two auto companies as before. There has not been any money flowed to General Motors, and there are strict conditions before that happens.

Should the company's restructuring plants not be certified, or should that company go into CCAA or chapter 11, we can convert those loans to debt financing, which are either callable or they have higher security, so that is the answer to the hon. member's question.

When will he do his job as Leader of the Opposition and not say one thing in British Columbia and say another thing in the House of Commons?

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I make a habit of saying the same thing right across the country and the hon. member knows that.

Canadians are not buying cars and I did not get an answer to the question about protecting warranties for Canadian cars. I did not get an answer to the question about access to the credit facility, promised in December, not to be delivered in May. Why?

When will the government start doing its job, which is to protect Canadian taxpayers and Canadian auto-workers?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I did say yesterday was that when we get some details of what the Obama administration has planned for warranties, we are willing to look at that. We are extending credit through the secure credit facility. That will help auto parts makers.

*Oral Questions*

Indeed, as I have said before, we have made loans available. GM has not asked for those loans. There are strict conditions attached to those loans and we will continue to apply those conditions.

When the hon. member stands up and says he is being consistent, I would like to ask the hon. member how consistent he is on the carbon tax, which he pushed on the previous leader of the Liberal Party and now tries to distance himself—

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

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

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the answers amount to saying, “Always a follower; never a leader”.

[*Translation*]

GM Canada unveiled its restructuring plan in February. This government waited until yesterday to reject it.

Why did it make GM and its employees wait so long for such a disappointing response? Why are they going to have to wait so much longer in anguish and uncertainty?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the restructuring plans submitted by GM and Chrysler are not acceptable now. Perhaps later there will be an action plan we can find acceptable.

[*English*]

It is very interesting. The hon. member says things in different parts of the country that he thinks will be acceptable to them. He does not understand that we have 24-hour-a-day news channels today. We hear those things and we wonder when he is going to be consistent. Because if he wants to be prime minister, he has to be consistent.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I asked whether the government required collateral from GM Canada in the event of a loan.

Incredibly, the minister answered that no loans had been made to date, as if that were enough.

Yet several months ago his government agreed to lend the automotive sector \$2.7 billion.

I repeat my question: do the Conservatives require that GM Canada put up any assets as collateral for loans, and if so, what is that collateral?

• (1425)

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, we have not made any loans to GM to date. If there are restructuring plans that are not certified and if we do make loans under those circumstances, those loans will be repayable.

[*English*]

I have also said that, in the case of a chapter 11 CCAA situation, then of course we would be able to roll over any potential loans to a DIP financing situation and we would have higher security. That is the answer to the question. I have been consistent all along. I

certainly encourage the hon. member to convince his leader to be consistent as well.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the industry minister said that the U.S. president had “some new ideas on the auto industry that he's willing to look at”.

If the minister were truly at the table with the U.S., he would know these are not new ideas. Clearly, he is not there.

While President Obama is considering structured bankruptcy, with support for consumer confidence through warranty guarantees, the appointment of an auto reform director and decisive leadership, the Conservatives are doing nothing to support consumer confidence.

Why is the minister hiding in a shroud of ambiguity while our industry struggles for life?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the ex-auto critic for the Liberal Party should know that we are working very closely with the United States government and we have been from the very beginning, and that is because it is an integrated car industry, which the hon. members on the other side seem to have forgotten.

Yesterday, President Obama credited Canadians with being part of the solution and credited us with working together with them. It would be something that even the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the Liberal Party, must be very jealous of.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**GOODS AND SERVICES TAX**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is really sad to see the Prime Minister sending out one of his token Quebecers when he cannot answer our questions himself. When it came to loan guarantees, for example, it was the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) who answered our questions. For the harmonization of the GST, it was the Minister of Public Works and Government Services who answered our questions yesterday.

I want to ask the one who is really responsible for the GST harmonization file to rise and answer us once and for all. Can he give us one good reason why he is willing to compensate Ontario but refuses to do so for Quebec?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the token member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. After 18 years in the House, has he actually been of any real use to our Quebec nation?

I would like to remind him of the facts. The situation in Ontario is different from that in Quebec. Ontario is going to pass a federal harmonization act but Quebec has decided to have two distinct taxes, the QST and the GST.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, he is the most comical of the token Quebecers. He drove around in a truck during the election campaign, with this result.

Getting back to the GST, Paul Martin said in 1996:



...the federal government does not owe Quebec any money for harmonizing its sales tax with the GST. Provinces are eligible for payments when they lose more than 5% of their revenues by harmonizing.

Ontario did not lose anything and its revenues will even rise. Despite that, it is going to be compensated. Why will it be compensated when, as Jean Charest says, Quebec has harmonized its sales tax?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member with his 18 years of token service to Quebec, his 18 years of incompetence, that Quebec still has full control over the establishment and administration of this value added tax.

Quebec administers its own sales tax system and the GST for the federal government. In return, the Government of Canada has paid Quebec \$1.77 billion over the years.

• (1430)

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in 1991, Quebec was the first to harmonize its sales tax with the GST. The federal government congratulated itself on this, but offered nothing in compensation. The Atlantic provinces received \$1 billion in 1997 because they were losing revenue. Today, Ontario, whose tax revenues will increase with harmonization, will be receiving \$4.3 billion.

Will the government acknowledge that, regardless of the party in office, the recipe is the same: any excuse is good to avoid giving Quebec its due?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would thank this member, because one good turn deserves another. I would point out that Quebec did not adopt the federal legislation on the harmonized sales tax, that it did not sign the comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement and that the Quebec sales tax and the GST remain quite separate.

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I think that it would truly be the end of things if the Government of Quebec adopted federal legislation.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services, in his role as token Quebecer, yesterday justified the unjustifiable by describing money received by the Government of Quebec for the administration of the GST as compensation. There must be someone in government honest enough to admit that this is not the compensation sought by Quebec for harmonizing its tax with the GST.

Instead of misleading the public, will the federal government do the only reasonable thing? Will it compensate Quebec and give it the \$2.6 billion it seeks?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the best thing the Bloc could do for this House would be to go back to its headquarters in Quebec City, to express its opinion there, quite simply, in the National Assembly.

## Oral Questions

[English]

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in January, the Conservatives tabled a weak stimulus package that fell far short of what the G20 was recommending to stem the worldwide crisis. As a result, Canada will lose more than twice as many jobs in 2009 than the government said that it would create in the entire year.

Considering that the OECD projects Canada's unemployment rate will hit 8.8% higher than the industrialized average, instead of lecturing other countries, why will the Prime Minister not finally recognize that we need to do more here in Canada to protect and create jobs and to help people who are losing their jobs?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of doing more, I would remind that hon. member that his party put forward not one suggestion in our prebudget consultations. The people who members of the NDP represent expected them to put forward their positions, as did the folks who members of the Liberal Party represent.

The NDP put forward nothing and then it suggests that what we have done, our economic action plan, is not enough. I do not understand where the member is coming from.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have put forward proposals to fix the EI system to help people who are being left in poverty. They were adopted by this House but are being ignored by the government.

Now the Prime Minister is heading off to the G20 meeting with another clear instruction from the House, which is to make poverty reduction a top priority. That is what the House wanted him to do.

The G20 represents 85% of the world's economy. Canada should be playing in role on the world stage around poverty alleviation.

Why will the government not respect the unanimous will of this House to put the issue of poverty reduction front and centre at the G20?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government has always put poverty reduction as one of its primary goals. In fact, we are actually doubling our aid to Africa. We see the opposition voting against all of our positions that we put forward.

We have been front and centre, leading at the G20 and leading at the G7, in order to get our own country's finances in place so we can continue to help those less fortunate than us.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for the third month in a row, Canada's gross domestic product has declined. In January, the number of people with jobs dropped by 117,000. This is the most significant drop since March 1991. The Conservatives are beating all Brian Mulroney's records for economic mediocrity.

Why is the government refusing to acknowledge that its economic plan is inadequate and that more must be done to help the middle class, here in Canada, right now?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our economic action plan, which the member and that party voted against before they even read it, provides increased support for Canadians to help those who have lost their jobs to be able to retrain for jobs of the future. We are providing extended EI benefits for those who have lost their jobs. We actually have a plan, an extraordinary financing framework, that puts money in place so people can actually borrow money again to keep their businesses going and hire new employees.

• (1435)

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one factor making this recession worse is the government. According to its own reports, the Conservative government decided to not invest \$1.2 billion in infrastructure funding it had budgeted for this fiscal year ending today. By their own calculations, that represents 21,000 jobs that could have been saved or created this past year. With matching funds, it would have been 60,000 jobs. Meanwhile, thousands of construction workers have lost work.

Is the government just incompetent or is there a reason it will not help Canadians get the jobs they need?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is always great to hear from the member for Parkdale—High Park. His sunny disposition and always seeing the glass half full is always welcome from those of us on this side of the House.

We are working aggressively with the Province of Ontario and provincial governments around the country to identify projects that can move forward quickly. We have made outstanding progress in the last three months and the next three months will be even better.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, sadly, that is pretty thin gruel for people who are not working. In fact, this is a pattern of incompetence by the minister and his predecessors.

In the last three years, the Conservatives have failed to use over \$3 billion in approved funds for infrastructure spending. If it had actually invested the money, over 150,000 jobs could have been created across the country.

Will the government today apologize to Canadians for how poorly it has done in creating jobs and for making the recession worse? Will the minister agree that he is responsible so that Canadians know exactly who it is that failed them?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, many times the lapse will be rolled over. Quite often, when we identify and commit to funding support for a given project, such as the subway extension at Spadina in the city of Toronto, it does take a period of time before the shovels can go into the ground.

For new funds that we announced as part of our economic action plan, we have agreed to fast-track them and only support projects where that can begin and be completed in the next 24 months.

We are cutting red tape to ensure that this stimulus can be of benefit to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We are committed to working hard and getting the job done.

*[Translation]***FINANCE**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in 2007-08 the Conservatives let \$7.6 billion in Parliament-approved spending vanish into thin air, just to increase their surpluses. For example, \$1.2 billion for defence was not spent. We have now come to the last day of the 2008-09 fiscal year.

What amounts approved by this Parliament have still not been spent because the Conservatives are trying to reduce their deficit at workers' expense?

*[English]*

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely reject the premise of that question. If we are talking about cutting budgets on the backs of other folks, we all remember in the 1990s when the Liberals cut transfer payments to the provinces. In our prebudget consultations we talked to some of those finance ministers in the provinces who were absolutely devastated that any federal government would push that onto the backs of the provinces. We refuse to do that.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is wrong when hard-working citizens of Markham need to work twice as long as other Canadians to be eligible for employment insurance. Everyone except the government agrees, including the OECD, which today projected a 10.8% unemployment rate and called on the government to do more to help the unemployed.

Do we need millions of unemployed Canadians roaming the streets before this uncaring government will do the right thing and fix employment insurance?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I remind the member for Markham—Unionville that the EI system we now have, with the variable rate, was instituted in 1997 when his government was in power. The unemployment rate then was 8.4%, a full 0.7% higher than what we have today.

What we have done is add a number of initiatives, calculated at over \$4 billion, to help those who need help most when the economy is going the way it is today.

*Oral Questions*

•(1440)

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is true that the two week waiting period has existed since 1971. However, what the Minister of National Revenue, another token Quebecker, does not say is that workers did not pay premiums if they did not qualify for the plan, something which was changed by the Liberals in January 1997. Since then, premiums have been paid from the first hour worked, but the waiting period has not been eliminated.

Instead of coming to the defence of the Liberals, should not the token Quebecker for revenue instead be working for justice, to get rid of the waiting period?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in this time of economic difficulty, it is important to protect those who lose their jobs. Therefore we organized consultations, at which people asked us for more protection during this period. We feel it is better to offer them five more weeks of employment insurance, at a time when they could devote much more time to finding work, than to eliminate the waiting period.

I am also pleased to hear the hon. member acknowledge that this waiting period has existed for a long time, namely 38 years.

**Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the OECD says that Canada is not doing enough. It says that unemployment will increase dramatically between 2010 and 2011. Therefore the social safety net has to be improved and reinforced.

Does the government not think that eliminating the waiting period might be a good way to provide assistance to the unemployed, and also to jump start the economy?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the hon. member is also thinking not only about protecting those who lose their jobs, but also about what we are putting in place in our action plan to support economic activity. We will be investing \$12 billion in the building Canada program to create vast work sites in Canada and in Quebec.

In addition, we are providing a tax credit of \$1,350 for people who want to renovate their houses. This will enable manufacturers to offer job opportunities to their workers and to stimulate economic activity within their companies. These are two measures we are introducing to support economic activity in Canada.

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**TAXATION**

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, a number of countries, including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, have condemned tax havens and reaffirmed their commitment, at the G20 summit, to tighten financial controls and crack down on tax evasion. Oddly enough, Canada has taken the opposite stand by reinstating a tax loophole.

Can the government explain why it is helping billionaire companies and abandoning those in need?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, anyone who earns income must report it, whether it is earned abroad or here, in Canada. Rules require individuals to report income. Naturally, it is a concern when tax owing in Canada is not paid through the use of tax havens. Our efforts are focused on protecting the tax base and being fair to those who pay their share of taxes compared to those who try to evade taxes.

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the double deduction is a tax loophole that facilitates the unwarranted export of capital. The government likes to say that this provision makes Canadian businesses more competitive. However, its main trading partner, the United States, has rejected the double deduction.

Can the government tell us how exporting capital in these times is good for jobs, investments and the economy in Canada?

[English]

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we established a panel of experts to bring us a report on that. We have acted on that report. The report told us that we needed to do everything to ensure that Canadian companies could remain competitive.

We are aligning with other countries in the world so we do not put our Canadian companies at a disadvantage. We took the recommendation of that expert panel.

\* \* \*

•(1445)

[Translation]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Safety. Ms. Napolitano, the U.S. homeland security secretary, recently stated that, "One of the things that we need to be sensitive to is the very real feelings... that if things are being done on the Mexican border, they should also be done on the Canadian border."

What is the minister doing to change these positively dangerous thoughts in the mind of the U.S. Secretary of State?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I reject the interpretation or understanding of the comments of the homeland security secretary that the member for Toronto Centre has adopted. She has made it quite clear that she views the northern border differently. That is why she requested a detailed briefing note on the conditions at the northern border.

We all agree that borders are borders and they serve the same function for the United States, but the issues at each border are very different. The secretary of homeland security is very much aware of that. I do not think the hon. member gives the Obama administration sufficient credit.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the minister has not in fact addressed what Secretary Napolitano said. She said very clearly what she said and the minister has not addressed it.

### Oral Questions

An executive from Campbell's Soup said at the same conference last week that we had gone—

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

**Hon. Bob Rae:** Mr. Speaker, those members can laugh at jobs in Ontario. Those members can laugh at jobs in Quebec. Other people are not laughing. They said that we had gone from just in time to just in case.

Why did the Prime Minister not address this question when he made his pilgrimage to Fox News? Why was the Prime Minister not front and centre in defending the interests of Canadian industry and Canadian jobs?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is very pleased to be working co-operatively with the Obama administration and with the American government. In fact, in areas where we saw threats to Canada, such as the early implementation of the western hemisphere travel initiative, when that party was in government, it did not even know it was going through Congress. Nobody told the Liberals. They did not lobby.

After it was passed, we got involved when we became the government. We secured a number of extensions to that. We continue to work with them to ensure flexible implementation on June 1. We are working very hard and engaging co-operatively with the Americans.

I know the opposition wants to step up the rhetoric and attack the Obama administration. We prefer to work together co-operatively for solutions.

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### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has been six weeks since the so-called energy dialogue was struck with the United States. However, there are no special envoys, no targets, no timelines, nothing to report, nothing even new about the agenda.

In fact, in 2001 the previous Liberal government launched an energy working group with the U.S. and Mexico to pursue a dialogue on energy efficiency smart grids and energy security.

Will the minister simply admit that he has no plan, has given up on Canadian sovereignty, and he is really awaiting his instructions from Washington?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. I am pleased to advise my hon. friend and the House that I have put forward to our American neighbours our idea of how the joint working group should proceed. There are three very respected Canadians who have been put forward as the Canadian leads on these: Linda Hasenfratz, who is the CEO of a respected company, Linamar; Mr. Charlie Fischer, who is the former CEO of Nexen, is to head a second working group; Mr. Jacques Lamarre, who is the former chair of SNC-Lavalin, is to head a third working group. They are three extraordinarily respected Canadians.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, not only has the government compromised our sovereignty, it has also abandoned its own plan. It said that it would reduce greenhouse gas

emissions by 49 megatons next year, but not a single regulation has been delivered. The Prime Minister announced 10 months ago that he would be pricing carbon at \$65 a tonne, which is a farce.

Where is Canada's cap and trade system? What are our targets now that the Democrats are pursuing absolute reductions? When will the minister stop hiding behind dialogue window dressing? Where is Canada's plan?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, he began this parliamentary session fearmongering on Chalk River. He moved on from there to accusing the premiers, including his own brother, of eco-fraud. He has now engaged in this anti-American diatribe. What kind of a performance is that?

We have a clean energy dialogue with the Americans. We are working in concert with them on a host of energy related environmental matters.

\* \* \*

● (1450)

### CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it seems that Correctional Service Canada wants to relocate its Ottawa parole office.

[Translation]

It is my understanding that one of the proposed sites is located in a densely populated residential area near downtown.

[English]

Last night more than 100 residents packed the local meeting hall to express their concerns and ask that Correctional Service Canada reject this site.

Would the Minister of Public Safety advise the House about the government's plans with respect to the 1010 Somerset site.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Ottawa—Orléans for his ongoing interest in keeping the community safe from crime.

We are committed to the overall safety and security of Canadians. Correctional Service Canada is committed to ensuring that the new location for the Ottawa parole office is one that is appropriate in keeping the community safe. Part of that ensures consulting the community to understand its views and to understand the local issues. That has happened and the message has been loud and clear.

The 1010 site is not an appropriate site for a correctional facility of this type. As a result, I have asked Correctional Service Canada to reconsider it, which I understand it is doing.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**GOODS AND SERVICES TAX**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate just how much they scorn Quebec, the Conservatives got one of their backbench puppets to answer an important question, a question that was the subject of a unanimous motion in the National Assembly this very day: Maritimes, \$1 billion; Ontario, \$4.3 billion; Quebec, \$0. According to their stooge, Quebec did not sign “a comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement”, as he put it.

What is the real difference between that and the document Quebec actually signed? The answer is that there is no difference, except that the government wants to deprive Quebec of its due.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that we are proud to be working for the Quebec nation.

Did the NDP help us? Did it vote for our stimulus plan for Canada? It voted against it. The member should be ashamed.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. In the Maritimes' case, the federal government legislated that it was because of a compensation rule that required giving up 5% of the revenue. That was the rule, but in order for Ontario to be compensated, the rule had to be changed. Now, rather than lose revenue, its revenue will increase by 3.5%. That is a perfect example of the kind of piecemeal federalism that always swindles Quebec in the end.

Why can they change the rules to benefit others, yet make sure, once again, that Quebec ends up with nothing?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will take our time and explain why Ontario's situation is not the same as Quebec's. Ontario passed a federal harmonization act. Quebec chose to go with two separate taxes: the QST and the GST. That being said, in the 1990s, Quebec signed an agreement with Ottawa, a perfectly legal agreement between the two governments then in power.

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**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism claims he is bound by the recommendations of the committee responsible for applications for appointments to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. But according to the latest Auditor General's report, there is a standing list of candidates that is updated regularly from which the minister can choose. There are currently 99 names on that list. The minister therefore had plenty of other choices.

Why, then, did he choose to appoint controversial Conservatives like Pharès Pierre and John Cryer, who is a homophobe?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have adopted a new pre-selection system for IRB members. The pre-selection is done by the IRB. The chair of that quasi-judicial body suggests

names to me. We review the names before making appointments. This procedure is transparent and ensures that the IRB guarantees the credibility and qualifications of IRB appointees.

• (1455)

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, only 37 or 42% of the existing 89 competent board members were renewed. The remaining 58% were not renewed, even though their qualifications were recognized by the IRB.

Are we to understand that the minister did not renew the contracts of the remaining 58% because he did not consider them conservative enough for his taste and he wanted to keep spots to reward friends of the party, as the Liberals did before them?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. The fact is that when the Liberals were in power, they appointed anyone they wanted, without a pre-selection system. We have adopted a pre-selection system, as recommended by the agency for public appointments. That means that 100% of the candidates considered for appointment to the IRB are pre-selected by the IRB. Many people who apply to the IRB are not recommended to me as minister.

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[English]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I recently met with Robyn, a mother of three and sole supporter of her family, who lost her job. She applied for EI, but due to the backlog was forced to seek social assistance to support her family. When Robyn finally began to receive EI, the social assistance she received was clawed back, leaving her with almost nothing.

When will the government fix EI so Robyn and thousands of other Canadians finally get the support they desperately need when they need it?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will not get into the specifics of that particular case. We understand that people are going through difficult times. To the extent that we are, we have made modifications to the EI program that will bring benefits to many people, benefits of \$2 billion to \$4 billion.

We are taking three approaches: we are strengthening benefits for Canadian workers, we are enhancing the availability of training and we kept the employment rates frozen so there is no additional cost to employers and employees.

If the member has a specific issue, she can bring it to my attention after question period.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, since October the number of unemployed Canadians has risen by 295,000. According to the OECD, it will continue to rise.

### Oral Questions

A young mother in my riding took on an internship to get Canadian experience. Her employer has just cut the program, leaving her on the street. She has 724 hours, but because she lives in Ontario, she does not qualify for EI.

What plans does the government have to bring EI into the 21st century?

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with the EI program. The variable rate requirement for hours was set in 1997 by the previous government, but we are enhancing it significantly to deal with the issues in the economy at the present time.

We will be benefiting 400,000 Canadians by extending the EI program by five additional weeks, not two, and by extending training programs for people who do not qualify for EI, those who need enhanced training, by a total of 190,000 people. This is looking after those who are in need at this time.

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### AFGHANISTAN

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there is disturbing news from Afghanistan today that laws passed by the Karzai government will make women even more vulnerable. Afghan women's groups and the UN say these new laws restrict a woman's right to leave her home, permit child marriage and, most disturbingly, legalize rape.

The government claims that protecting Afghan women is at the heart of our combat mission, yet with these laws women have never had it so bad.

Will the government, in no uncertain terms, let President Karzai know that this is totally unacceptable?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if these reports are true, this will create serious problems for Canada. The onus is on the government of Afghanistan to live up to its responsibilities for human rights, absolutely including rights of women. If there is any wavering on this point from the government of Afghanistan, this will create serious problems and be a serious disappointment for us.

• (1500)

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is true, these laws explicitly give men all the rights in child custody, in divorce, in inheritance, but most horrifyingly is the fact that these new laws legalize rape within marriage. At a time when the world is coming together to hammer out a new international consensus on Afghanistan, women's rights in that country are being dealt a death blow.

How can we say that our soldiers are there to protect women's rights when the western-backed leader of this nation pushes through laws like this? Allowing women to be treated like a piece of property, is this what we are fighting for? Is this what our people are dying for?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I

repeat, if these prove to be true, it will create serious problems for the Government of Canada, for the people of Canada. Absolutely, the onus is upon the government of Afghanistan to live up to its human rights responsibilities, absolutely including the rights of women.

If there is any wavering on this point, as we have said, this will create serious difficulties, serious problems for the Government of Canada. We expect this to be addressed. We expect the government of Afghanistan to live up to its responsibilities to protect the rights of people and to respect the rights of women.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is supporting Quebec's aerospace industry in this time of global economic uncertainty. Today Bombardier announced a new \$1.5 billion purchase agreement for its new CSeries plane, in which our government is a partner and investor.

My colleague, the hon. Minister of Industry, was in Montreal this morning to announce new investments in the aerospace industry. I am anxious to hear about the results of his trip to Montreal.

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

This morning in Montreal, I announced a repayable investment of \$250 million to support CAE Inc.'s development of innovative modelling and simulation technologies used in the aerospace and defence sectors. This government recognizes that the Canadian aerospace industry is one of the best in the world and now, with our economic action plan and the leadership of Prime Minister Harper, I have no doubt the industry will be very successful in the future.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. minister knows very well that he must not use the names of other members. This is not permitted in either questions or answers.

The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville now has the floor.

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[English]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government has said that unemployment must never be lucrative. Here is another sample of its success. In Toronto, a car accident forced a veteran to leave his job after 30 years. When he turned to EI, he was denied the maximum benefit and was cut off after only 15 weeks, not enough time to find a job in today's Ontario. He ended up losing his car and his apartment.

When will the government finally make EI fair for this veteran and Ontario workers?

*Point of Order*

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we certainly can empathize for the particular situation the member raises and we are doing whatever we can to enhance the EI program that was instituted under her government.

We have made additions to it to make sure that there are benefits that are available to people by extending the program in a number of ways such as the five week additional benefits and ensuring that those who do not qualify for EI are eligible for retraining.

We have put dollars into that with the provinces as well. We appreciate that there are cases that will be difficult, but overall, we are trying to attend to it to deal with the situation as best we can.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ)** Mr. Speaker, at the Bonn conference on climate change, the EU denounced Canada's lack of leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and failure to use 1990 as the reference year.

Vicki Pollard of Climate Change Strategy and International Negotiation has deplored the fact that there are no greenhouse gas reduction regulations in place.

Can the minister tell us when he will put in place his new greenhouse gas regulations?

• (1505)

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. The Bonn conference is currently underway and these meetings are just one stage before the Copenhagen meeting. The member opposite knows the Canadian Ambassador for Climate Change, Mr. Michael P. Martin. We have had discussions and meetings in Poznan and Mr. Martin is leading a team in Bonn to ensure that Canada is one of the leaders in fighting climate change and introducing a global plan.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I am afraid the time for questions has expired.

I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Abdullahi Ahmed Abdulle, the Minister of Diaspora Affairs for Somalia.

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**POINT OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**The Speaker:** Order please. The hon. member for Bourassa is rising on a point of order arising from Oral Question Period.

I give the floor to the hon. member for Bourassa.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, these past two days, during Oral Question Period, a tendency has been exhibited in this place, especially between the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party.

I find it totally unacceptable, and I say so as a Quebecker, to see members from either side question the legitimacy of members of Parliament. Today, the member for Saint-Lambert, like the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie yesterday, referred to “token Quebeckers”. The member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière also questioned the legitimacy of the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie by referring to him as “the token member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie”.

I find it unacceptable that members of Parliament be described as “token”. Every member of this House serves adequately his or her constituents. Some may be less competent than others, but the legitimacy of members should never be questioned. I therefore ask that, from now on, no reference to token Quebeckers be made in this House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. whip for the Bloc Québécois on this point of order.

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's remarks, but I should point out to him and to the House that such expressions are part of the vernacular in Quebec.

I refer to page 522 of Marleau and Montpetit, under the heading “Rules of Order and Decorum”, and nowhere do I find the expression “token Quebecker” mentioned in the definition of unparliamentary remarks.

I submit this very respectfully.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse, on the same point of order.

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice to the others in this House who feel that personal attacks and slurs from all sides contribute nothing to the debate, particularly in this time of economic crisis when people expect a minimum of decorum and also expect us to debate issues in depth and not just superficially.

I believe that expressions such as “token Quebecker”, “clown” and “stooge” have no place under the circumstances. I would particularly encourage the hon. members for Laurier—Sainte-Marie and Outremont, to focus on the priorities of the people of Quebec and to change the level of their speech in this House accordingly.

[*English*]

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC)** Yes, Mr. Speaker, just an observation, if I may.

*Point of Order*

I understand the challenges that you have as Speaker of maintaining decorum in the House. In this particular instance, it goes well past the issue of politics. It goes to the issue of the very essence of this nation when the people who come to the House, as the Bloc Québécois come here, preface their address to members of our government. I do not have an understanding of French, but my understanding is, as if they were servants of the government. These members of the government are at the service of the people of Canada.

It is deeply regrettable when we get to a point where members of the Bloc Québécois are clearly casting aspersions. I would hope that you would see fit to rule that they stop this practice immediately.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Bourassa wishes to add something on this point of order.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to make it clear. We are not waging an attack against the Bloc Québécois today. The member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière called the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie the “token member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie”.

Today we have to raise the level of our game somewhat. I too am not without fault. But to call people “tokens” even if claiming it is just common parlance, when coupled with the tone and attitude that went along with it, can be construed as an attack against their legitimacy.

It is not a matter of one against the other. All members in this House need to act responsibly.

**The Speaker:** I will take the hon. members' comments concerning this point of order into consideration and I will get back to the House soon with a ruling on it.

[*English*]

The hon. minister of state is rising on another point of order.

**Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct the record. The member for Etobicoke Centre was misrepresenting the facts. The visa requirement that was lifted was done by the citizenship and immigration minister of the Conservative government and the many stakeholders who worked very hard on that issue. It was not due to a press release sent out by that member's office.

[*For continuation of proceedings see Part B.*]

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CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, March 31, 2009**  
**(Part B)**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

[Continuation of proceedings from Part A]

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—CBC RADIO-CANADA

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Before question period, the hon. member for Ahuntsic had the floor. There are five minutes left for questions and comments in response to the speech by the hon. member for Ahuntsic.

The hon. member for Mississauga South.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, earlier today there was quite a good discussion about the unique role of the CBC and Radio-Canada with respect to the services for Canadians and particularly for French Canadians. This unique role to provide these important unifying services to Canadians means that the services have to be across Canada because there are many francophones who live outside of Quebec.

The hypothesis is that in order to provide these services across all of Canada, CBC Radio-Canada has to operate at a disadvantage to other private broadcasters who can thrive on purchasing high profile U.S. programming and therefore attract the advertising revenues. CBC Radio-Canada is at a disadvantage simply because it is meeting its mandate.

The question is whether or not there is a real justification for assisting the CBC, so that programming presently offered does not suffer and may be lost, and to mitigate the chance that the programming, if cut, will never be able to return. I wonder if the member has a comment.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I think it is crucial that the crown corporation be strengthened, not undermined, especially since services must be maintained in both rural and urban areas. I would like to give an example. In Montreal alone, these cuts will result in the loss of 150 jobs and 85 jobs in news. In Quebec City, hours of programming will be cancelled. For instance, about 15 jobs will be lost as a result of the cuts, and the local noon program will disappear altogether. I could go on and on.

We think these cuts are completely unjustified. Instead, this corporation should be strengthened. Furthermore, the \$171 million should be allocated to it, since no one really knows how the government plans to invest the famous \$3 million.

There is no doubt about it. A report was prepared after hearing witnesses and written submissions, all clearly demonstrating that not only should CBC/Radio-Canada funding be maintained, but it should be increased. The Bloc Québécois is talking about \$40 per capita. That funding is much higher in other countries, such as Great Britain and France.

I think it is unfortunate that this motion does not contain any of the report's recommendations. In a way, those recommendations would maintain the funding. I would remind the House that, under the Liberals, unfortunately, the corporation also faced cuts. I want to believe in my colleague's good faith and that of other members of the Liberal Party, but I cannot help but wonder about this motion, although it will no doubt pass.

• (1515)

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague represents a Montreal riding with a much more urban population than that of my central Quebec and Eastern Townships riding, where populations are both urban and rural. Nevertheless, we both represent people for whom CBC/Radio-Canada is their connection to relevant regional news.

The Conservative government's propensity for cutting cultural funding is having a devastating impact on people in general, whether they live in rural or urban communities.

I would like my colleague to comment on the negative consequences of the Conservative government's decision to cut funding, and on the Bloc Québécois' proposals to counter the government's medieval attitude.

**The Speaker:** The member for Ahuntsic with a short answer.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. These cuts will have an impact on the news. I gave a few examples involving Quebec City, but similar examples can be found in other regions of the province where some programs will be cut and others, such as *Le Téléjournal*, will have their broadcast hours reduced.

*Business of Supply*

In Quebec City, the 6 p.m. broadcast of *Le Téléjournal Québec* will be shortened by half an hour from June 29 to September 4, when it will be reinstated in its one-hour format. There will be less broadcasting. The worst part is that we know Quebeckers and francophones living outside of Quebec are among the most avid Radio-Canada listeners, whereas English-speaking Canadians tend to prefer American programs to those on the CBC. Moreover—

**The Speaker:** I apologize for interrupting the hon. member for Ahuntsic, but her time has long since run out.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

[English]

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Newton—North Delta.

I rise today to speak in support of my colleague's motion with respect to the indispensable role of Radio-Canada in providing national, regional and local programming.

As a former journalist with the CBC, I think it is fair to say that I can speak with some knowledge about the corporation and what it offers Canadians. What it offers Canadians is the opportunity to learn from each other, from coast to coast to coast.

CBC has been referred to as the home of Canadian content. It offers services in English and French in five time zones. It provides coverage in eight aboriginal languages. It provides coverage in eight international languages for new and aspiring Canadians, and nine languages via the CBC's worldwide network.

Some people might ask why we are spending taxpayers' money on offering programs in languages other than our two official languages, English and French. It is because that is who we are in this country, a mosaic of people from throughout the world, many of whom chose Canada because of our reputation as a caring people and country.

We care enough to make sure they have every opportunity to learn about their new home, including via the country's public broadcaster. In fact section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms states, "This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians". The recognition in the charter of the multicultural heritage of Canadians speaks to the importance of ensuring there is a forum for all Canadians to express their views no matter what their heritage. The CBC has been helpful in fulfilling this role.

By reducing funding to the CBC, are we not compromising that opportunity? When the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism refers to the CBC as a bloated crown corporation, does he not realize how valuable the CBC is to our multicultural population?

Without the CBC, I think it is fair to say that Canadians born in this country would not have the opportunity to learn about every region of the country. Many do not have the opportunity to travel and they welcome the chance, through the CBC, to discover information about Canada and other Canadians.

One example of a great program hosted by a fellow Newfoundlander, Rex Murphy, is *Cross Country Checkup*, Canada's only national open-line radio program broadcast live across the country every Sunday. Anyone who has listened to *Cross Country Checkup* knows Rex initiates a lively discussion on issues of national importance that Canadians are only too eager to speak about, and to share their thoughts and opinions.

I mention *Cross Country Checkup* because when I see comments from the Prime Minister where he refers to the CBC as a government-sponsored loser, how can he not see the value in programs produced by the CBC where the emphasis is on Canada and Canadians?

In Newfoundland and Labrador, a local radio program called *The Fisheries Broadcast* is the radio program to tune into for information about anything to do with the fishery, a vital industry in the province, one that continues to provide a living for many despite the collapse of the ground fishery. Whenever I get a chance to listen to *The Fisheries Broadcast*, it is obvious just how much those involved in the industry use it and appreciate it.

Since its inception in 1951, *The Fisheries Broadcast* has covered stories about the fishing industry, reflecting the people and the communities that depend on the sea for their livelihood. The program provides basic survival information to fish harvesters, such as marine weather forecasts, meeting announcements and the opening and closing times of the various fisheries. For more than half a century *The Fisheries Broadcast* has been considered a trusted, essential communication service provided by the CBC.

Unfortunately, with the Prime Minister's view of CBC as a government-sponsored loser, programs like *The Fisheries Broadcast* could one day be on the chopping block. That would be a tragedy.

When one reduces spending to a crown corporation, like the CBC in this case, and leaves those in charge no choice but to make decisions taking into account the funding cuts, anything and everything is up for consideration.

In Newfoundland and Labrador invaluable programs such as *Radio Noon* will be cut to one hour, and a program called *Living Newfoundland and Labrador* has been cancelled. *Living Newfoundland and Labrador* has been an interesting program, not only for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, but it has also aired in other Atlantic provinces, just as similar programs from other Atlantic provinces have been carried in Newfoundland and Labrador by the CBC.

Canadians learning about Canadians instead of watching American produced programming is not a bad thing and should be encouraged.

• (1520)

I recall watching an episode of the *Rick Mercer Report* in which he interviewed people in the United States. He asked them questions about Canada. Their lack of knowledge about Canada and Canadians was appalling. Rick Mercer was doing his part to educate Americans about Canada, even if he was taking a shot at them while doing so. By the way, Rick Mercer is a fellow Newfoundlander as well.

*Business of Supply*

The government's latest funding cuts could result in as many as 20 jobs eliminated in Newfoundland and Labrador. While we talk about the loss of programming and the seriousness of these cuts at the CBC, the personal side is something that tends to get lost.

I know of a cameraman who has lost his job, a father of three whose wife is a stay-at-home mom. In this economy, finding a job for either the husband or the wife will not be easy, even if possible. It is possible that this man will end up on EI, trying to provide for a family of five. He will go from one government funded job where he was a productive member of society to trying to make ends meet on EI, a fund administered by the government.

A poll conducted by the *Truro Daily News* in Nova Scotia asked readers if the government should have provided the funding to ensure that the CBC did not have to axe hundreds of full-time jobs across the country. It was clear in the responses that CBC is considered to provide a valuable service. I am sure the response would have been the same throughout the country. Why then, at a time when hundreds of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast are losing their jobs, did the Conservatives decide to play a major role in seeing the loss of hundreds of more jobs? The Minister of Industry is on record asking, "Do we need the CBC, in its current format, when there are so many private broadcasting channels available?" Unfortunately, such a comment shows the absence of any understanding of the mandate of the CBC and the important role it plays in the country.

It should not be seen as one or the other. Both have a role to play and both do it well. The difference is that in many small rural communities throughout the country, the only presence is the CBC. It serves as the voice of Canadians who live in those communities. In my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's, there are over 200 communities. In fact, it takes nine hours to drive from one end of my riding to another. There are eight isolated communities in my riding. Indeed, the CBC is the voice of Canadians. Residents and constituents of my riding listen to the CBC.

The president and chief executive officer of the CBC, Hubert T. Lacroix, said that the corporation brings Canadians programming when, where and how they want it on 29 services and multiple platforms: television, radio, the Internet, satellite radio, digital audio and a recording label. According to Mr. Lacroix, only the CBC provides 21 hours of Canadian programming in regular prime time. In the last four years, CBC increased by 38% its investment in Canadian dramas and comedies. CBC created a made-in-Canada reality segment. CBC commissions more developmental, commercial free, child focused programming than anyone else in Canada. CBC has increased its focus on original current affairs programming, highlighting Canadian issues and international events from a Canadian perspective.

• (1525)

While Mr. Lacroix likes to boast about what the CBC has been doing, and rightfully so, my take on it is that the CBC has been fulfilling its mandate and, if given the opportunity to do so, would continue down that path.

What I thought really interesting in Mr. Lacroix's remarks is that Canadians, through their tax dollars, contribute \$34 a year to the CBC, which is less than a dime a day. In Britain, each person

contributes \$124 a year toward that country's public broadcaster, the BBC. In France, each person contributes \$65 a year and that will rise to \$77 a year under the French government's plan to disallow advertising on its public broadcaster.

How is it that the Conservative government does not have the same appreciation for Canada's public broadcaster? Could it have anything to do with the Prime Minister's remarks on March 12 of this year, just a little over two weeks ago, when he said:

Never forget—you would forget this sometimes listening to the CBC—that it was Conservatives that created our federation, one of the most lasting political democratic arrangements in history.

Could the decision to let our national broadcaster die a death of a thousand cuts stem from the Prime Minister's dissatisfaction over some remarks made by some announcer, journalist or program producer? Certainly that cannot be the case. Canadians support the CBC and so should the Conservative government.

• (1530)

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I realize that the member is new to this House, so perhaps she has not had an opportunity to read the Broadcasting Act. She would realize, if she took the time to do so, that the CBC is totally independent of this House, of the Prime Minister and of the government of the day, according to the terms laid out in the Broadcasting Act. Perhaps with a lack of information, I find her comments quite regrettable.

I would like to engage her in a debate about her assertion, which is a totally false assertion. She said that we, the government, are reducing the funding to the CBC. In fact, if she were to do a modicum of research, she would come to the realization that in fact our government has increased the funding to the CBC over the last four budgets continuously to the tune of \$100 million.

If she is looking for a government that wanted to cut the CBC, it would be her government under Jean Chrétien and finance minister Paul Martin that removed between \$400 million and \$500 million from the funding envelope for the CBC. This created a major crisis in the CBC, caused the unfortunate loss of 4,000 jobs and the resignation of the president of the CBC at the time.

I would like to give the member the opportunity either to do some research or, at the very least, to correct the record and admit that her comment that this government is reducing funding to the CBC is without any basis of fact whatsoever.

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Mr. Speaker, clearly, the member is, as we would say, out to lunch, in terms of the question itself and the information that he is providing here in the House of Commons to the public via the airwaves.

We clearly know, and the CBC has admitted this, that the government did not provide the bridge funding as was requested by the CBC. All it was asking for was funding to allow it to continue its mandate.

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As I said, I am very familiar with the mandate of the CBC, being a former employee of the corporation. The CBC wants to do what it was mandated to do. Unfortunately, the government is not allowing the CBC to do that, whether it is through not providing the bridge funding or not continuing with the budget it already has, which is in fact being cut. It was cut the last two years by the Conservative government. This year it is being cut by \$62 million. If the hon. member does not believe that, all he has to do is look at the CBC's own financial statements.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her obvious support for the CBC. I share her enthusiasm.

In the 1990s when the Liberals were slicing and dicing the CBC, I was living in the Yukon and relying immeasurably upon the CBC to inform me on what was happening in the rest of the country.

I have had the opportunity of living across the country and overseas and in all circumstances I have appreciated being able to find out what is going on in Canada through the CBC.

I find it a bit incredulous that the member's party supported a budget that gave money to multinational corporations to test out pollution control technologies, which has obviously left the budget shortchanged, and yet she is now complaining there is not enough money for the CBC. I wonder if she could please explain her rationale.

**Ms. Judy Foote:** Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that one precludes the other. It is important for all of us to recognize the importance of the CBC to Canadians and to the country. I do not think we need to talk about doing one and not the other in terms of the environment. It is important for us to recognize that we need to take care of the environment and, at the same time, take care of something as important to all of us as the CBC.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's on her passion toward the CBC.

This past weekend Vancouver had the honour of hosting the Juno awards, the country's largest celebration of homegrown music. The weekend was a fantastic success, in the welcoming spirit of the west coast in hosting the rest of the country, in the much needed economic activity that greatly benefited local businesses, and most important, in the pride that we have for our country's finest musicians who serve as global ambassadors for Canada.

Yesterday in the *Vancouver Sun* there was a fascinating article about how our country is a pioneer in the protection of cultural sovereignty. We continue to promote Canadian culture in spite of being next to the world's largest economy, and our artists continue to thrive.

In 2005, UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The purpose behind such an initiative was described as follows:

For the first time in modern history, the right of states to adopt policies to protect and promote their cultural expressions was affirmed in an international legal instrument.

Canada was instrumental in putting this convention together and, in spite of heavy opposition from the United States, it passed overwhelmingly with a vote of 148 to 2.

Since that time, 96 countries have ratified the agreement, and the concepts of cultural protection and promotion have become a worldwide phenomenon.

Unfortunately, we no longer have a Canadian government that embraces these principles. The first sign of this was during the last election when the Prime Minister stood by his decision to cut \$45 million from cultural funding. Now this trend is continuing with the government's assault on the CBC. Before we get into what these cuts mean to Canada's unique cultural identity, let me frame this debate properly.

The Prime Minister and the Conservative Party have spent over a decade attacking CBC at its core. They do not believe that the government should provide any funding for a public broadcaster. This has been a long-standing position and tough economic times are simply an excuse for the real reasons behind the government's refusal to provide bridge funding. Misinformation is what the government is using to confuse the public.

The government claims that it has increased funding to CBC Radio-Canada every year. The truth is that an examination of both CBC Radio-Canada's annual reports and the main estimates determine that the government has cut funding since the Conservatives took office.

They claim that administrative cuts need to be made to trim the fat from the CBC. The truth is that the refusal of bridge funding is eliminating—let me repeat that word—eliminating original Canadian produced programming.

They claim that they care about Quebec and our bilingual identity. The truth is this funding shortfall hits directly at the core of French programming, with more than half the cuts to staff coming from the CBC's francophone operations.

Let us be clear, the CBC is not asking for a handout. Management has clearly indicated that it understands that in tough economic times “everyone must tighten their belts”.

• (1535)

An increased subsidy to the annual appropriation has not been asked for. What we are talking about is a request for a loan, a loan that CBC as a crown corporation cannot access from the private sector.

Let the government begin to be honest about its intentions. The CBC's troubles provided a perfect means to capitalize on a network that the Prime Minister has referred to as a “government sponsored loser”. Therefore, the government is happy to see the CBC fall to its knees and in the process that original Canadian content, quality television and radio, is being lost.

The government is not targeting salaries or bonuses or compensation packages as is being done with some of the major auto manufacturers. It is intent on destroying Canadian programming, period.

With all the money that is being spent to invigorate the economy, with all the money that is being racked up in the largest deficit seen in a generation, and with all the money that the government has squandered because of poor economic decisions, a loan to the CBC was entirely possible and, more important, a loan to the CBC was entirely necessary if, of course, one believes in the protection of our cultural identity.

What is clear, both in terms of this debate about the CBC and the past cuts to cultural funding that I mentioned earlier, the Canadian identity is not important to the Prime Minister unless it is a commodity to be bought and sold like any other product.

Here is the ironic part about all of this. The decision not to provide bridge funding is going to cut at the heart of television shows that have become huge exports across the world for the CBC.

Let us take the program *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, which is in international syndication in France, Switzerland, several franco-phone-speaking African nations, Israel, Dubai, Finland, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Here is an example of a Canadian international success story that has been cut because of the government's hidden agenda when it comes to our cultural identity.

To conclude, I encourage the government to reconsider its decision about the CBC, which is a pillar of our cultural identity. However, much more than that, I encourage the minister and the Prime Minister to come clean about their intentions and at least let Canadians know their true motivations for hanging the CBC out to dry.

•(1540)

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are in difficult economic times. The news media, television and radio are all having difficult moments. The auto industry alone is not advertising on television stations. The CBC is having difficulty. The private news stations are having difficulty as well. Small stations are being closed all across this country. Jobs are being lost and programs are being rearranged, whether it is public or private.

My question to the member is this. When he talks about providing specific assistance to the CBC, should the government provide funding to all public and private television stations?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the hon. member some information that might be helpful.

Let us be clear about the landscape of the broadcasting industry. These commercial regulations provide private broadcasters with the right to substitute U.S. content, and they bring between \$270 million to \$330 million. Provincial and federal government subsidies, such as tax credits, and the Canadian Television Fund add another \$165 million in cash supports to private broadcasters.

We all know our media industry could not exist without the subsidy. Private companies compete for public money and the CBC competes for advertising dollars. The difference is that the CBC has a mandate to tell Canadian stories and spending on Canadian programming is more than all the private broadcasters combined.

CBC television is being viewed by 30% more Canadians today than just three years ago, so it has the number one news and

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information website in Canada. I can tell members that because of the subsidies and the funding to the CBC—

•(1545)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for his comments.

[*Translation*]

Today, we heard the Conservatives talk about CBC/Radio-Canada, and we saw just how deep their cultural cuts went. They cut some 15 cultural programs. Now they are refusing to lift a finger to help our national public broadcaster.

My question is simple: does my colleague get the sense that the government is trying to use the crisis as an excuse to get rid of CBC/Radio-Canada?

We know what the government thinks of our national public broadcaster, but does my colleague get the feeling that the government is trying to use the current economic crisis as a pretext for slashing the corporation's funding?

[*English*]

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. I totally agree with him. In fact, if we look at the last decade, government ministers on the frontbench and the Prime Minister have always tried to diminish the CBC's ability to broadcast.

In my riding of Newton—North Delta, there are many francophone Canadians who want to listen to the CBC. This has always been the government's intention and that is what it is doing right now, taking advantage of this economic downturn to put blame on the CBC.

**Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the hon. member's comments but we just simply cannot make a financial argument in this case. It is quite clear, from the estimates and from the CBC's appropriations that funding has gone up. It has gone up since the last Liberal government. It was \$997 million and went to \$1.043 billion last year, and \$1.115 billion this year.

However, the point I want to make quickly was that the revenues of all of the stations, as the member for Dufferin—Caledon has said, and all the networks are suffering from economic difficulty because of reduced ad revenues particularly. The member simply missed the point here financially. If ad revenues have gone down for everybody, the CBC's ad revenue is a very small part of its budget—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I will allow a very brief response from the hon. member for Newton—North Delta, then we will have to move on.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the estimates and the CBC's financial reports, it is very clear that the funding from the government has gone down year after year.

• (1550)

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to inform the House that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Saint Boniface.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier for proposing the motion today because it allows me to clear up some of the misunderstandings he has propagated with regard to the operational structure of the CBC. While seemingly unimportant to most, an argument based on faulty fundamentals is certainly of no use to the House.

In recent weeks the hon. member has made a number of statements that reveal just how far off-base he is with his assumptions around many of his supposed facts, and just how little he knows about the governance of the CBC and its operations. Perhaps he is doing a political show.

If the hon. member truly believed in the motion, it makes one wonder just why he voted in favour of the government's economic action plan, not once, not twice, but three times in the House. The economic action plan clearly outlined what the government's financial plan was for the CBC. Again, I remind the House that the hon. member voted not once but three times in favour of that economic action plan.

That being said, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide much needed clarification and perspective on this issue for the hon. member and all Canadians.

It would be important to begin with the briefest of history lessons, so I will begin by quickly reminding the hon. members opposite of the origins of CBC Radio-Canada, its governance, and the importance of autonomy from government interference, which is what this particular motion seeks to do.

CBC Radio-Canada was created in 1936 and replaced the Canadian Broadcast Commission, which had become far too vulnerable to interference and meddling by political players. Because of the political influence, the public began to lose faith and confidence in the nation's public broadcaster.

However, unlike Liberal leaders who followed him, Prime Minister Mackenzie King took the opportunity to restore confidence in national institutions cherished by Canadians. He chose to fix the problem and granted the new public broadcaster with a greater level of autonomy from government. That was in 1936. Since 1936 the Broadcasting Act has been amended a number of times, but no amendment has ever attempted to disregard that autonomy, as the hon. member's motion would have us do today.

The Liberals are certainly not the party of a strong, independent and free national broadcaster, as they would have us all believe. In fact, history indicates just the opposite. It was the Liberal Party that promised increased stable and long-term funding for the CBC in 1993, only to start slashing the budget in 1994. The year 1997 saw the same promises made and the same ends met. Budgets were cut to the tune of \$440 million, while at the same time certain individuals

in the Liberal Party received similar amounts of money by something most Canadians, unfortunately, remember as the sponsorship program. The victims of that were the more than 4,000 Canadians who lost their jobs at the CBC under the previous Liberal government. That is the real legacy of the Liberal Party.

A Conservative government in 1991 further expanded the corporation's independence from government and allowed the leadership of the CBC to make its own decisions with regard to programming and journalistic activities, and freed the CBC from the interference of former Prime Minister Trudeau, who infamously threatened to put the key in the door of the CBC, a threat that would obviously have put thousands out of work.

Another Conservative government increased funding to arts and culture to record levels in the country, and increased support to the CBC to the tune of \$1.1 billion a year, a level that has never before been seen. This Conservative government has made all those changes.

The amazing thing is that a Conservative government always has to come to the aid of the CBC in tough times. Yet, the hon. member claims that Conservatives are destroying the CBC. I think Canadians are smart enough to know the real story when they hear the facts, which is why I am very pleased the hon. member raised this motion today.

The government will not dictate business practices of the CBC, as the hon. member would have us do with the motion. Supporting the motion today would certainly be the first step in the destruction of the CBC.

I am sure, in worldly travels of the Liberal leader, he has come across state controlled broadcasters and he must know the result of such control. We cannot and we will not dictate what the corporation should run, which programs it can run and when or second guess the decisions that it must make. The results would be catastrophic and I hope the Liberal leader will remember this when it comes time to vote on this motion tonight.

What the member opposite fails to understand is that to now intervene in the CBC's business would reverse over 73 years of autonomy from the government, an autonomy that is paramount for a public broadcaster in a free and democratic society.

The fact that the country is facing an economic downturn is not news today. The downturn was not created by this government but it is one that this government, with the help of Canadians, including our business leaders, will conquer together. Each and every business in this country needs to make difficult decisions, as does each and every family. The CBC is not alone in this. Every media outlet, every business and every family are now making the difficult decisions that are required during these difficult times.

The leadership of the CBC, by virtue of being a corporation funded by taxpayers, is not immune from these difficult business decisions. It has taken the bull by the horns and has faced its challenges head on. That is why it is good at what it does. To have my colleagues second guess it here today must be truly insulting to the management of the CBC.

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It is the responsibility of this government to ensure that the CBC and, in fact, all crown corporations are appointed with people, not on the basis of who they know but on the basis of what they know. It is the job of the government to ensure that the leadership of the CBC is stacked with people who have the proper skills and experience required to run a business because that is what the CBC ultimately is.

The skills, experience and competence of the corporation's current CEO, Hubert Lacroix, his chairman, Timothy Casgrain, and the entire board is undeniable. The board is well-balanced and includes individuals with the vast knowledge and experience in all aspects of business. They will weather this storm and will be stronger for the tough decisions they are making.

The CEO and board of directors deserve the support of the House. We must have faith in their abilities to make the right decisions and use what they have been given wisely. Although we may not be pleased with program choices or a news report, we do not interfere and we must not interfere.

When the decisions of the board get more difficult to make, as in this case, when employees are let go or programming is scaled back, governmental interference is equally inappropriate. On this side of the House, we do have faith in the leadership of the CBC. We know it is best able to make the tough decisions that these difficult times require. Without a doubt, its job would be easier if all the decisions were simple. Reality, however, dictates that they are not, not for Hubert Lacroix and not for any Canadian.

If the hon. member lacks the faith in the leadership, then he should move that motion. I am sure the House would resoundingly defeat it. What he should not do is sit in the House and play backseat driver in the decision making process of the CBC.

The sponsor of this motion supported the budget that allocated record levels of funding to the CBC and now that is not enough for him. He now wants to run the show but it does not work that way. During these times, how can he possibly look his constituents in the eye and not blush? How can he support the budget that outlines funding for the CBC one day and the next day complain against it?

Everyone in the House supports the CBC. However, the senior management of the CBC has said that the end sought in the approval of this motion will not be met with or without the bridge financing requested here today. As such, I would propose the following amendment. I move that all words following "throughout Canada" be deleted so that the motion reads as follows, "That this House recognizes the indispensable role of CBC-Radio Canada in providing national, regional and local programming, including news coverage and services to linguistic minorities throughout Canada".

• (1600)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Pursuant to the Standing Orders, the hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham will need the consent of the mover of the original motion in order to move the amendment. Does the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier grant consent for the amendment?

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, let me think about it. No.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Mr. Speaker, would it be in order to defer the amendment until such time that we could have a recorded vote on the amendment?

**The Deputy Speaker:** No. In order for the amendment to even be moved, there needs to be consent by the mover of the original motion. As the House has heard, that consent has not been granted.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is a French expression to describe my colleague's speech: he is out in the field. He is way out in left field. He is a member of a government that has made drastic cuts to culture. The Conservatives cancelled the PromArt and Trade Routes programs and at least a dozen others. They never lifted a finger, not even once, to help the CBC. They say they have increased its budget but that is completely false. They have not given one cent more. The only increase was the 1.5% allocated by Treasury Board. Therefore, their claim is completely false. Someone mentioned an additional \$60 million, which is also not true.

We know that the members of this government have said, over and over for the past 10 years, that they want to abolish the CBC. I ask them today, is this a brazen attempt to use the current economic crisis as a pretext for doing what they have always wanted to do, that is, to axe the corporation?

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, I find the comments of the hon. member to be quite remarkable. It was this government that increased funding to the CBC to the highest level. Guess what? It was that member who voted not once, not twice but three times in favour of our economic action plan, which increased funding to the CBC to the highest level in Canadian history.

The member talks about one red cent. Let us talk about the red book of 1993 where the Liberals said that they would provide stable funding. What did they do? They cut \$440 million. Why did they cut \$440 million? They wanted to redirect that money to their friends so they could do something called the sponsorship program. It had nothing to do with CBC then, did it?

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I find it highly ironic and rather hard to swallow that the very government that is providing backseat driving to multinational corporations on the testing of pollution control technology when the Government of Canada has endorsed the polluter pays principle is now criticizing the party that put forward the motion that we should be allowing the CBC to compete fairly. We need a little more consistency in the proposals put forward by that party. If we are not going to be backseat drivers on one, why are we backseat drivers on others who, frankly, do not need taxpayer subsidization?

*Business of Supply*

First we had the cuts to local radio and television and now it has come to my attention that the Conservative government will deliver a second blow to Canadian content that Canadians enjoy. It has been brought to my attention that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has killed the Canadian television fund and rolled it into the Canadian media fund, thereby giving preferential treatment to large media companies and cable companies over small Canadian film producers. He is giving preference to the selfsame companies who spend more—

• (1605)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I will need to cut off the hon. member there to allow enough time for a response.

The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham.

**Mr. Paul Calandra:** Mr. Speaker, I will say this about the members of the NDP. A least there is some consistency in what they are saying, unlike our friends in the Liberal Party who complain on a daily basis in the House about certain things that they just voted in favour of.

I will remind the hon. member that we did provide \$1.1 billion of funding to the CBC, a record level. A great majority of the House voted in favour of that. Our minister has been changing the way in which we provide funding to all levels of cultural institutions. However, we are providing record levels across the board, levels that have never been seen before in this country.

In my riding, the changes have been welcome. However, we need to look at two things. We need to look at responsibility to Canadians. We have a responsibility, as the government, to ensure the funds that all Canadian taxpayers send to us are treated with the respect they are being sent to us with, which why we put in \$1.1 billion and why we expect all hon. members to respect the independent decisions made by the CBC. We appreciate the work being done by the CBC in these difficult times.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must say that, in spite of these difficult economic times, I am pleased to learn that CBC/Radio-Canada intends to maintain the priorities that are at the heart of its mandate, especially with regard to services in French.

This was highlighted yesterday once again by the CRTC in its report on French- and English-language broadcasting services in English and French linguistic minority communities. The CRTC quotes the Fédération culturelle canadienne française and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, both of which pointed out the important role played by regional Radio-Canada stations in official language minority communities. Many communities depend on Radio-Canada as the sole source of regional news in the minority language—

I am therefore reassured that CBC/ Radio-Canada will remain anchored in the regions, does not intend to close regional stations and, more importantly, intends to continue to honour its conditions of licence. In other words, I am reassured that CBC/Radio-Canada intends to take the necessary steps to enable it to get through this current difficult economic crisis, while concentrating on its essential

activities as provided in its conditions of licence and its mandate under the Broadcasting Act.

In this regard, CBC/Radio-Canada is a key instrument in the Canadian broadcasting toolbox, and the steps it plans to take should mean it will retain that role. Among other things, CBC/Radio-Canada intends to reduce the number of positions affected by offering its employees a voluntary departure incentive plan and is working closely with its unions to find other solution options.

I am also especially proud of the fact that, despite the current extremely difficult economic climate, this government has confirmed that CBC/Radio-Canada will receive all its appropriations, including the special \$60 million envelope for programming initiatives. The government is prepared to work with the corporation to enable it to sell \$125 million worth of assets. The government's willingness to cooperate was illustrated publicly by Hubert Lacroix, the president and CEO of the corporation, in a speech to the metropolitan Montreal chamber of commerce, when she said she respected and got along well with the Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC).

The current economic and financial crisis, like structural changes in the broadcasting industry in Canada and around the world, obliges broadcasters to think strategically.

For CBC/Radio-Canada, it means looking at the role and nature of public broadcasting in Canada in the light of its mandate under the Broadcasting Act.

This government is reassured by the fact that CBC/Radio-Canada, despite the economic crisis, still considers it its mission to develop an identity and a community and intends to remain anchored in each of the country's regions, especially since its presence in the regions helps reduce the sense of isolation small communities may feel.

This government is also reassured by the fact that CBC/Radio-Canada intends to continue its vital role within the Canadian broadcasting system.

Today, as our national public broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada provides radio and television services offering a very broad range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains, in accordance with the Broadcasting Act.

This programming is distinctively Canadian and reflects Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences. It actively contributes to the flow of cultural expression, is offered in English and in French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, and is of equivalent quality in English and French.

The programming contributes to shared national consciousness and identity. It is made available throughout Canada and reflects the multicultural and multiracial nature of our country.

I think it is important to say as well that Radio-Canada is no longer merely a French-language broadcaster. It distributes its programming on several different platforms through a variety of services.



Radio-Canada television includes eight local, general-interest TV stations that broadcast live to 99% of French-speaking Canadians. On the radio, the Première Chaîne reaches 98% of French-speaking Canadians.

•(1610)

The Espace musique network has 19 local stations that reach 91% of Canadian francophones.

When it comes to analogue specialty networks, Radio-Canada operates the Réseau de l'information, which broadcasts news continuously in French, ARTV, a television network that broadcasts French-language arts and culture programming, and TV5 Monde, an international television consortium that offers a selection of news and general-interest programs produced in French from Canada, including Quebec, France, Belgium, Switzerland and francophone Africa.

Radio-Canada also provides other radio and new media services such as radio-canada.ca and bandeapart.fm, as well as Radio-Canada Nord, a network that broadcasts in northern Canada in French and aboriginal languages. The corporation is also a 40% partner in Sirius Radio Satellite Canada, a service providing 120 satellite radio stations, including some in French. There is also Radio Canada International, an international radio service that produces programs in several different languages, including French, for an international audience.

I am confident that the corporation has the ability to manage this portfolio of services in a responsible, professional way under the current difficult circumstances. I am also confident that it will be able to adapt to the profound changes in the broadcasting industry in Canada and to the economic and financial crisis, which affects us all, by focusing on its long-term strategy and on fulfilling its mandate under the Broadcasting Act.

I believe that an investment of more than \$1.1 billion a year will enable it to fulfill its mandate.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been negotiations between the parties and I believe you will find consent for the following motion. I move:

Notwithstanding Standing Order 93(1)(b), that the recorded division requested on Bill C-311, currently to take place immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business on Wednesday, April 1, 2009, instead take place at the conclusion of question period earlier that day.

•(1615)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

#### Business of Supply

[Translation]

#### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION — CBC/RADIO-CANADA

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Continuing with questions and comments. The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague from Saint-Boniface to explain the speech she just gave. She is relatively new to the House of Commons, and she is getting along very well, but the speech she gave was undoubtedly prepared by the Department of Canadian Heritage. I would like to know what she will tell her constituents in Saint-Boniface who want local news. The local news from Winnipeg has been eliminated, and from now on the news will likely come from Toronto. Programming on the French network may well come from Montreal.

I would also like our colleague to explain CBC/Radio-Canada's involvement in TV5. The speech that the department prepared for her implies that TV5 is owned by the corporation, which is not true. I would like her to explain, based on the information she has from the Department of Canadian Heritage, how CBC/Radio-Canada is involved in TV5.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the opposition member for his question. I want to assure everyone that I will work very hard for my constituents in Saint-Boniface, as I always do. I agree completely that the situation facing the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is very important to Saint-Boniface.

But I am surprised that the member is asking questions about this when it was the Liberals who slashed funding for CBC/Radio-Canada. They are the ones who really axed that funding.

TV5 Monde is an international consortium that offers a choice of news and general interest television programs in French from Canada—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I must interrupt the hon. member in order to allow other questions and comments.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Saint-Boniface says the Liberals are the ones who made the cuts and the Conservatives recognize those cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada. Would it not therefore be time, during this economic crisis, to sit down and get something done, with an immediate allocation of funds to save the Radio-Canada jobs and its programming?

Does she take pride in knowing that in Windsor, Ontario, for example, there will now be only three people instead of nine? This is a francophone minority region in southern Ontario. We should take pride in the fact that there is a radio station there, with news and other French programming. This region is about to lose all the Radio-Canada noon programming, and will no longer have access to RDI. How can she explain that? Only by referring to the cuts made by the Liberals?

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the opposition for his question. It is such a sad event for anyone to lose his or her job. We have a great deal of sympathy for those workers.

*Business of Supply*

What should the government do about the cuts referred to by my colleague? I will quote what André Pratte said in *La Presse* on March 29. It is a good explanation of what our government has done.

If the CBC has hit a dead end today, it's not because the Conservatives were cheap, but because of a decline in advertising revenue as a result of the recession. In addition, the public broadcaster is facing the same structural problems that other general interest broadcasters are experiencing: costs are increasing, while revenue is being dispersed among a whole variety of new media.

Some say that the Government of Canada should simply give more money to the CBC. However, who believes there is tight management in that corporation? If the government has to support them, then there must also be assurance—

• (1620)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Once again, I must interrupt the member. I am sorry, but it is time for another speech.

The member for Hull—Aylmer.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver Centre.

I rise today to condemn how CBC/Radio-Canada is being treated. The corporation plays a vital role through its national, regional and local broadcasts. I am thinking here of news coverage and services for linguistic minorities throughout the country.

Access to information has become more and more restricted since the Conservatives came to power. The government's desire to control the media has taken many forms, the latest being its cuts to funding for CBC/Radio-Canada. Not that long ago, in 1995, the current Prime Minister, who was a member of this House, said:

Then we have the CBC which is mortgaged to the hilt and costs over \$1 billion a year. The major reason two are winners and one is a loser is based on incentives or lack of them...

Reform policy would place the government sponsored loser in a situation where subsidies are weaned away and the future of the company is based on consumer satisfaction.

Last week, the Prime Minister made good on his promise and refused to provide CBC/Radio-Canada with the bridge financing it so badly needed, which would have enabled the corporation to maintain 2008 staffing and service levels. He set in motion the dismantling of CBC/Radio-Canada, as he had said he would do in 1995.

Members will recall that the current Minister of International Trade stated in 2000 that “The Liberals decided to throw millions and even billions in non-priority areas, while ignoring vital ones. For example, the CBC will receive \$60 million.”

For his part, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism said that the cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada were not deep enough and condemned the fact that “There are subsidies to bloated crown corporations like the \$1 billion annual subsidy to the CBC.”

The previous Minister of Canadian Heritage promised extensive consultations on CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate. We are still waiting for that to happen. The current Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages is improvising. He told the members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that he was open to allowing CBC/Radio-Canada to run radio ads in order to supplement its funding.

The Minister does not understand broadcasting. If he were not constantly trying to improvise, he would know that the Canadian public does not want advertising when it is listening to programming on public radio.

Today, because of the incompetence or bad faith of the Conservatives in dealing with the CBC, the CBC has been seriously undermined.

This situation could have been avoided. The president and CEO, Hubert T. Lacroix, stated, “We have been in constant discussions with the government since the beginning of January about our financial situation.” To no avail.

The interim funding would certainly not have solved all the problems, but Mr. Lacroix said that with this funding, the corporation would have been able to manage them better and minimize them.

Instead of helping the CBC weather the storm, the Conservatives are using this situation to undermine it. In fact, the CBC was not asking the government for more money, simply for more flexibility. We know that the CBC cannot go to the bank to borrow money as a majority of Canadians and businesses can do. Its status as a crown corporation prevents it from taking out bank loans. It had therefore asked the government to either give it permission to borrow or provide some bridge financing. This government, which is trying to get rid of the CBC, said no.

The media everywhere in Canada are having financing problems because of the decline in advertising revenue. The CBC is no exception. But what is the government doing to help it? Nothing! This conduct is not just unacceptable, it is unreasonable.

What are the consequences of this sombre decision? First, the head of the CBC will be forced to lay off more than 800 people. And that would just be the beginning. These cuts would amount to 10% of the corporation's workforce.

• (1625)

As well, the earnings shortfall has put an end to the traditional way of dividing funding between the two networks: one third to the French-language network and two thirds to the English-language network. The cuts to the French-language network represent nearly half of the total jobs eliminated. That is shameful!

What do these layoffs mean? There are two very significant consequences. First, the government is demonstrating how little concern it has for Canada's regions. The cuts will necessarily mean that regional newscasts in Quebec will disappear and news operations will be centralized in Montreal. How will the regions be represented? How will it be possible to provide coverage of the regions with so little air time? The Conservatives are quite simply abandoning the regions to their own devices. They no longer count, in the Conservatives' game plan. Quebeckers have long memories: after all, our motto says *Je me souviens*.

In the Outaouais, the television newscast *Téléjournal du midi* will disappear. Our region will not escape the cuts; this excellent noon-hour newscast, hosted by Nathalie Tremblay, will be eliminated. That amounts to abandoning the people living in the Outaouais region—they will now be served by Montreal. While I respect the people who live in our metropolis, the problems we have in the regions are very different in their nature and scope. The unique character of the regions, with which their people identify, is gradually disappearing, being smothered by Canada's large urban centres and by American broadcasting as well.

A second consequence, no less important, is the abandonment of the minority communities. In our region, the national capital region, along with the *Téléjournal du midi*, the radio program *L'Ontario aujourd'hui* will disappear. The Franco-Ontarian community has reacted strongly to these cuts. This is what it had to say, according to the daily *Le Droit*.

Nicolas Séguin, president of ACFO, the Association canadienne française de l'Ontario, Ottawa region, said, "What I find sad is that, even before these cuts, we had to 'hog the blankets' to get local news. Not only are they not listening to us, they are going to reduce local content".

Claudette Boyer, general manager of the ACFO in Ottawa, "It's terrible. I will be getting my news from Montreal. That is of no interest to me".

Nathalie Ladouceur, president of the ACFO in Prescott-Russell, "We are fighting for our language and our cultural heritage. It's discouraging, not just for Franco-Ontarians, but for francophiles as well. It's another demonstration that we have to be constantly fighting".

Ms. Lise Routhier-Boudreau, president of the FCFA, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, said, "We absolutely need to find solutions so that the crown corporation is no longer forced to make these kinds of cuts".

Those are the reactions of francophone leaders outside Quebec. These organizations are feeling abandoned by their government. They are ignored, except when election time rolls around. Newscasts are being cut in regions like Moncton, where there is a loyal Radio-Canada audience. Spot the error!

Another consequence of this scandalous decision by the Conservatives is that the CBC is being forced to sell assets valued at some \$125 million. One wonders what the logic of this is. Is it not better to sell real property when demand is high and supply low? The present economic situation is certainly not ideal.

Once the assets are sold, the CBC will then have to pay rent, which will only increase its expenses. This sale of assets seems to me a last-ditch attempt to bail out the government in the short term. What will be the long-term consequences of this decision? Did the government even consider this in its haste to butcher the CBC, or was this the intended effect all along?

The mission of the CBC is to be a public broadcaster providing radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains. Its programming should, and here I quote two obligations, first of all, "reflect

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Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions".

And second, "be in English and French, reflecting the different needs and circumstances of each official language community, including the particular needs and circumstances of English and French linguistic minorities".

• (1630)

It is clear that in abandoning the regions and the minority communities this Conservative government has failed to meet its responsibilities. The Quebec minister of culture, communications and the status of women has said that, without wishing to interfere in this matter of federal jurisdiction, she thinks that one can only cut so far into the bone. She is right: the government is underfunding the CBC, allocating it only \$34 per citizen per year, compared with France where the figure is \$77.

As you seem to want to interrupt me, Mr. Speaker, I deduce that my time is up.

• (1635)

[English]

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, could the member show me the place in the budget or in the estimates where the government has cut funding to the CBC?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Mr. Speaker, I would point out that I did not say that the government was cutting CBC/Radio-Canada funding. I did not use those words. The government refused to grant the corporation permission to borrow money, as any other Canadian company or individual can do. The government had another option. It could have made funding available to CBC/Radio-Canada. I clearly explained that the government refused both options.

Obviously, this is a difficult situation, since advertising revenues are decreasing because of the financial crisis, so the crown corporation has been forced to make cuts in programming and human resources. However, the only thing the government has been doing for a number of years is continuing to follow Treasury Board regulations by adding 1.5% a year, but the government has not increased funding any more than that.

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and congratulate him on his excellent speech. We can see that he is very knowledgeable on the issue. We can also see that he attaches a great deal of importance to news in the regions, to the CBC's presence in the regions, and to linguistic duality, that is, the need for English and French television in Canada, unlike the government, which has slashed in almost every area of culture.

As I said a little earlier, one might think that the Conservatives are attacking culture in general and the CBC in particular. Although they did not cut funding directly, they refused the corporation's request for financial assistance in the form of a loan or bridge financing. They completely slammed the door. And as a result, 800 jobs will be lost and some of its assets will have to be sold. Based on what the Conservatives have said over the years, clearly, they have always wanted to get rid of the CBC.

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Would my colleague agree that the Conservative government is trying to do indirectly what it cannot do directly, that is, completely eliminate the CBC?

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

The Conservatives are trying to convince the public that they have maintained and increased funding to CBC/Radio-Canada. That is false, absolutely false. In 2006-07, the Conservatives reduced allocations to the corporation by \$32 million, despite a budget surplus of \$13 billion. And who had left them that surplus? The Liberal government. That is the Conservative rhetoric.

We have been accused of making major cuts in 1995. Let us keep this in mind, however: why was the Liberal government obliged to make cuts? Because the Conservative government had shown itself to be incapable of managing this country properly. When the Liberals took over, we found what a terrible mess the Conservatives had left us with, and as good administrators of Canada, were forced to take unavoidable and costly remedial action.

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I find the points raised by my colleague to be excellent.

I would like him to tell me whether he does not find the situation a bit out of kilter. At a certain point in time, during an economic crisis, the government is absolutely bent on creating jobs. It does so via the infrastructure and all kinds of other programs, but it cuts jobs at CBC/Radio-Canada, which could also have been part of the job creation strategy. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on this roundabout way of destroying the corporation.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very pertinent question.

The government needs to start coming up with some answers. I have just asked my colleague from Saint-Boniface what explanation she will give francophones outside Quebec, such as the ones in the Winnipeg area, for their local news being cut. How can this government tell us on the one hand that it is doing all it can to create employment in order to avoid lay-offs, while on the other hand it is forcing the lay-off of 800 people? How can the government claim that the corporation will fulfill its mandate, when it is slashing the corporation budget and thereby forcing it to cut services to regions and language minorities? What answer can the government give to that?

• (1640)

[*English*]

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am standing here today to support, with some passion and vehemence, the opposition motion which is asking some simple things.

It is asking the government to recognize the indispensable nature of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio-Canada. It is asking the government to recognize the essential mandate of the public broadcaster and to give it the bridge financing it needs to continue its work until, as we have heard everyone here say today, advertising revenues return to normal and the CBC can go back to boosting its own coffers through advertising.

Everyone has talked about the loss of \$171 million in 2009-10 by the CBC. This is spread 50:50 between the CBC and Radio-Canada.

There is a loss of 800 jobs which is also going to be shared almost equally between the CBC and Radio-Canada.

The CBC, as a result, is going to have to cut services and programs. It is going to scale back regional radio and television programming, all of which is part of its mandate. It is going to have to decrease current affairs, drama, music, special events, all of which is part of its mandate. This is happening just at the time when the CBC is in fact increasing its viewership and its listenership over its main competitors in private television and private radio.

The point is this, and it is ironic, that in February 2008 an all-party committee, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, made some very important recommendations which the government actually refused to even read or listen to.

The all-party committee stated that there was overwhelming support for the CBC as a national broadcaster across this country. I was on the committee when we travelled across the country and there was overwhelming support for the CBC.

As a result of that support and the things that we heard, the committee recommended some very important things. It recommended an increase of money for regional programming which is now having to be cut. It recommended an increase in variety, drama, news and public affairs, all of which is now going to have to be cut. It recommended an increase in programming for official language minority groups, all of which is going to have to be decreased. It recommended an increase in funding toward the development of new media. It recommended a one time capital cost for high density television for the CBC. All of this was going to be special one time funding.

The all-party committee was very clear, the CBC needed more money. It also said that the CBC should have stable, multi-year funding over seven years. Currently, the CBC receives about \$33 per capita from every Canadian, so that it can continue to be the public broadcaster.

That funding over seven years was going to increase to \$40 per capita. That is not a very large amount of money, but this special money for high density and new infrastructure is needed in radio and television. As we know analog is going out right now and the CBC is going to have to go digital across this country.

There were strong recommendations and a strong support for the CBC just barely a year ago from the all-party committee.

Now the CBC is being forced to do exactly what we know the government has wanted of the CBC all along. I have been here for almost 16 years and time after time after time we sat at the heritage committee, we sat in the House, and listened to the fact that the Conservative government was not supportive of the CBC, not supportive of a public broadcaster, and was waiting to do this kind of trickle down, subtle burying of the public broadcaster.

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Let me speak about public broadcasters. We looked at 18 such public broadcasters in different countries in the industrialized world and Canada ranks 16th out of 18 in terms of its funding for its public broadcaster. Yet, most of the studies done by Nordicity have told us that Canada, of all the countries that have a public broadcaster, needs a public broadcaster most.

Why does Canada need a public broadcaster most? It is because Canada in fact lies close to a larger country that speaks the same language. That was one of the indicators that was used to define whether a public broadcaster was necessary. In fact, a public broadcaster was necessary in such situations to promote culture and to give a shared value system. Especially in a diverse country like ours, this is absolutely important. Diverse by region and diverse by demographics, we have to have that kind of shared value system and that promotion of our diverse cultures.

Second, the development of community and social cohesion, again in a country with such a large landmass and a sparse population, public broadcasters are absolutely necessary to form that kind of communication infrastructure to reach small communities all across Canada, linking these communities and offering a sort of universal virtual highway and coverage.

We also know that in a place where there is a small domestic market, there is not enough private sector investment in domestic programming because there are not enough people to buy that domestic programming. So a public broadcaster, in cases like this, is not compelled to realize a profit and therefore should be able to provide that kind of domestic and regional content that we talked about.

However, this is not happening. We see that the government is prepared to let the CBC die. The interesting thing is that we are talking about bridge financing, so the CBC could go back to looking at advertising to supplement its operational budget. Yet, one of the most important recommendations of the committee in February 2008 was that in fact the CBC be weaned off advertising revenues, so that it could truly function like a public broadcaster.

What do we see now instead? We actually see the government initiating slow and very subtle cuts: in 2006-07, \$32 million; in 2007-08, \$26 million; in 2008-09, another \$26 million; and in 2009-10, \$63 million in cuts, at a time when the CBC can ill-afford to have that. Talk about death by a thousand cuts.

Bridge financing is important now for the CBC to keep its head above water, but when we see all the indicators and we understand the reasons why public broadcasters are in fact very necessary, Canada is probably, as I said earlier on, by all of the studies done, the country that most needs a public broadcaster.

I am hoping that we would not only look at giving the CBC the bridge funding it needs, but heeding the recommendations of the heritage committee of February 2008, and in fact increasing funding for the CBC. This could be seen as a stimulus package because culture is an industry, because in a country like Canada, we need to hear our stories, listen to our drama, see our films, hear our music, and watch our dance.

The BBC has shown us how it can be done. The BBC has spread British culture around the world. It is now an industry that brings a

great deal into the GDP of Great Britain, and also trades an enormous amount of cultural products around the world.

This is CBC's role and instead of watching CBC die a death by a thousand cuts, I am hoping that the government would heed this and do the bridge financing and then actually follow the 2008 committee report and all of its recommendations.

● (1645)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am having a hard time listening to the hypocrisy in the House from the Liberals. It was in 1995 that they cut the CBC by \$400 million and 4,000 jobs were lost. I remember how much we lost in the communauté. That is not taking into consideration the Conservatives' not helping the CBC today. I will be speaking later on that.

At the same time, how can Liberals stand in the House and say how horrible it is that this is happening when they already cut the CBC by \$400 million saying it was because we were in financial difficulty? They cut health care and employment insurance, took \$57 billion from working people that loved their jobs, including the CBC Radio-Canada. How can they stand today and act like nothing happened?

● (1650)

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, I know how difficult it is for the hon. member's party to understand what is done in times of fiscal crisis or to even understand how to balance books.

Yes, indeed, that was a time of a very bad fiscal crisis, left once more by a Conservative government for a Liberal government to clean up. It cleaned it up but to do so everyone had to tighten their belts. It did not gut the CBC. Cuts were made and those cuts were slowly brought back year after year, including in 2002 when Liberals brought in a \$60 million yearly stipend for the CBC that in fact was almost not given by this government this year.

At a time of surplus, it is unconscionable that a government would begin to cut a public broadcaster. In a time of surplus when the government has money to spend, the government tells us very clearly by cutting that it has an agenda, which is to get rid of the public broadcaster.

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**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to pick up on what the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst was just speaking about, the member for Vancouver Centre has been in the House since 1993. She was here when the Liberal Party gutted and cut \$414 million from the CBC. There is no rationale for that. It promised it would not do it. Then in 1997, with red book 2, it made the same promise again and said, “It was tough and we made cuts but not next time”. It cut the CBC again and 4,000 jobs were lost. The evening news was gone, the regional broadcast was gone. The Liberal Party says one thing and does another thing when it is in power. The hypocrisy is astounding.

The member should pay attention to what the CBC has said. There has been record funding: \$1.1 billion in support, \$60 million in new money from this government to the CBC. That is our record. The Liberal Party record is one of cuts. The CBC indicated these jobs would have been lost regardless of bridge financing or not. Its board has a plan. She should listen and put some confidence in the board. It has a plan moving forward. The Liberal plan was to cut, axe and kill the CBC.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to listen to the hon. member speak about the history of things when we see that this is a government that did not even recognize that we were going into a recession. It kept believing there was no recession then changed its mind. It did not have a stimulus package. It did not know what to do and stood paralyzed with fear or what else it was paralyzed with, and waited until we got to this point, having spent all of the surplus it had.

I do not need any lessons in financial planning as a political party from this member. However, the bottom line is that the CBC was not gutted because it was still able to do its regional programming. The CBC was still able to do drama and some of the things that its mandate asked it to do. That is the important thing to remember.

What is happening now is that the CBC will die because of the cuts that have been made by this government.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since the member is blaming us, I would like to add something to this debate. CBC/Radio-Canada is cutting 800 jobs. Nobody here is denying that a lot of jobs will be lost. Nevertheless, this is an independent Crown corporation. Unless I am much mistaken, the member's party cut \$400 million a few years ago, and CBC/Radio-Canada lost 4,000 jobs as a result.

The Conservative Party, however, gave CBC/Radio-Canada \$1.1 billion this year. Yes, the corporation has been losing advertising revenue, but so have private-sector broadcasters. Whatever funding the government gives out, others might also demand. They might ask for similar help from the government. In this case, CBC/Radio-Canada has to figure out how to manage this temporary difficulty.

Can the member justify the cuts her party made not that long ago?  
[English]

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member's math is correct and the government says it gave \$1.1 billion to the CBC, it is my

understanding that the CBC would then have a little over \$2.1 billion in its budget. This is absolutely untrue and the hon. member knows it.

● (1655)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

I am not a Conservative and everyone back home is well aware of that. However, I had to rise earlier to tell the member for Vancouver Centre that it was hypocritical to say that the government is not investing in CBC/Radio-Canada, considering that in 1995 the Liberals reduced the corporation's budget by \$400 million, a decision that resulted in the loss of 4,000 jobs. Now, the Liberals claim that they did not really make cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada's funding. Come on!

At the time, they did it because of a financial problem and not because an economic recession had hit our country. They reduced the CBC's funds by \$400 million and they also made cuts to employment insurance. I do not want to engage in a debate on employment insurance when we are dealing with the CBC. However, workers lost \$57 billion. The Liberals also made cuts to health care. Therefore, I have a problem with the hypocrisy that they are showing today.

But let us now get back to today's issue. Time has gone by and this is no longer 1995. The CBC's shortfall is the result of an economic crisis. Advertising revenues have gone down. As the minister said, even if we gave money to CBC/Radio-Canada this year, it would not save the jobs at stake. He is right, because we are not talking about this year alone. The corporation needs a multi-year budget, and money must be invested every year. Rather than injecting \$1.1 billion annually, the government could have provided \$1.25 billion or \$1.3 billion.

It must be realized that CBC/Radio-Canada is important to us. It is our national broadcaster. Back home, we did not have the opportunity to watch TVA or TQS. I am sorry, but when it comes to French language television, TVA and TQS do not provide local news in French. They are not reporting on events that are occurring in Grand-Pré, Nova Scotia, in Manitoba, or in Vancouver. The cuts that CBC/Radio-Canada must now make mean that in Windsor, for example, only three of the nine employees will keep their jobs. The crown corporation will eliminate a half hour of local news every evening. The lunch hour phone-in program will also disappear, along with the local segment. That saddens me. This is our broadcaster. This is a public broadcaster, a crown corporation that belongs to our country. It belongs to us. And today we can see what is happening.

*Business of Supply*

The Prime Minister gave a first interview to CBC/Radio-Canada last week. Does the government have a problem with the crown corporation or CBC/Radio-Canada? Is there something it does not like about it? What problem do the governments have? I do not want to blame only the Conservatives. The Liberals are also to blame. What is their problem with CBC/Radio-Canada? When there is an issue between the government and CBC/Radio-Canada, we get the impression that the corporation is expected to be different than it is and not say anything bad about the government of the day. If it reports the real news, it gets a rap on the knuckles and the daylight scared out of it. Unless it helps the government, the government will not help it, and if it says anything bad about it, the government will cut its funding further.

Someone once told me that it was as if Jean Chrétien stayed up at night looking for ways to dismantle CBC/Radio-Canada.

This was at the time when \$400 million in cuts were made and 4,000 people lost their jobs. He just hated that corporation. Everyone knew it, and we in this House knew it. Now, the Conservatives are saying that they did not make any cuts. They are providing it with \$1.1 billion in funding, but CBC/Radio-Canada is struggling.

With all due respect to our Montreal cousins, I am sure that the people of Caraquet, back home, do not want to hear nothing but news about Montreal. They want local programming. It is nice to be able to sit in the living room after dinner and tune in to Abbé Lantaigne's talk show and hear people from our area talk with him. That is really nice. No doubt that the people of Chicoutimi and that area want to be able to sit in their living rooms and listen to news about their area. They will lose that ability. They will get the news from Montreal: the cat that was killed crossing Saint-Catherine Street. That is what is going to happen to us.

To help the CBC, why does the federal government not change course and require that providers of satellite broadcasting services offer CBC programming? Even in Ottawa, the nation's capital, satellite broadcasting service providers do not distribute the signals of the local CBC/Radio-Canada television stations. On the one hand, there are Montreal, Quebec City, the Atlantic provinces, Manitoba and Vancouver. On the other, there are Ottawa, Regina, Saskatchewan, all the places where the local CBC/Radio-Canada station's signals are not distributed by satellite. Why would the CBC produce programming in those regions if it is missing 30% of the Canadian audience? That is what it amounts to.

This is something the government could do: order the CBC, perhaps by way of the CRTC, to offer its services by satellite. For example, Quebec City does not even get service from Star Choice. It is a major francophone Canadian city, with a large population, and does not even get service from Star Choice. As well, the companies could be told that if they want to broadcast programming by satellite here in Canada, they will have to include our public broadcaster.

Where I live, in the Atlantic provinces—that is correct—there have been call-in shows at noon on the CBC. It was enjoyable to listen to. That is over, and now there will be national broadcasts. We are missing the boat, and that is unfortunate. Now we have to ask whether the government really cares about our public broadcaster. We are going through an economic crisis. Eight hundred direct jobs will be lost. For each job lost, three indirect jobs will be lost. Imagine

how many people are going to lose their jobs. The only thing the government is saying is that it has already provided \$1.1 billion. But that figure is money that was already there, in the ordinary course of things. And we are in an economic crisis.

I would like to kindly ask my francophone colleagues from Quebec, and I will not say my token colleagues, to get the Prime Minister's ear and tell him that this is going to hurt people where they live, in the regions, not them as members of Parliament, but their regions and the people there. When we were young, where I live, what did we watch? We watched the CBC or Radio-Canada. That was the television we watched, the television we pay for with our taxes, and we are proud to have a public broadcaster.

I would really ask the government to rethink this, to try to meet with the managers of the CBC and come to some agreements with them to save our public broadcaster. We need it. It is ours, it belongs to us, and we should be proud of it.

• (1700)

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Culture; the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, Status of Women; and the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster, Employment Insurance.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as usual, I listened with great interest to the remarks of my hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst.

I would like to hear his comments on a quote from an hon. Conservative minister whose name I cannot mention and whose riding I forget. On December 11, 2001, the minister said, “The Liberals decided to throw millions and even billions in non priority areas, while ignoring vital ones. For example, the CBC will receive \$60 million.”

Speaking about cuts made by the Liberals to our public broadcaster, the same Conservative minister was criticizing the Liberal government for providing \$60 million in funding to CBC/Radio-Canada. I would like to hear him on that.

The hon. member also realizes that there is another difference between a Liberal government and a Conservative one, and I hope he will admit it. It is a matter of honesty. It is evident from the remarks made by various ministers of this government when they were in opposition. There was contempt in their remarks about the public broadcaster. I am noticing no such contempt from the other parties in this House and I would like him to comment on that.

Finally, I would like him to comment on the Conservative Party's vision, whereby CBC/Radio-Canada would become something like the PBS network in the United States, a network that has to raise funds every Saturday night through specials or by showing filmed concerts over and over.

*Business of Supply*

• (1705)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Madam Speaker, the member asked me to be honest. I am being honest when I say that the Liberals cut the CBC's budget by \$400 million and 4,000 jobs were lost. The difference is that the others just sit over there and watch as the corporation vanishes. Of the two, I no longer know who to blame.

However, as for the \$60 million mentioned by my colleague, CBC/Radio-Canada has said that it is tiresome having to beg for it every year. That money always arrives at the last minute.

There has been no change since 2001. What we must do is ensure that they receive the \$60 million for the next seven years, at the beginning of each year, and that it would henceforth be on their books. It always receives this money at the last minute.

Last Friday morning, even before going on the program *Le Match des élus*, we learned that the CBC had finally received its \$60 million. It was already late. To my way of thinking, you cannot operate a business and you cannot resolve the situation that way. We know that this Conservative government is looking at privatizing in the public sector. It wants to go the route of privatization. It prefers to give money to the private rather than the public sector, as is evident from the steps it is presently taking—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Questions and comments. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[English]

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, in the recent federal budget, which the Liberals voted for, the government plans to raise billions of dollars selling off public assets. Does the member agree that CBC assets could be part of this asset sale that the government is contemplating?

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has less than one minute to answer the question.

[English]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Madam Speaker, let me put it this way: That is why the government answered so quickly. When Radio Canada asked to sell their assets, the Conservative government said yes, yes, yes.

I have never in my life seen the government answer so quickly. Radio Canada asked to sell their assets, and the government said yes because it wants to privatize the public buildings and everything. It wants to give those to the private sector.

We can see what happened when we privatized Air Canada. When they got in trouble, they ran to the government to get the money back from the taxpayers. The same thing is going to happen here.

I think it is wrong to sell any asset of Radio Canada. Those assets belong to the taxpayers of this country and it should stay that way.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP)** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in the debate this afternoon to the opposition motion on bridge funding for the CBC.

It amazes me how much governments and official oppositions enjoy kicking the football of the CBC back and forth across the aisle. It is a pox on both their houses. It is true that the Liberals gutted the

CBC back in the 1990s. It is also true that the Conservatives have no interest in ensuring the future prosperity of our public broadcaster. We know there are reasons to disbelieve both those parties when they talk about CBC Radio-Canada.

We need a permanent and ongoing commitment to our national public broadcaster. We need to give up the football of kicking the CBC around and enjoying the political sport of it. It is not doing this important institution any favours. It is not doing the Canadians, who depend on the CBC for the cultural and democratic life of their communities, any favours whatsoever. The reality is they are both wrong.

It is long past the time for us to have a government in Canada that believes in national public institutions like CBC Radio-Canada. Frankly, there is only one party in the House of Commons that has a foundational belief, and it is the NDP. In this corner of the House, we know the importance of public institutions. We would go to bat for CBC Radio-Canada to ensure the safety, the security and the excellence of our national public broadcaster. That is fundamental to who we are as social democrats and democratic socialists.

I will not talk about the mandate of the CBC because I do not think there is anything to discuss. It is absolutely crucial. We know the CBC works hard to attain the goals of that broad mandate.

I want to talk briefly about the motion, which ends the notion of bridge funding to deal with the current crisis. I do not think that is enough. The motion, if it were really working in the best interests of public broadcasting in Canada, would have included the notion of a long-term stable commitment to funding for the CBC of at least seven years, as was recommended by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in the last Parliament. It would ensure there was a memorandum of understanding negotiated between the government and the CBC to allow for that kind of long-term stable funding. Unfortunately that is where the Liberals are not prepared to go, despite the brave words and the clear understanding of the member for Vancouver Centre. She clearly knows the situation, but she is not prepared to see her party include that as part of the motion. It needs to be in this motion. I will support the motion, as far as it goes, but something very important is missing from it.

Why is that so important? The committee report done in the last Parliament by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage noted that the funding of the CBC was absolutely crucial. We know the CBC is dramatically underfunded. In terms of public broadcasters around the world, we know the CBC is 16th out of 18 in western industrialized countries. We fund the CBC at the rate of \$33 per Canadian, which is the second-lowest rate of funding in the world for a public broadcast, and that is completely unacceptable. Only New Zealand and the United States fund their public broadcasters at a rate lower than Canada.



We have heard, in the course of this debate, that a country like France funds its national broadcaster at \$77 per French citizen. Britain has a licensing system. The equivalent funding is around \$130 per person in the United Kingdom to fund the BBC. I think everyone in this chamber would appreciate the excellence of the work of the BBC, and it is partly as a result of its funding.

The BBC is well-funded by the people and the government of the United Kingdom, through a 10-year memorandum of understanding that is negotiated between the BBC and the government of Britain. This results in a long-term stable funding so the broadcaster can plan for its future, make decisions about where it will go, instead of wondering year after year what kind of money will come to it and what cuts will be subject to. It is also a broadcaster that does not depend on advertising revenue, like the CBC, and the vagaries of the economic situation.

The CBC is now feeling the effects of the economic crisis because of its advertising revenues. It would be an important facet of any long-term funding arrangement that any dependence on advertising revenues by our national public be removed. That is crucial.

We need that kind of long-term stable commitment. We need to increase the funding to the CBC. We need to ensure that it is negotiated as part of a memorandum of understanding between the government and the CBC.

● (1710)

There can be no argument about that. Even the Conservatives on the committee agreed with the need for a seven year memorandum of understanding about long-term stable funding for the CBC. They may dispute the funding level, but they have not disputed the need for it. However, have they acted on it? Have they moved in this direction? Unfortunately not. We are still in the situation of kicking the CBC back and forth across the aisle of Parliament, with charges and countercharges. It would be nice to get out of that rut and ensure that the CBC has that kind of commitment to funding so it can get on with its important job and fulfill its mandate to Canadians.

In these most recent troubles facing CBC, we know local media is one of the things that is most affected. It is one of the great ironies of the situation. For a number of years now, the CBC has been promoting a plan to expand local radio across Canada. It has had a plan on the table. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage last year reviewed the plan to expand local radio into 15 markets in Canada to ensure that another eight million Canadians would have access to CBC local radio programming.

Communities such as Kitchener, London, Montreal South Shore, Hamilton, Barrie, Kingston, the Laurentians, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Drummondville, Red Deer, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Fort McMurray, Chilliwack, Saskatoon and Cranbrook would all benefit from having the CBC local radio as part of their communities. Some of the most successful programming of the CBC are its local radio programs.

I know in Vancouver, for instance, the CBC local radio programs lead the market in terms of audience share now, and they are excellent programs. They are programs of record in terms of the life and political life of the community. None of the communities that do

### *Business of Supply*

not have it now, the eight million Canadians that do not have access to that kind of programming, should be denied that.

The sad part is it is not an expensive proposal. It is \$25 million in capital costs and \$25 million a year in funding afterwards. That is very cheap for the kind of high quality programming to which another eight million Canadians would have access.

What are the benefits to those communities for establishing those kinds of radio stations with CBC local radio in those communities? There are a number of benefits.

It would act as an economic stimulus, and we need that in all of our communities, given the current crisis. CBC Radio-Canada local radio highlights a region's innovation. Development and opportunities are promoted to national and international audiences. With that local connection, other things become possible.

CBC Radio-Canada local radio advocates for local culture. Local careers are launched in music, comedy, drama and literature. Locally recorded CBC concerts are heard around the world and on other public broadcasters.

Skills are developed in local communities, with partnerships with students and schools. There is community dialogue on community events and community political issues, so it increases the democratic life of those communities. The CBC local radio stations are also available for emergency broadcasts 24 hours a day, should that be necessary. All these things—

● (1715)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I regret to interrupt the hon. member in his last minute. It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** All those in favour 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 yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Call in the members.

● (1740)

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

*Business of Supply**(Division No. 46)*

## YEAS

## Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bigras	Black
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cannis	Cardin
Carrier	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crête
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dorion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Foote	Fry
Gagnon	Garneau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravlee
Guarnieri	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Hyer
Ignatieff	Jennings
Julian	Kennedy
Laframboise	Lavallée
Layton	Lee
Lemay	Leslie
Malhi	Malo
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Mendes
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Neville
Oliphant	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paillé
Paquette	Patry
Pearson	Plamondon
Pomerleau	Proulx
Rae	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Siksay	Simson
St-Cyr	Szabo
Thibeault	Tonks
Trudeau	Valeriot
Vincent	Volpe
Wasylycia-Leis	Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj	Zarac — 136

## NAYS

## Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Ashfield

Baird	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Cadman
Calandra	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fast	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Glover	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hill
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Payne
Petit	Poillievre
Prentice	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Smith	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Sweet	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young — 126

## PAIRED

## Members

Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Blais
Calkins	Freeman
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kerr
Lalonde	Lessard
Lévesque	Thi Lac
Warawa	Weston (Saint John) — 12

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.*[English]*

It being 5:44 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1745)

[Translation]

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ)** moved that Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (Charter of the French Language) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see the interest and energy that introduction of this bill has triggered in the House. That is absolutely normal, given that this bill will enable parliamentarians and the members of this House to give tangible expression to a motion passed in this House in November 2006 recognizing the existence of the Quebec nation. All of our hon. colleagues will therefore be able to be faithful to the decision taken at that time and to amend the Official Languages Act in order to ensure that the Charter of the French Language will be respected in Quebec, particularly by companies under federal jurisdiction.

The purpose of Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (Charter of the French Language) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts is to require the federal government to recognize the Charter of the French Language within Quebec and to allow it to extend its application to companies under federal jurisdiction.

In order to avoid any ambiguity, we felt it essential for the Official Languages Act to stipulate the fact that French is the official language of Quebec.

We therefore feel it is significant to amend the preamble to state that the federal government recognizes French as the official language of Quebec and of the Quebec nation.

As I said, this recognition of the language common to all Quebecers is the totally logical extension of the recognition of the Quebec nation by this House.

As I said—

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

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I will wait until the House is a little quieter.

The hon. member has the floor.

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see you call for order, but I am also pleased to see that my colleagues are very excited at the prospect of debating Bill C-307.

As I mentioned, in order to avoid any ambiguity right from the start, we will amend the preamble to the Official Languages Act to ensure the federal government recognizes that French is the official and common language of Quebec. I will say it again and I will keep saying that Bill C-307 is the logical extension of the House of Commons' recognition of the Quebec nation in November 2006, if memory serves.

We will also amend two sections of the Official Languages Act, namely part VII and part IX, to ensure that these amendments to the Official Languages Act will require the federal government to

### *Private Members' Business*

undertake not to obstruct the aims of the Charter of the French Language. It is important to mention that recognition of the Charter of the French Language in no way diminishes the rights and privileges of the anglophone minority in Quebec as provided under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and in the Charter of the French Language, as well. As I was saying, these two amendments to the Official Languages Act will eliminate any ambiguity.

If the Government of Canada and Canadians want to promote bilingualism across the country, let them do so, but it is vital that it be clear to Canadians and the federal government that, in Quebec, there is only one official language, one common language, and that is French. In this regard, the federal government will undertake not to diminish in any way the rights and privileges of Quebec's Charter of the French Language.

It should be mentioned there is no administrative problem in implementing this provision, which will allow the Charter of the French Language to apply to all employees of businesses under federal jurisdiction, and under the federal code specifically, because there are already situations in which the provisions of federal laws, Quebec laws or provincial laws apply to federal law. I am thinking, for example, of minimum wage. It is noteworthy to read in the Canada Labour Code, the provision setting the federal minimum wage according to provincial minimum wages. This provision, section 178.1 reads as follows.

Except as otherwise provided by or under this Division, an employer shall pay to each employee a wage at a rate

(a) not less than the minimum hourly rate fixed, from time to time, by or under an Act of the legislature of the province where the employee is usually employed and that is generally applicable regardless of occupation, status or work experience.

There is no reason Quebec's minimum wage provisions would not apply within Quebec. I therefore have a hard time seeing how the government can support its claim that there would be administrative obstacles to making Quebecers' common language—French—the language of work for all Quebec workers, whether they are under federal or Quebec jurisdiction.

As we already know, several companies under federal jurisdiction comply voluntarily with the Charter of the French Language, but we think more should be done.

I would point out that some of the national companies governed by the Canada Labour Code are involved in telecommunications and broadcasting. Some are crown corporations, such as CBC/Radio-Canada and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Canada Post is also subject to this provision, but none of the other departments, services or crown corporations are because they are covered by section 16 of the Constitution, which requires a constitutional amendment to achieve the goals set out in my bill. We have set them aside for now to ensure that there are no constitutional obstacles preventing other corporations, particularly private ones, from adhering to the Charter of the French Language.

*Private Members' Business*

● (1750)

I mentioned sectors such as telecommunications and broadcasting, federal crown corporations that are agencies, banks, airlines, airports, extraprovincial marine transportation and a number of public services. When I refer to public services, I am talking about railways and bus transportation, which are not necessarily in the public sector. In fact, a number of sectors are targeted. In all, roughly 7% of workers in Quebec are covered by the Canada Labour Code, because they work for companies subject to the code. A total of 200,000 to 250,000 workers are affected.

Between 93% and 95% of workers in Quebec are already subject to the Charter of the French Language. We have to wonder about the inequity of a situation where 5% to 7% of workers in Quebec do not enjoy the rights conferred by the Charter of the French Language. I want to remind this House that the Charter of the French Language does not impose any obligations. It gives workers in Quebec the right to work in French.

It is extremely important that all workers in Quebec enjoy the same rights. In this case, everyone will acknowledge that it will certainly be easier to apply the Charter of the French Language to the 7% of workers who are not currently covered than to do the reverse. Moreover, that would run contrary to the objectives that the Quebec nation has had for a number of years, which are to protect the French language and ensure that it develops.

It is extremely important to take this step so that French continues to gain ground in the workplace. That sends an extremely important signal to the entire Quebec nation. It is also a sign of Canada's respect for the National Assembly's repeatedly stated desire.

All the polls conducted in Quebec show how strongly Quebecers are united in their support for Bill 101 and the Charter of the French Language.

These amendments to the Canada Labour Code will fill a gap that is creating the inequity I mentioned earlier.

So, this bill proposes amendments to the Official Languages Act to ensure that, in Quebec, the federal government respects the Charter of the French Language. It also proposes amendments to the Canada Labour Code, to ensure that workers in businesses under federal jurisdiction located in Quebec can enjoy the same benefits and rights as those in businesses that come under the Quebec jurisdiction. Better still, the bill also proposes an amendment to the Canada Business Corporations Act, to ensure that the name of a corporation respects the Charter of the French Language. I think this makes perfect sense.

Not only should we respect the Charter of the French Language when it comes to workers' rights, not only should we respect it, and Bill 101, as regards the collective choices made by the Quebec nation and conveyed on several occasions by its National Assembly, but we should also ensure that the Charter of the French Language is respected as regards the names of businesses, because it reflects their corporate image in Quebec.

Let us not forget that since the year 2000 many complaints have been made regarding corporate names. There have been close to 1,500 over the past eight or nine years. So, this is an extremely

sensitive issue in Quebec and, in the context of the Canada Business Corporations Act, businesses that are under federal jurisdiction must be required to respect the Charter of the French Language as regards their corporate name. That is why we are proposing amendments to that effect.

I should also mention that a number of people have argued that relatively few complaints have been made to the Office de la langue française about the application of the Charter of the French Language, whether it is regarding the language of work or corporate names. That can easily be explained by the fact that, currently, there is a gap and businesses that come under the Canada Labour Code are not subject to the Charter of the French Language. Consequently, very few people lodge complaints, because they know that they are not relevant in the current context.

● (1755)

If there were any amendments such as those proposed in Bill C-307, clearly, we would be seeing a lot more complaints. Workers have said that meetings were being held in English, even though only a single anglophone and 10 francophones were taking part. Furthermore, employees who are all francophone are being forced to communicate with each other in writing in English, especially in the aerospace sector. This information appeared just today in a major Montreal area newspaper.

In the airport sector, time and time again, employees have complained that it is impossible for them to work in French, even though their jobs do not require them to work in English. Of course I will not bother listing all the complaints that are received on a daily basis regarding services offered in French by airlines, even in the Montreal area.

Logically, this House should fully support Bill C-307, so as to be completely consistent with its decision to recognize the Quebec nation.

This is the second time we are introducing this bill. Last time we had the NDP's support. We hope to have their support for this bill once again.

As for the Liberal Party, the official opposition, it has a new leader who prides himself on being the first leader of a federalist party to recognize the Quebec nation. I therefore expect him to remain consistent with what he has said, and not necessarily take it to its logical conclusion, but at least go one step further towards tangibly recognizing the Quebec nation, by ensuring that the Charter of the French Language applies within Quebec's borders in the case of businesses under federal jurisdiction.

I expect Conservative members from Quebec to support this bill, along with the Liberals and my NDP friends, so it can be referred to committee quickly and improved.

● (1800)

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Madam Speaker, through you, I would like to ask the sponsor of Bill C-307 now before us a very technical question.

*Private Members' Business*

We have a Commissioner of Official Languages. If the bill were adopted—no matter its merits or its timing—that would mean that the Commissioner of Official Languages could promote the official languages in the nine other provinces and territories, but not in Quebec. At present, he looks after Quebec.

Have I understood correctly that, consistent with the purpose of this bill, the Commissioner of Official Languages would no longer be able to work in Quebec because only the Charter of the French Language would apply to federal jurisdictions?

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

We are in contact with the Commissioner of Official Languages. It is very clear that the Commissioner of Official Languages would no longer need to intervene to ensure respect for the Charter of the French Language, given that only one official language, French, would be recognized in Quebec. Therefore, intervention by a commissioner responsible for promoting bilingualism would no longer be relevant.

That would also be the case for private businesses under federal jurisdiction such as Bell Canada, CN and all kinds of banks. The Charter of the French Language would apply to them. However, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms would continue to apply to all federal government services, as required by section 16. Therefore, the Commissioner of Official Languages will always have a role to play in ensuring that federal government services are provided in French and English to different users.

**Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his fine speech. This bill shows how important it is to protect the French language in the workplace. We are left in Quebec facing a discriminatory situation with two kinds of workers: those who are protected by the charter and those who are not.

Historically in Quebec, the charter arose out of a major labour dispute when the workers at General Motors fought to work in French in their workplace. There was a long strike strictly over language because French was not spoken in the plant and no documents were available in French. Nowadays of course, there are many companies that show respect for the French language.

I would like to know what my colleague has to say about the two classes of workers we have now in Quebec and the lack of protection under the Charter of the French Language.

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question, which is very important.

When the Charter of the French Language was passed in 1977, there was a very difficult situation in Quebec workplaces. A number of strikes, lockouts and labour disputes had arisen simply in order to get collective agreements translated into French or to be allowed to negotiate in French. That is now a thing of the past for almost all companies, including various multinational firms. Rio Tinto is subject to the Charter of the French Language. I cannot believe that Bell Canada could not also be subject to the Charter of the French Language or that Telus Communications could not do as Rio Tinto and other multinationals located in Quebec have done. GM was

mentioned earlier, but there are many others as well in the aerospace industry. There are also Rogers and CTV Global Media.

It is a matter, therefore, of political will. This will has been present in Quebec for many years, and the federal government should now show some respect for it. It is particularly incumbent on the House of Commons to do so, having passed a motion recognizing the Quebec nation. The House should therefore recognize the Quebec nation's decision to have French as its common language. That is just a matter of logic and of correcting a legal loophole, which appeared in 1977 when the Charter of the French Language was passed.

In conclusion, I would like to say that just a few days ago we commemorated the 10th anniversary of the passing of Camille Laurin, who was the father of the charter. I wanted to honour his memory on the occasion of the introduction of Bill C-307.

● (1805)

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Madam Speaker, hon. colleagues, it is a pleasure for me to take the floor today on Bill C-307 which, if passed, would make amendments to the Official Languages Act, the Canada Business Corporations Act and the Canada Labour Code, so as to harmonize them with the requirements of Quebec's Charter of the French Language.

As the Prime Minister has reminded us many times, Canada was born in French. Quebec and the French language are therefore at the heart of Canada, its history and its identity, and complement the history of the anglophone and allophone communities in Canada. Linguistic duality has been one of the foundations of Canadian society since the Canadian federation was created, and is an asset for the country and its citizens. Quebecers are in support of this duality. Indeed, according to a 2006 Decima poll on behalf of Canadian Heritage, 84% of the francophones of Quebec consider linguistic duality to be a source of cultural enrichment.

Whether it be the commitment of \$30 million in the 2007 budget, spread over two years to promote increased use by young people of the minority language in their daily lives, or the establishment of the language rights support program, announced last year, to support the language rights of Canadians, our government has taken concrete action to support this duality and the communities that exist at its heart.

Our government takes full account of Canada's linguistic duality in its actions, a duality which it has committed to promote in Quebec as in the other provinces and territories. In a speech delivered in Quebec City last year, the Prime Minister himself referred to French as the first official language of our country. This is an incontestable truth which goes back to the arrival of the first French colonists in New France.

Our government is firmly committed to supporting the official languages and to the promotion of English and French, both in Quebec and in Canada as a whole. The Roadmap for Linguistic Duality in Canada 2008-2013: Acting for the Future is clear evidence of that commitment.

*Private Members' Business*

Announced in June 2008, this roadmap is the Government of Canada's five-year plan for linguistic duality and official languages, and represents an unprecedented government-wide commitment with a budget of \$1.1 billion. Thirteen federal departments and agencies have been its driving forces from the outset. Since then, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has joined the group, to meet the needs of the francophone communities in the territories.

The roadmap is directed at strengthening the vitality of the official-language minority communities and offering all Canadians the benefits that French and English—the country's two official languages—give them. Hence it supports the development of French all over the country, while also providing for a new arts and culture component and new programs in the fields of justice and economic development, with additional investments in health and immigration.

One example of this increased investment is the \$4 million in additional funding which our government provided last week to the Consortium national de formation en santé. This brings that organization's funding to \$20 million in 2008-09, so that more support can be given to francophone students wishing to continue their post-secondary education in the field of health. In this way more of the country's francophones will benefit from increased access to health services in the language of their choice.

The roadmap includes a new culture component and new initiatives to make the benefits of linguistic duality more accessible to all Canadians. The government recently unveiled two of these programs.

The Cultural Development Fund announced this month, which will have a budget of \$14 million over four years, will support and strengthen the arts, culture and heritage within anglophone and francophone minority communities.

●(1810)

It will help Canadians everywhere in Canada to become more familiar with the diversity and vitality of the cultural scene in these communities, from Whitehorse to Moncton and from my community of St. Boniface to Lennoxville.

Our government has also announced the details of the National Translation Program for Book Publishing, for which we are providing a budget of \$5 million over four years. This program will help publishers in Canada translate Canadian-authored books into English and French. With this program, we want to give as many Canadians as possible access to the enormous wealth of our country's culture and literature.

The new programs under the Roadmap, for culture and for linguistic duality, are concrete actions to help promote our two official languages within minority communities and across Canada. We are going to continue down this path. Our government will continue to support the development of francophone and anglophone minorities and to promote the full recognition and use of English and French in our society.

Going beyond the Roadmap, the Government of Canada is very active in implementing cultural measures that encourage the promotion of French. To mention but a few, there are the CBC, Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board, support for cultural

industries and the Canada Council for the Arts. At the international level, our active participation in the institutions of international francophonie provides concrete support for the promotion of French and the francophone community of Canada.

The 400th anniversary of Quebec City last year gave us a wonderful opportunity for this, and the celebrations were a great success.

The actions taken by the Canadian and Quebec governments can complement and strengthen each other. In fact, considering that the challenge of preserving Canada's French language and culture must be met increasingly in the broader context of North American integration and globalization, our government firmly believes that the governments of Quebec and Canada must work together to consolidate a true francophone critical mass within the Canadian, North American and global village.

That is why the Canadian government wants to work to promote the French language in the context of a unifying, inclusive and respectful vision of all the francophone realities of our country. Our approach aims to create a francophone space to connect francophones in Quebec and in minority communities and francophiles from every cultural origin. There are a number of ways to achieve that, but the cultural sector is definitely a preferred option in this respect.

Besides government action with respect to official languages, Canadian arts and culture policies generously support the cultural development of francophones in Quebec and across Canada. We are providing support for Canadian cultural products to promote, among other things, greater awareness of all francophone artistic and cultural production in all the regions of the country. This can help create closer ties between the francophones in Quebec and those in minority communities, as well as between French speakers and francophiles such as myself across the country. Increased visibility of the French language also help increase awareness of linguistic duality among all Canadians.

Linguistic duality is a vital part of our Canadian identity. According to a Decima Research poll, 77% of francophones in Quebec believe that having two official languages is important to their sense of what it means to be Canadian. Our government remains committed to promoting this duality and to supporting official languages across the country.

I would like to focus briefly on the demographics, which have been the subject of considerable discussion since the release of the 2006 census data. This data shows that, in terms of the language used in public, French is the language of the majority in Quebec. Overall, 94.5% of the population speaks French, whether or not they know another language. That is also the case on the island of Montreal.

Quebec's anglophones personify the linguistic duality of our country. Quebec is the province where French is best mastered by anglophones, with 69% being able to speak French and using the language regularly.

●(1815)

To conclude, with our roadmap for Canada's linguistic duality 2008-2013, our government wants to give Canadians living in—

*Private Members' Business*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Resuming debate.

The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

**Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am taking part in the debate, at second reading, on Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (Charter of the French Language) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, brought forward by the member for Joliette, in order to explain clearly why the official opposition will not support this legislation.

This bill is merely the transformation of a motion presented by the Bloc, in April 2008, on the same issue. This is to stir up old fears on the same issue and to have us believe that the French language is constantly threatened, and that the efforts of previous Canadian governments to promote French both inside and outside Quebec have been to no avail.

What is even more ironic with this legislation introduced by the Bloc is that it proposes to force the Quebec government to interfere in federal jurisdiction. The Bloc, which has always boasted about defending Quebec's jurisdiction, is bringing forward a bill that would impose a provincial law on businesses that come under federal jurisdiction. That is really odd.

Moreover, for years the Bloc has been claiming falsely that the French language in Quebec is in a disastrous decline. The reality is quite the opposite. The 2006 census and the report of the Office de la langue française in Quebec, published in March 2008, both indicate that the use of French in the workplace has increased in Quebec, compared to the 2001 census data. It is also important to realize that the changes proposed by the Bloc could in fact threaten the rights of the anglophone minority in Quebec.

In many provinces and in the territories, bilingualism rates are going up, clearly showing the vitality of minority linguistic communities. A recent survey shows that a large majority of Canadians believe that bilingualism is a factor that defines our country. However, with Bill C-307, the Bloc strikes at the very heart of bilingualism, which is a Canadian value. What this bill is saying is that French must be promoted in Quebec, without regard for the linguistic minorities outside the province.

It is important to note that, according to Statistics Canada, the proportion of Canadians whose mother tongue is French increased by 1.6% between 2001 and 2006. In addition, during the same period, the proportion of anglophones who know French rose from 9% to 9.4%. The proportion of allophones who speak French rose from 11.8% to 12.1% during the same period. According to the Statistics Canada census, in Quebec, in 2006, nearly seven out of 10 anglophones, or 68.9%, said they spoke French and English, compared to 66.1% in 2001.

It is also important to note that the bilingualism rate increased between 1996 and 2006 in eight of the twelve provinces and territories outside Quebec. In support of the thesis that bilingualism is a core Canadian value, the popularity of bilingualism has increased among Canadians since 2003, rising from 56% in 2003 to 72% in 2006.

These figures are all highly revealing and show how false one of the Bloc's main arguments is, namely that French is threatened as a language of work and that the situation could be improved by

applying the charter to more companies. According to Statistics Canada's 2006 census, 63% of immigrants spoke French in the workplace in 2001 and 65% spoke French in 2006. In addition, 60% of allophone immigrants used French in 2001 and by 2006, this had risen to 63%. Retail sales are a provincial jurisdiction and here the use of English in the workplace increased by 1%, which goes to show that even the provincial language legislation does not have the expected results.

The Bloc likes to rave over the French fact in the Americas but does not seem to care that the Official Languages Act is intended to protect linguistic minorities all over the country.

• (1820)

The French fact does not exist only in Quebec but in the other Canadian provinces as well.

[English]

Private member's Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, would modify the Canada Labour Code so that companies operating in Quebec yet under federal jurisdiction would be subject to la Charte de la langue française, a provincial charter.

The Bloc is trying to impose la Charte de la langue française, also known as Bill 101, on companies under federal jurisdiction, by occupying what they call a regulatory vacuum.

Indeed, section 34 of part V of the Official Languages Act states:

English and French are the languages of work in all federal institutions, and officers and employees of all federal institutions have the right to use either official language in accordance with this Part.

The Bloc argues that the law does not mention companies under federal jurisdiction, but rather, "federal institutions", which would allow them to impose la Charte de la langue française disposition on companies under federal jurisdiction.

The private member's bill reveals the Bloc's hypocrisy on this since it tramples on already established federal jurisdiction.

The Bloc also fails to provide any detail on the economic and structural consequences of the bill for companies under federal jurisdiction, or on the Province of Quebec, which enforces language law.

Also absent from the Bloc's rationalization is how the anglophone minority would be protected.

[Translation]

If French were imposed on all federal institutions in Quebec, what would stop the other provinces from adopting charters of the English language and insisting that they too should not be subject to the Official Languages Act? What would happen then to the Acadians, the Franco-Ontarians, the Franco-Manitobans and the Franco-Saskatchewanians? The Bloc feels no responsibility at all for the Canadian francophonie.

Since Parliament passed the motion recognizing Quebec as a nation on November 27, 2006, the Bloc has been trying to force the federal government to implement policies that make the Quebec nation more of a reality.

*Private Members' Business*

Bill C-307 is just another attempt of this kind. By forcing companies under federal jurisdiction to comply with the letter of the labour relations code in the Charter of the French Language, the bill gives Quebec provincial legislation precedence over federal legislation, which in the Bloc's view, would be a further recognition of Quebec's nationhood.

Why in this regard would the Bloc not amend its bill to extend it to limiting voting rights only to people who pass a French test, as the PQ has suggested? When it comes to creating two classes of citizens, why stop when they have made such a good start?

• (1825)

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP)** Madam Speaker, the NDP has previously supported a bill similar to Bill C-307. It was Bill C-482. It came before this House and was voted on. The NDP supported it at second reading to have it sent to committee for study, because it was a very significant bill.

The present bill has been introduced by the member for Joliette, who said that, in the opinion of the House, further to its recognition of the Quebec nation, the government should now act and propose measures to give form to this recognition, such as having the Charter of the French Language apply to businesses under federal jurisdiction within Quebec, as concerns language of work.

I was listening to my Liberal colleague, who seems afraid of what will happen to francophones in the rest of the country if this sort of thing were passed in Quebec. I remember the member for Papineau saying that, if people did not learn both languages, it was because they were lazy. In New Brunswick, for example, we have two school boards, one English and one French. I recall the member for Papineau saying in Saint John on a visit to New Brunswick that there should be a single, bilingual school board. We know what that produced—a real setback for the French language.

I would like this bill to be studied in committee to hear the experts and hear whether anglophones in a minority situation in Quebec feel threatened. I have a hard time imagining any danger to anglophones in Quebec, given that McGill and other anglophone universities are located there. They are important universities. There is Bishop's University in Sherbrooke and others. They provide good services.

It is still sad that a bill has to be introduced to protect the French language in this country. I am trying to imagine a French company setting up in an anglophone region. All the employees should speak French and the collective agreement should be in French. I cannot imagine that happening. And yet, back home, in L'Anse-Bleue, for example, an anglophone company refused to provide a collective agreement in French. None of the employees in L'Anse-Bleue could understand it.

And what does this bill say? It says that francophones in Quebec will have the right to speak their mother tongue at their workplace and to have services under federal jurisdiction in French. This is not about government services, because services provided directly by federal departments must be in both official languages. Nevertheless, they say that employees within federal departments are entitled to use their mother tongue.

Again this week, at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we were wondering how many deputy ministers, at the

federal level, do not speak French. There are some. Does the same problem exist on the other side? How many deputy ministers do not speak English? With all the respect I have for anglophones, they do not have this problem, because all deputy ministers speak English, but not all speak French.

With regard to the Olympic Games to be held in Vancouver, we have just discovered that the advertising being done by the British Columbia tourism agency in other countries, such as China and Mexico, to welcome them to the Olympic Games, is being done in English but not in French. We spoke about that again this morning.

In spite of this, the federal government says that it respects both languages, that it has given a lot of money, through Canadian Heritage and Sport Canada, and so on. But we still have to fight to make sure that French, one of the two official languages, of one of the two founding peoples of this country, is respected.

• (1830)

I do not mean that the Bloc has fought to have the nation recognized, that they succeeded, and now they want a little more, but in my opinion the word "nation" does not mean very much. We ourselves are an Acadian nation, but what difference does that make? It does not make a hill of beans difference!

I recall that at the time the Queen was asked to apologize and acknowledge the wrongs done to the Acadians. The Liberal government of the day denied us that and fought to make sure that the British Crown did not acknowledge the wrongs done to the Acadians. What we were asking for was legitimate. The British Crown had apologized in a number of countries for the wrongs that had been done, but we Acadians, we could not ask for an apology.

In New Brunswick, we have learned to work together and we have had our French school boards and our English school boards. And in spite of that, people have worked together and it did not create just unilingual francophones or anglophones. I think that New Brunswick has become more bilingual because of that, and because of our mutual respect.

Last year, on the question of francophone immersion classes in the schools, the Liberal provincial government of Shawn Graham did not want children to start learning French before grade five, in the only officially bilingual province in Canada. I would never have believed that I would see 350 anglophones in the streets of Fredericton fighting to have their children learn French from a very young age, when they first start school.

The two communities have grown closer. I think we can see the difference between how it was before and the direction we are taking today.

For example, at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the organization Parents for French has appeared several times to say that the government should give the provinces more money to help establish more immersion schools so that our children can learn both languages.



*Private Members' Business*

Now people are saying they want to learn both languages. This bill does not frighten me so far. It is a beginning. Voting to have it referred to committee would show our ability to talk to each other and to study the bill. It saddens me to hear the Liberals say they will vote against it. We can get some Quebec anglophones and francophones to come in to talk about it, we can chat with them and perhaps come up with some amendments to the bill.

The member for Joliette had even suggested some amendments to the bill. Let us look at the situation as a whole, rather than jump on the Bloc members about its dealing with a nation, and calling them a bunch of separatists. I know that is not what the hon. member said. But people would say that is the perception people have when it comes from the Bloc Québécois. And that is not what it is.

There is one province within North America that is the flower of the francophone culture. As for us, we are the francophones from the rest of Canada and we must protect the language and culture. This is important. We have now made some progress and anglophones see us now, not as a threat, but as full members of society able to work in our own language.

In some countries, there are five or six languages spoken with no problem whatsoever. If, however, we feel that we have to introduce a bill because in Quebec, a province with a francophone majority, francophones are being required to speak English in the workplace because the employer is English, it shows that not much progress has been made.

We need to look at how adjustments can be made. I have problems with Canada Post, for example. There is a problem within the francophonie itself, at the moment. When a person applies for a job with Canada Post, he has to do a test that comes from Quebec. But we Acadians—and it is not that we cannot understand each other—have a different language and a different accent. So I have been told by people working at Canada Post—

• (1835)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** I do not think the hon. member saw the chair's signal.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

**Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am proud to have the pleasure of rising here in the House on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to talk about the language of Quebec, a majority language that is widely spoken in economic, cultural, social and political spheres. It is used in most of our institutions and businesses. Yet that language needs protection.

As I mentioned earlier, Quebec has seen some important struggles, including that of GM workers in Boisbriand. They went on strike for three and a half months in order to protect this language in the workplace, because they were being forced to work in English. Some workers were even dismissed because they did not understand English. Since they were receiving instructions in English, this did cause some major problems. The union had to defend them and initiate strike action to ensure that the French-language collective agreement would guarantee respect for workers, in matters of labour relations, communications and workplace documents. The workers were given only an English version of the documents telling them how to assemble a car. Imagine how hard it must have been for

workers who do not speak English to defend themselves in a situation like that.

There is no doubt the French language is important. This bill will affect private companies in Quebec. Either the Liberal Party member forgot part of the bill or she misread it. This bill targets large multinational corporations operating across Canada, whose employees are forced to use English as the language of work. These corporations include banks, airlines, rail lines, NAV CANADA, and all such companies. Take inter-city transportation, where Quebec truckers transporting goods from one province to another or from one town to another have serious problems doing their work in French.

The purpose of this bill is to prevent this kind of discrimination. Earlier, my colleague said that some 200,000 to 250,000 workers are not currently subject to the Charter of the French Language, so they have no way of ensuring that their employers respect their language—French, which is protected under the Charter of the French Language in Quebec—in their own province. Without that charter, we would still be where we were in the 1970s when people were striking. Things could be even worse.

People in Quebec are proud to speak French. Quebec has been recognized as a nation. All we need are some small changes to the legislation that governs the promotion of French and English in Canadian society, changes to sections 7 and 9, to the Commissioner of Official Languages' mandate. All we have to do is insert the Charter of the French Language and enforce its provisions in all of these major institutions.

Consider certain companies, those operating in the interprovincial marine transport sector, for example. Quebeckers who go from one lake to another—people in Quebec use all kinds of waterways—are subject to the English language, the dominant language. Often, they cannot use their own language.

• (1840)

This is simply a question of respect and non-discrimination. The same applies for air transportation, for the workers travel across the country and are often forced to speak English only.

Consider the banks. We have several banks in Quebec, including the Royal Bank of Canada, the Laurentian Bank of Canada and the National Bank of Canada. Every day, the workers speak only English with their bosses: they get their orders in English and they carry them out in English, even though we know for a fact that the entire clientele of these banks in Quebec do business in French. In the end, it is simply a question of respect.

Consider private firms as well. I am thinking among others of Bell Canada, which my colleague mentioned earlier, of Telus, Canwest, Cogeco and Astral Media, which are not subject to the charter. Those persons who have never visited them should take the time to do so. They will see that, indeed, English is dominant there.

For us, this bill is seeking nothing but justice for the workers, and respect for the French language. French has been protected all these years by the Charter of the French Language, thanks to which that language continues to be commonly spoken in Quebec today.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I would also point out that, in Quebec, people often speak two or three languages, but the French culture and the French language are protected. As I always say, we are surrounded by 250 million anglophones. Yet we have succeeded in preserving and protecting French, and in making it dominant. French is increasingly spoken in Quebec, even in economic affairs. Whether it be the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, solidarity funds or equity funds, all important economic tools of the financial sector, French is the language used. Today it is possible to build in French in Quebec. This is not because we want to be different, but only because French is our language, and we are proud of it.

The Bloc Québécois is asking the federal government to recognize and respect Quebec's Charter of the French Language in the Official Languages Act, and to respect the spirit of the charter in matters relating to language of signage and language of work in related legislation.

• (1845)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles has about three minutes left. He may continue later.

**Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I know that you are a Franco-Columbian and I believe the debate in this House is very interesting.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act (Charter of the French Language) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

This year, as we mark the 40th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, it is important to note that, several decades ago, the Government of Canada established a linguistic framework based on the rights of French and English. Respect is the basis for our policy: respect for our two official languages and respect for the groups and the individuals who speak those two languages.

Canada defines itself as a country that values pluralism and where French and English have the status of official languages. Language rights are defined in our constitutional texts and in the Official Languages Act, and the most recent amendments made to that act in 2005 have strengthened those rights.

I want to assure this House that our government is firmly committed to meeting its obligations to support the official languages and promote French and English, not only in Quebec, but throughout Canada. This important commitment underscores the key role of the Government of Canada in this area, a role that is understood and supported by the majority of Quebecers. According to a poll conducted by Decima Research, 2006, *Attitudes and Perceptions towards Canada's Official Languages*, 84% believe that linguistic duality is a source of cultural enrichment and 87% believe that the Government of Canada has an important role to play in promoting and protecting the status and use of French within Canadian society.

Our government takes that duality—both the francophone reality of Quebec and the fact of francophone minorities across the country—into consideration in all its actions. As a result of the 2005 amendment to the Official Languages Act, the Government of Canada is even more committed to promoting the vitality of official

language minorities and full recognition of French and English in Canadian society. We honour that commitment by providing unequivocal support for promoting French throughout the country, and particularly in Quebec.

I would like to take a moment to outline the linguistic framework put in place in recent decades. July 9, 2009 will mark the 40th anniversary of the first Official Languages Act passed by the Parliament of Canada in 1969. This act came out of the recommendations in the report by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

This act laid the groundwork for protecting and enhancing linguistic duality in Canada by recognizing French and English as the official languages of all federal institutions in Canada and giving them equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada. The Official Languages Act also created the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, whose job it is to oversee the implementation of the act, receive and investigate public complaints, conduct independent studies and report to Parliament.

This act would lead to the enshrinement of language rights in the Constitution with the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982.

• (1850)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

CULTURE

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak in this adjournment debate.

I have chosen to take part this evening because I asked a question in this House on February 4 of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages and did not get a satisfactory answer. I asked him how it was that he preferred to spend \$25 million to bring foreign artists to Toronto and to cut \$45 million from artists here who promote Quebec and Canadian culture abroad. As a result, the entire arts community is against him. I asked him how he could claim to be listening to artists and the cultural community, and how he could have the gall to say that the budget that had just been tabled in the House was a good thing. It was a good thing for his two chums in Toronto who were raking in a lot of money from the investment of \$25 million of this government's money.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I went on to say that Quebec's entire cultural community was opposed to this approach and to making this a priority. The money for artists must go first of all to the artists. What is more, that same week, within days, it was reported in a study commissioned and released by the Minister of Canadian Heritage that artists were living in deplorable conditions on an average annual income of barely \$20,000. There we have the minister taking \$25 million and handing it over to some people in Toronto to create the Canada Prizes, six-figure awards to foreign artists, while our own are barely making ends meet. They make an average of \$20,000 a year. That made no sense to me then, and it makes no more today. The minister did not give me a satisfactory answer to that.

Obviously, the minister will say this is not true, and that everyone is not against him; one person said he was OK. That is what he told me. One person as opposed to all of Quebec. That is an absolutely ridiculous answer. I understand he is required to give an answer when I ask questions, but he ought to make a better choice of words. He also said that he had invested unprecedented amounts in the history of this country in arts and culture.

Seriously though: "unprecedented amounts". The amounts he invested are basically the same, give or take a few million dollars, as in previous years. I have not done the math, but I am sure that, in constant dollars, today's artists are losing out, particularly because they have just lost \$45 million. Last year, the government cut \$45 million from its programs, \$26 million of that in August. Trade Routes and PromArt were important programs that enabled artists, cultural organizations, and dance and theatre companies to travel abroad, pay their bills and make it to the end of the fiscal year. Now they cannot do any of that because these programs no longer exist.

On November 20, the minister told me that he had transferred \$21 million to the Olympic torch relay. During question period, he said: "We gave that money to the torch relay".

• (1855)

[*English*]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Madam Speaker, you are putting in a long day today. I have a great appreciation for your work ethic. You were here this morning and you are here tonight. It is very impressive.

With respect to the question before the House, the hon. member has not put forward the numbers accurately to reflect what has actually occurred. She mentioned the figure of \$45 million, but she knows that is not what actually was taken in trade routes. Trade routes was a \$7 million program. We have reallocated that money and provided record funding in support of arts and culture in this country. In fact, the Canada Council for the Arts received a 17% increase, record funding of \$181 million annually.

Frankly, we have heard from artists around the country who have celebrated that increase to the Canada Council. Those are artists helping artists. Those are artists promoting the arts right here in Canada. That is an arm's length organization that we have heard an awful lot of good things about at committee. The artists are happy with it. Our government is the one that has provided record funding to the Canada Council. I hope the people in Quebec are listening to that. They should not have to listen to constant misrepresentation of

those numbers. Those are the facts. The Canada Council is receiving record funding.

However, we did not stop there. Just this year we added \$276 million to the arts over the next two years. Our record investments include \$540 million in support of the arts. That is in this year's economic action plan. Of course, as we all know, the Bloc voted against that. We also brought in \$100 million in support for festivals. I know the member is aware that there are festivals in Quebec. Some of the festivals are having a difficult time raising advertising revenue for this year. We want to make sure that those Quebec festivals and festivals from coast to coast across Canada go ahead as planned. We know how much they mean to the communities. We know how much they mean to artists. That is why this government has stepped up in a major way to support those festivals.

Of course, the Bloc members went the opposite way. They said they did not want to support those festivals. That is what they did when they voted against the economic action plan. They said they did not want to support magazines. That is what they voted against. They said they did not want to support expanded funding to the Canada Council. That is what they voted against. They said they did not want to support the new funding for the Department of Canadian Heritage and support for arts and culture. That is what they did when they voted against the budget.

It is very difficult at committee where we fight for truth. People come in and put forward the truth. Then the truth is manipulated and comes out the other side and it is no longer reflective of what the witnesses said. For example, the member mentioned the figure of \$45 million. She knows full well that figure is not reflective of arts and culture. She knows full well that is not accurate, but we continue to hear it in the House.

I think that is unfortunate, because I would like to talk about the investment the government is putting behind artists. I would like to talk about the record amount of investment that we put behind artists. The Bloc has no interest in talking about that, because if the Bloc members went back to their ridings and indicated that it is this Conservative government that is putting record funding behind arts and culture and into support of artists from coast to coast to coast in this country, frankly, there would not be as many of the Bloc members here.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée:** Madam Speaker, first of all, I never said that Trade Routes cost \$45 million. That is not what I said. I said that some 20 subsidy programs totaling \$45 million were cut in 2008. The programs cut in August cost \$26 million, and Trade Routes cost \$7 million in two instalments, one for \$5 million and the other for \$2 million. My figures are correct.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The member can trumpet his record-breaking allocations to the Council for the Arts all he wants, but artists know that he has nothing to be proud of. The Council for the Arts needed \$300 million, and the government increased its budget to \$181 million. That is a \$120 million shortfall. He should have mentioned that too.

He should also have mentioned that festivals do not give a penny to artists. Festivals are nice, and everybody likes them, but artists do not get a penny out of them. Festivals are good for tourism, and that makes people happy.

The member said that we voted against his party, but I would like to point out two dates. On May 10—

● (1900)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Once again, Madam Speaker, I take issue with the quoting of the number of \$45 million. The member knows full well that the overwhelming majority of that amount was for programs where those funds were no longer required because they had achieved the objective and had nothing to do with the arts or artists. We are talking about accurately reflecting what those numbers actually mean.

There is one thing I will never apologize for in the House, and, in fact, I am very proud of. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to responsibly spending taxpayer dollars and ensuring we get the best possible result for every hard-earned taxpayer dollar that is sent to the Government of Canada in support of not just the arts but every facet that government is called upon to serve. The government must be responsible in how it spends dollars. Our government is doing that and I am proud of it.

## STATUS OF WOMEN

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity this evening to follow up on a question that I asked in the House regarding the CEDAW declaration that the Prime Minister signed during the election campaign of 2006. As most will know, CEDAW is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a UN document that all leaders in the election campaign signed.

The response I received at the time did not even begin to address the obligations under CEDAW. Therefore, I am pleased to have the opportunity to ask the question again tonight.

As many in the House know, since the Conservative government has come into power, Canada has been somewhat of an international embarrassment. It failed to ratify the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it obstructed climate change at the UN, it failed to take the recommendations from the universal peer review of Canada seriously and, most certainly, it has failed to uphold the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in spite of the fact that the Prime Minister, in an election campaign, signed a pledge card, which many of us as candidates saw, and has woefully neglected to address.

The government has cut funding to women's advocacy. It took the word "equality" from the mandate of the Status of Women. It

eliminated funding for research under the Status of Women, research, ironically, that it has been referring to and trumpeting.

Earlier this month, women across the country voiced their displeasure with the government's lack of action for Canadian women and protested the Minister of State for the Status of Women when she took the stage at the UN Commission on the Status of Women last month, another embarrassment.

Representatives of Canadian women's organizations, labour unions, and not-for-profits gathered at the front gates of the United Nations to protest the government's regressive policies towards women. At the protest the women announced their intent to file a complaint against the government with the UN.

It has been nearly six months since CEDAW issued its observations on Canada's record. It has asked for Canada to respond within a year, and to the best of my knowledge, little progress has been made on the response to date.

The committee's comments have been described by many as serious, disturbing and scathing. So far, there has been no action. Budget 2009 was the time to advance the equality of women and to address concretely some of the recommendations in the CEDAW document, or at least to reference them and acknowledge them.

The committee made about 20 recommendations to Canada that are detailed and reasonable. It spoke certainly to the closing of the Status of Women Canada offices across the country and the limited accessibility for women. It talked about the government's revision of status of women guidelines and its doing away with advocacy and research.

Because of the extraordinary circumstances, CEDAW asked for a report within one year on the social assistance levels across the country and action on the growing problem of violence against aboriginal women. More specifically, CEDAW spoke to the 500 missing and murdered aboriginal women. It spoke to the status of women under Bill C-31 of the first session of the 33rd Parliament and to many other issues.

Most particularly I want to emphasize the court challenges program and the elimination of that program.

● (1905)

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC):** Madam Speaker, Canada remains a world leader in this fight to end gender discrimination and we take this leadership role very seriously, both within our borders and internationally.

Our commitment to women's equality at home and abroad was recently demonstrated when our Minister of State led Canada's delegation to the UN. There she met with her counterparts from around the world to share best practices and to continue Canada's leadership role.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Last week, the Minister of State also met with Valerie Jarrett, head of the newly formed inter-agency White House Council on Women and Girls. During the meeting, they discussed best practices on advancing women's equality within their own countries. This meeting is yet another example of Canada demonstrating leadership on the global stage.

The Government of Canada is taking leadership to bring about equality for women because we want nothing less than women's full and equal participation in the economic, social and democratic life of the country.

Our commitment to women's equality is demonstrated by the Prime Minister's recent appointment of the highest percentage of women to cabinet in Canada's history.

As well, we increased status of women funding by 42%, bringing it to its highest level ever. This funding increase means that more women are receiving the skills and services they need to participate fully in Canadian life.

We are witnessing significant progress in a number of areas, including women's employment and labour force participation rates, which are approaching record highs. Women are increasingly represented in a wide range of professional fields as well as in careers and fields of study traditionally dominated by men.

Violence against women also remains an issue of grave concern. Having worked in the male-dominated field of policing for almost 19 years, I understand intimately the needs in terms of this violence issue, and that is why I am a Conservative. It is because we recognize that more work needs to be done to address this problem, which affects all communities in Canada.

We believe that those who commit such crimes against girls and women must be held accountable. That is why we passed the Tackling Violent Crime Act and made significant investments in policing, youth crime prevention, the renewal of federal corrections, combatting gun crime, and supporting victims of crime. We also put an end to conditional sentences, including house arrest for serious offences such as violent or sexual crimes.

This government is currently implementing many of the recommendations put forward by CEDAW, including working to end violence against women, providing women with the skills they need to take on leadership roles and participate equally in the economy, and protecting the human rights of aboriginal women.

We are responding to the issue of missing aboriginal women by funding the Sisters in Spirit initiative. Addressing violence against aboriginal women is a serious concern for this government, which is why we endorsed the federal-provincial-territorial Iqaluit declaration, which recognizes that sustained and coordinated action is required to reduce sexualized violence against aboriginal women. We have also co-sponsored the National Aboriginal Women's Summits, which focused on violence and other quality of life issues.

Our government has also demonstrated leadership on the issue of human trafficking. Under our leadership, we changed the rules regarding visas to victims of trafficking, and immigration officers are now able to grant temporary resident permits for up to 180 days to trafficking victims.

This government has, time and time again, demonstrated its commitment to addressing women's equality. We have made important strides, and I can assure the House that we will continue to work to create the conditions for success for all Canadian women.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Madam Speaker, the Conservatives do not have a monopoly on virtue when it comes to the issue of violence against women. I think that is a concern of all members of all parties and not solely that of Conservatives.

My colleague across references the minister's appearance at the UN. I would be ashamed to be a minister at an international meeting where the people and the women of my own country demonstrating against me. The Conservatives have co-opted the word "equality" and re-tooled it to fit their own needs as to what constitutes equality.

We must remember that the Prime Minister signed the CEDAW pledge. He understood what the CEDAW pledge meant in terms of the elimination of discrimination against women.

When the minister and the Prime Minister represent Canada abroad, they should remember the words of Gandhi, "We must be the change we want to see in the world".

• (1910)

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Madam Speaker, the member opposite can spin her misleading messages any which way she chooses, but the facts are consistent. This government is taking a leadership role to advance equality for women.

For example, personal tax relief will put money back in women's pockets. New tax measures and access to start-up funding will stimulate business for women-owned enterprises. Improvements to maternity, parental and E.I. benefits will ensure self-employed and non-standard workers and their families access to the supports and benefits they require.

Investments in social housing, totalling more than \$2 billion, will particularly benefit aboriginal women, senior women, women with disabilities, lone parent women and women living in poverty. It is a Conservative government that will finally empower aboriginal women through the changes to the marital property issue on reserves.

We have taken action and we will continue to take action until we reach our goal.

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on the issue of employment insurance, which was not adequately addressed by the government in question period.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

As we well know, we are living through one of the worst economic crisis of our existence. Certainly it is the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. It is a crisis that developed very gradually. Over the past 20 years, we have seen a huge erosion in family income. It has come into sharp relief over the last few months due to the economic crisis that has hit home in Canada because of a complete lack of industrial strategy or job strategy. It is hitting people in every part of the country, including my constituency of Burnaby—New Westminster.

We are seeing hundreds of cases for requests for employment insurance and most of those Canadians are being denied Employment Insurance.

The government has billions of dollars to bail out banking and corporate CEOs. They shovel money off the back of a truck when it comes to a small number of wealthy Canadians, but what has it done for ordinary Canadians?

It is very clear that the Conservatives have betrayed the trust that ordinary Canadians have placed in our national government. Back 20 years ago, the eligibility rate for employment insurance was 75%. In other words, about 75% of those who were unemployed could access the insurance fund into which they had paid.

I am not completely blaming the Conservatives. Under the Liberals that eroded back to about 38%. In other words, just over one-third of those who were unemployed could actually access the money they had paid into employment insurance.

Now, as the Caledon Institute of Social Policy has very clearly said, about 44% of unemployed Canadians qualify for benefits under employment insurance. This is an insurance program into which Canadians have paid.

We have heard referenced many times the \$54 billion taken out of the fund, first by the Liberals and now under the Conservatives. That means only 44% of unemployed Canadians qualified for benefits.

It is absolutely absurd. These are people in Burnaby—New Westminster who, through no fault of their own, have seen local softwood mills close. Three of them have closed in my area because of the softwood lumber sellout, which was an absolutely irresponsible piece of policy that never should have been signed. Mills have closed as a result that. A couple of thousand people were thrown out of work directly. If we add the indirect jobs, we are talking about hundreds and hundreds more, yet, according to what has been a very serious analysis of employment insurance, most of those people do not qualify.

It is worse in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia than elsewhere. It is estimated, again by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, that only about 28% of people in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia qualify for employment insurance. In areas that voted Conservative, such as Calgary and Regina, it is even lower. It is 19% in Calgary and 18.9% in Regina.

It is absolutely absurd that we have a situation where hard-working Canadians pay into employment insurance, yet they cannot access it. They cannot access it to feed their families when they are in dire need. They cannot access it to keep a roof over their heads. This is absolutely deplorable.

The government throws out these figures, saying that 80% or 90% of those who qualify get employment insurance. The question is right there. It is because the qualifications are so stringent that most people do not qualify even though they pay into the fund. That is why this constitutes a betrayal of ordinary, hard-working Canadians. They have worked hard. They deserve employment insurance.

• (1915)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member's party and the NDP leader said that they would oppose the budget even before they read it. Now that the budget is before the House, they either do not know, or they are misinformed, or they do not want to know what the economic action plan will do for those who are unemployed.

Our government is taking action to help Canadians weather the global economic crisis through our economic action plan. We want to help ensure that Canada emerges from the current economic downturn in a stronger position.

Under the plan, we are investing \$8.3 billion, not an insignificant amount, in the Canada skills and transition strategy. This strategy will strengthen employment insurance benefits and expand skills training opportunities.

We recognize that many Canadians, who find themselves out of work, are looking to employment insurance to help make ends meet. Our plan is designed to help people who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own by providing them with the benefits they need during these difficult times. That is why, among other things, we have extended the duration of EI benefits by expanding nationally a pilot project, which already provided five extra weeks of EI benefits to EI claimants in areas of high unemployment. That alone constitutes additional estimated costs of \$1.15 billion.

In addition to this measure, for a period of two years, we have increased the maximum duration of EI benefits available under the EI program from 45 weeks to 50 weeks. Over 400,000 Canadians will benefit from these measures in the first year alone.

In terms of the number of people who can access EI, it is important to note that, according to the Statistics Canada employment insurance coverage survey, over 82% of those who paid into the program and either lost their jobs or quit with cause were eligible for benefits.

Unfortunately, often the opposition cites numbers that are misleading based on something known as the beneficiary to unemployment ratio, or the BU ratio for short. These statistics are not a good measure of EI access. They include persons whom the program was not designed to serve, such as the self-employed, and there is some action being taken in that regard, as well as students, those who quit without cause, or even those who have never worked.

However, statistics aside, the member opposite should know that the EI system automatically responds to changes in the labour market. As unemployment rates increase, claimants can access EI with fewer hours and have additional weeks of benefits, and that is a fact. Where the need is greater, that is where the money flows.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

For example, over the last year, the unemployed in the Oshawa region can now access four additional weeks of EI benefits, while working approximately two weeks less. In fact, since October 2008, 26 regions across the country, like Oshawa, have seen their entrance requirements decrease and their benefit durations increase.

Our government recognizes the need to further increase access to EI benefits. That is why our economic action plan also includes a \$500 million strategic training and transition fund to support the particular needs of individuals, including those who do not qualify for EI. There are other amounts of dollars, not insignificant but substantial investments that the member chooses to ignore.

These are just a few of the measures we have taken to help Canadians get through these tough times. However, the member opposite and his party voted against each and every one of these measures to help Canadians. They are not helping Canadians with their opposition. Now that the Budget Implementation Act has passed, this help can be provided to Canadians.

Our economic action plan is designed to put Canadians back to work and put our economy back on track. We are happy our economic action plan can now be put to work, helping Canadians.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam Speaker, the New Democratic Party caucus was the only caucus where every member actually read the budget.

What we found out, like everyone else who understood what the budget said, was not a single additional new person would qualify for employment insurance after the budget was presented than before the budget. The budget did not change anything.

The parliamentary secretary references that there is some extension in benefits for those who already qualify, but most people do not qualify, and that is the problem.

The parliamentary secretary cited the BU ratio. That ratio should have in its title B as well as S. Essentially it does not allow any

additional Canadian to qualify for employment insurance. That is the problem. That is why Canadians are losing their homes. That is why Canadians are unable to feed their families. That is why the unemployed are suffering so much because—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the New Democratic Party said that he would vote against the budget even before the budget was tabled and filed in the House. I find that remarkable.

We know Canadians have been affected by these economic troubles. We know many have lost jobs through circumstances beyond their control. We understand that these are tough and uncertain times for many Canadians.

That is why, among other things, our economic action plan does a number of things. We will help over 400,000 people benefit from an additional five weeks of EI benefits that were not there before. We will help 190,000 people, including long-tenured and older workers, get retrained to find a new job and put food on the table for their families.

We are providing more in terms of expanded work-sharing so workers can continue working to support their families during this uncertain time.

Our government has heard the needs of Canadians. We are delivering on the kind of action they want us to deliver during this tough economic times.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:18 p.m.)

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