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Monday, October 19, 2009

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 19, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

CANADIAN PRODUCTS PROMOTION ACT

The House resumed from June 1, 2009 consideration of the motion that Bill C-306, An Act respecting the use of government contracts to promote economic development, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings had the floor. There are seven minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, when discussing this issue, I talked quite a bit about the perils of protectionism and the advantages of trade. Today I will elaborate further on those components.

Trade also gives consumers more choice. We can think of all of the things that would disappear if our imports were taken away from us: food, clothing and other products that used to be, at some times, considered exotic. This is not just a question of consumers buying foreign-finished products. Imports are used as materials, components and equipment for local production. If trade allows us to import more, it also allows others to then buy more of our exports. That means that trade increases our incomes.

The advantages of trade spread to every part of our economy and touch every Canadian, from the farmer growing wheat to the engineer designing tractors, from the factory worker producing aircraft to the supplier providing aircraft parts. Trade's bottom line is our people and the jobs that it provides them with. One in five jobs in Canada is linked to international trade. We export more than half of our manufactured goods.

Let us look for a moment at our trade with the United States as an example. Canada and the U.S. are each other's most important partner in economic growth. Since the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1988 and then NAFTA in 1992, there is no doubt that our bilateral trade has been one of the major components of economic growth.

During these two decades, Canada-U.S. trade has tripled. Investment flows have also increased substantially. Two-way trade crosses the Canada-U.S. border at the rate of \$1.7 billion a day. I would just ask members to think about that scale. That is well over \$1 million per minute of trade. It is estimated that over three million jobs in Canada depend on our trade with the U.S.

Given this scale of success, it is clear that protectionism is our mutual adversary. Protectionism, quite frankly, is the greatest ideological threat in this global recession. Restrictions on trade reduce real growth prospects in both the developed and the developing world. Restricting imports might look like an effective way of supporting an economic sector, but doing so biases the economy against other sectors that should not be penalized.

We are committed to respecting and upholding our trade commitments with our partners. We expect our partners to do the same.

To come out of this global recession, we need to continue to trade with as few barriers as possible. The Great Depression taught us that the downward spiral of protectionism will only lead to more dire situations. That is why our economic action plan protects Canadians during the global recession, not by restricting trade but by promoting it.

Our Budget Implementation Act revoked additional tariffs in order to increase international trade. Our plan works to create new, good jobs for the future and to equip our country for successes in the years ahead. It is designed to stimulate economic growth, to restore confidence and to support Canadians and their families during the global recession.

It takes action to build infrastructure, stimulate housing construction, and support businesses and communities. It also helps reduce taxes, freezes EI rates, and assists Canadians through the Canada skills and transition strategy. It also improves access to financing and strengthens Canada's financial system.

Members do not have to take my word for it or your word, Mr. Speaker, or even the word of other members in the House here. This initiative has in fact been praised by the International Monetary Fund, a respected international body. In a recent report, they called it "large, timely and well targeted".

They said our immediate focus should be on implementing the budget to mobilize spending.

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We are acting through the most appropriate means to protect our economy and Canadians affected by this downturn. That includes the tax system. It includes the employment insurance program. It includes direct spending by federal and provincial governments. It also includes lending by crown corporations, and it includes partnerships with the private sector.

What it does not include is a return to the perilous ideology of protectionism.

Canadians know that in this global economy we cannot simply build a fortress and lock ourselves inside. That would be destructive.

I believe the evidence before us can lead to only one conclusion. Therefore I call upon my colleagues in the House to emphatically oppose the bill which quite frankly would be dangerous to the health and welfare of every Canadian.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-306, put forward by the member for Rivière-du-Nord of the Bloc.

First of all, members will know that this member is a very long-standing member of this place. I think she has been here for over 20 years.

My experience in working with this member on a number of occasions is that when she brings things up, they are usually fairly well thought out and provocative in terms of promoting debate. If I look at the member's speech, she is asking the House to give her an opportunity to debate the bill in committee.

We have had this on so many occasions, particularly for employment insurance bills where there have been many attempts to try to bring to the attention of Canadians the need for reform in terms of EI. We know that there needs to be a royal recommendation. We know that at the end of the day, there will never be a final vote but the debate is very important.

It is important so that Canadians understand the implications, so that within this place we look at the areas that we have difficulty with, to get the answers to certain specific questions because members usually do not have the personal expertise or the access within a short timeframe to the expertise that will give us the answers to those questions. Those questions include such things as what latitude we have within the WTO to give some preferential treatment to buy Canadian for government procurement.

It is a pretty good question. I know that our experience in this place has been that dealing with matters to do with the WTO creates a lot of acrimony. It could be the softwood lumber deal. We know that the dispute resolution mechanisms have been very problematic. We have had many debates in this place about why Canada is always on the short end of the stick when it comes to disputes. Why do we get dragged through the courts for years and years?

It is because the WTO and NAFTA do not provide the precision that we need to understand how much latitude we have to put the best interests of Canadians first, and that is what the member is asking for. Therefore I congratulate the member on bringing the bill forward.

In her speech the member also talked about the context that we have to put this conversation into. It has to do with the economic challenges we are facing now. It has to do with the fact that we have a government that said it was going to balance the budget. It had a \$13 billion surplus. We now find out that as the last fiscal year ended, it turned out there was a \$5 billion deficit.

Therefore the starting point was wrong. It squandered a \$13 billion annual surplus and turned it into a \$5 billion deficit. Then what happened? We had a budget come forward saying that we were going to have four years of surplus. We now know that at last report there was a \$30 billion deficit. Now it is up to a \$50 billion deficit and we have job losses that were over 9%. I think it dropped slightly, which I think is an aberration. All the experts seem to think we are going to have unemployment in the 10% range in Canada.

That means there are half a million families out there who are now forced to live on EI, and there are many families out there whose EI benefits have run out.

Therefore the member raises in her bill, Bill C-306 that the "purpose of this enactment is to promote economic development in Canada by ensuring that, in the procurement of its goods and services, the Government of Canada gives preference to Canadian products while complying with its international obligations".

It is not saying that we should break the law but that we should do what we can within the rules of the game that we have, and that way we should be able to stimulate the Canadian economy and we should be able to stimulate job growth. That as a premise makes a lot of sense.

It also specifies that the buy Canadian approach would not exceed, I think, 7.5% in terms of giving preference to Canadian products.

● (1110)

I have a problem with 7.5%. I would like to debate that. However, the 7.5% is not the issue in this debate. The issue is whether we need another stimulus effort within Canada to assist Canadian business and industry to deal with the economic situation that we are faced with, to deal with the unemployment situation that we have.

The bill may not see the light of day, in terms of a final disposition. I do not know. It is hard to say these days. However, the debate is a relevant debate. We are not going to resolve it here by having a half-dozen speakers when there are probably 50 people in this place who would like to talk about it. We can only talk about it within the context of what we know now.

However, things are happening very quickly today. In the United States, President Obama has the issue of American protectionism facing him, and the U.S. is going through the process. Our provinces have been talking about opening up to the Americans provincial procurement and bidding on contracts, on an equal basis. They are trying to make it work. However, we have to remember our history in these things. Canada always seems to get the short end of the stick when it comes down to trade issues.

I can fully understand the United States saying that Americans should support American business. There is nothing wrong with that.

As well, there is nothing wrong with Canada, the Canadian government and Canadian members of Parliament encouraging Canadians to look at the labels and buy Canadian, because when we buy Canadian, we help Canadian business and Canadian jobs.

Today we are also going to be debating the issue of forestry, which is a beautiful example of where we have opportunities, but we need to take some action, and I am pretty sure that is going to get the support of the House.

I look at private members' business as a proxy for debate, and that debate cannot fully happen here at second reading. The bill needs to go to committee. It needs to have witnesses and people with expertise so that we can ask questions and get answers. We have hon. members on these committees who work on this stuff time and time again. The knowledge, the approach, and the quality of the debate of the kinds of issues that will come up at committee are certainly more substantive than they are in this place right now. That is not to say that members are not capable of doing this. However, they do not have the time and they cannot ask questions or make comments. I could not ask questions of the member and nobody can ask questions of me.

Second reading is to ask whether we have an issue here that is worthy of more debate. In my humble opinion, I believe there is. I believe that the bill merits support to go to committee to have relevant debate, and I will be supporting this particular bill.

The other thing I wanted to talk about is whether or not matters like a home renovation tax credit or the stimulus program that we have, through which we are encouraging infrastructure, though not exclusively—as we know, there is a lot of stimulus money going to things that are not infrastructure—are promoting Canadian jobs, promoting Canadian business, promoting some assistance in the difficult circumstances we find in this economic climate. Those actions are not inconsistent, and this bill is not inconsistent with those actions with regard to the intent.

The intent here is to address our financial situation, the job situation and, to some extent, WTO, NAFTA and other trade agreement provisions that we have, as well as what the rules of the game are, what latitude we have and how we can have all Canadian businesses do better in this economic climate.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very happy to hear what the Liberal member had to say.

In the history of Parliament, the Liberals have never supported a domestic procurement policy. In fact, the Liberals have always criticized the NDP's promotion of policies that would use taxpayer money to buy Canadian products and to create jobs in Canada. The Liberals have made an about-face here, but I think that is a good thing. If the Liberals have finally realized that the NDP is always right, we are very happy, and we are very happy to hear that they will be supporting a policy that has long been endorsed by the NDP.

This bill is a positive step by the Bloc Québécois to support these procurement policies. This goes along with what the NDP has been saying for years, that we must use taxpayer money to support our

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Canadian industries. We support this Bloc bill, and we will be very happy if it receives the support of all the opposition parties.

Of course, this will be debated in committee, and that is very important. We know that the arguments others have repeatedly made against the NDP's practice of buying Canadian are unfounded. For a long time, we have heard the Conservatives—and up until today, the Liberals—claim that these policies are illegal, because of the regulations of the World Trade Organization and NAFTA. But we know that that is not the case. Other countries have passed similar legislation. Think of the United States, for example, and their Jones act and their shipbuilding policy. The American Congress just passed buy American legislation. These policies would be illegal. But they are not. It is very clear that they are legal.

The United States, Japan, China, Mexico and the European community all have buy local and buy domestic policies. These are our trade partners, and 98% of our international deals are with countries that have domestic procurement policies. So, it is very clear that this is not illegal from the point of view of the WTO or NAFTA.

For a long time now, other parties have been using patently false arguments to attack the NDP for supporting buy Canadian policies. The CAW even asked for a legal opinion from a leading expert in international trade law, Steven Shrybman of Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP. His legal opinion was very clear: a thorough review of Canada's obligations under WTO agreements, NAFTA and the AIT demonstrates that buy Canadian policies adopted by municipal, provincial or federal governments would not violate either international or domestic agreements. Basically, Canadian governments have more freedom to adopt such policies than most people think.

It is clear that the Conservatives' claim is false. According to Mr. Shrybman, municipal and provincial governments may specify levels of Canadian content when purchasing goods and services and, under certain circumstances, may even limit tenders to products manufactured entirely in Canada.

The member for Rivière-du-Nord's bill clearly defines the scope of these purchases. I want to emphasize that governments can buy products made entirely in Canada. It is legal and it is good for our economy.

• (1120)

This proposed comprehensive buy Canadian policy would apply not only to the very visible public transportation sector, but also to all other purchases from garbage trucks to office furniture, from uniforms to construction materials, and more. Provincial governments will also be able to attach buy Canadian conditions to transfers to municipal governments, agencies and crown corporations. The legality of such policies is indisputable and comprehensive.

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Moreover, and most importantly, international trade law specifically addresses federal transfers to the provinces and international procurement regulations, thus enabling the federal government to attach comprehensive buy Canadian conditions to all funding transferred to other levels of government.

This legal opinion is very clear. It is also very clear that many countries around the world have implemented sound domestic procurement policies. The conditions are right for a bill like the one introduced by the member for Rivière-du-Nord. We can implement domestic procurement policies. We can use Canadian taxpayers' dollars to stimulate our economy just like every other country in the world.

It is somewhat ironic that the Bloc Québécois should be the ones to raise this issue in the House. Of course the NDP have also drafted similar bills, but the Bloc's bill goes a little further than the NDP's bills. The Bloc is introducing a bill that will help all Canadians, while, so far, the Conservatives and the Liberals have always rejected the possibility of using federal, provincial and municipal government funds to stimulate our economy.

This is an important issue, given that, over the past 20 years, the vast majority of Canadian families have seen their family income decrease, which is surprising. It is not an issue that is widely reported in the media, but that is the reality. According to Statistics Canada, since the first Canada-United States free trade agreement was signed and implemented, two-thirds of Canadian families have seen their family income decrease.

It is very clear that our economic and procurement policies are making the vast majority of Canadians poorer now than they were 20 years ago. The Conservatives and the Liberals are washing their hands of the issue and saying that it is no big deal. They maintain that we simply have to keep signing free trade agreements, and everything will be fine. However, the economy is much more complicated. We must do more than simply sign a few free trade agreements and give lots of money to Canadian banks to ensure prosperity for everyone. That is not how it works.

The fact is, we are talking about a complete and massive failure on the part of successive Liberal and Conservative governments. They have the same economic policies and the same laissez-faire attitude, which are leaving most Canadians poorer than they were 20 years ago.

The Conservatives and the Liberals have no reason to be proud. The vast majority of Canadian families are poorer than they were.

• (1125)

[English]

We have real concerns about the direction that the government has taken. We have real concerns that it seems to always be willing to negotiate with concessions first. We have seen via rumours surrounding buy America that it is willing to give away health care protection and procurement policies for universities and rapid transit. That is a failure.

We cannot bargain with concessions. We have to put sound economic policy in place. Domestic procurement is a very sound part of a sound economic strategy. That is why we are supporting it.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-306, An Act respecting the use of government contracts to promote economic development, which was introduced by my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord.

Economic development is something we need more and more. The rapid deterioration of employment in Canada and Quebec is truly disturbing. There are 1.6 million unemployed workers in Canada. The OECD predicts that Canada's unemployment rate will reach 10.8% by the end of 2010. That means 2 million unemployed. We must support employment. We must support investment.

We are hearing more and more frequently about layoffs, plant closures and major reductions in productive investments. Forestry is vital to the regions of Quebec, and the situation in the forestry industry is a huge problem in Mauricie and in my riding of Trois-Rivières. In fact, 88,000 Quebecers work in forestry, sawmills and pulp and paper plants, accounting for roughly a third of Canadian forestry jobs.

How has this government responded? It gave the automotive industry \$5 billion, but it gave the forestry industry a mere \$170 million. Companies told us they needed loans and loan guarantees. A few years ago, I visited the Kruger company in Trois-Rivières. People there asked us for loans and loan guarantees to conduct research and development in order to help this industry. The government said no, and so plants are closing.

What does that have to do with this bill? We must support all our industries: aerospace, industrial research and fishing. One way to support industry is to give preference to Canadian companies when awarding government contracts. Bill C-306 is a response to this problem and seeks to ensure that government contracting complies with international agreements. The government has to use its procurement as an economic lever. This is something we need more and more. This bill would allow Canada to buy up to \$600 million worth of Canadian products annually, which represents 21,000 jobs a year. That is significant, and it is a positive response to a problem Canada is experiencing.

This bill focuses specifically on purchases not subject to NAFTA. It complies with the rules and the spirit of NAFTA. It is important to understand that. It is narrower in scope because it would affect Government of Canada direct goods and services procurement only. The Buy American Act affects all of the government's indirect procurement, not just direct procurement. This bill could be implemented in accordance with NAFTA. In order to comply with international treaties, this Bloc Québécois bill targets small federal government expenditures under \$25,000 U.S. for goods, \$64,786 for services other than construction and \$8.4 million for construction services.

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What amounts are we talking about? In 2008, the federal government spent \$20.1 billion on goods and services or 9.3% of its total expenditures. The Government of Canada is the largest purchaser of goods and services in Canada. Why not use the leverage we are proposing in Bill C-306 to truly produce spinoffs for our economy and for our businesses?

Passing this buy Canadian bill would halt the flow of some \$600 million to other countries annually. It is estimated that more than 21,000 jobs could have been created annually if this bill had already been passed. There is an urgent need to pass this bill, an urgent need to take action.

• (1130)

This bill would provide a way around NAFTA by tying all federal transfer payments to the provinces—equalization, transportation funding or transfers for post-secondary education and health—to investments being made in Canada only.

This would allow our companies producing steel, lumber, cement and all manufacturing companies in Quebec to become, provided the price differential is not significant, sole source suppliers for all provincial and municipal governments. As we know, numerous manufacturing companies have closed down. That is really worrisome. They did not get any support, and that has literally destroyed Quebec's economic fabric.

This Bloc Québécois bill does, however, allow for the sound management of public resources. Under the national preference rule for products and services contained in the bill, when choosing between a Canadian product and a similar non-Canadian product, the government is required to buy the Canadian product if its price does not exceed that of the non-Canadian one by more than 7.5%, ensuring sound management but at the same time giving preference to products with greater Canadian content. This 7.5% cap was set to prevent negative financial impacts on the government.

As for direct benefits to Quebec besides the ones already mentioned with respect to our businesses, through a clause requiring that the government treat the provinces fairly when making acquisitions, the bill proposes that the acquisition of goods and services be distributed equitably among the provinces. At present, the government obtains nearly two-thirds of its goods and services from Ontario. To remedy this situation, the bill includes a provision precluding the government from obtaining more than 50% of its products from another province.

In conclusion, if passed, this bill will promote job creation, Canadian procurement and the equitable distribution of acquisitions among the provinces while complying with agreements already entered into by Canada.

I therefore encourage our colleagues to vote for this bill. To refer this bill to committee is to say yes to Canadian procurement, yes to Canadian jobs, yes to renewed economic growth.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak briefly to the concept of assisting Canadian businesses and provide a different dimension on some of the other ways we can deal with this conundrum.

Obviously, Canada is a trading nation, and more so than most nations in the world. If we are not effective in the trading environment or if trade is not amicable to our needs, we will suffer more than other countries. Therefore, we need to be experts in this and have an international regime that will help us.

Of course, as trade increases, prosperity for our citizens increases if they can buy products at lower prices. However, make no mistake, we have confidence that Canadians can compete in a trading environment and our products and services can stand up to any in the world on a fair trading field.

There are a number of ways we can help businesses without abrogating trade laws or going against agreements because, by and large, the agreements we have with other countries are in Canada's favour and help our prosperity to a great extent. Canadians would be amazed to realize how much of their salaries they would lose if the loss of trade were spread over everyone. It is a significant part of our economy, much more than our trading partners.

Because it is so important, our government has a larger role than most countries in exporting products. There are a number of ways we can assist with that, whether it is financing or marketing our products that would not abrogate trade agreements. We of course need to be very careful that we do not go against the very agreements that work in our favour and facilitate trade.

Another way is the promotion of Canadian products. We have done that over the years through internal trade fairs in Canada to promote domestically and international trade fairs to help Canadian businesses participate in worldwide or specialty trade fairs that deal with particular products and open up markets around the world.

Another way to promote trade is through trade missions. However, with a number of embassies having been closed, some services overseas have been reduced, which is a bit disconcerting as that is a window on the world for our businesses by which we can help them facilitate trade without going against any treaties or agreements.

Another way is the work we have done in the past, which has diminished somewhat recently, related to research. As products are changing faster than they ever have in history, it is very important to keep our businesses in tune with the world in order to support the research they require and make it worth their investment so they can compete on an even basis with businesses around the world that also have access to excellent science.

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Another issue that we constantly hear about from Canadian business, and one only needs to make a quick phone call to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, is the red tape burden on small and large businesses. The information we collect is important to assist us in doing all the other things to help businesses and run Canada but we need to make it more efficient so there is a coordination of federal departments. We need to make some of the surveys coming from Statistics Canada more realistic and to show businesses the benefits of this type of research. We need try to make the research so that it is not overburdened with red tape while collecting the information that we need to monitor and assist businesses.

An additional way to promote trade in a rapidly and dynamically changing world is business intelligence. There is a function for the government as part of its productivity initiatives to collect intelligence and keep businesses up to date.

• (1140)

Approximately 95% of the research in the world is not done by Canadians but Canadian businesses should have quick access to that. Not all small businesses in Canada can afford to research around the world to find out the status of the biggest invention in their product is that day. The Canadian government could play a role in ensuring companies know the relevant advances in the industry so they can be right on the mark and be competitive with the research on that business intelligence around the world, which they cannot necessarily do themselves. Their research would not be duplicating something that has already been found and they could strike into new frontiers with their research and use the other 95% of the world's research to advance their own products or add to their product lines, service lines or the competitiveness of their existing products.

Finally, the government could also help businesses work together in promoting and developing strong associations, associations that understand their members and can make the cases for that particular sector to survive.

I support the spirit of the motion in helping Canadian business but not to abrogate existing agreements we have. To ensure we have a free and liberalized trade regime around the world is where we do our lobbying when Canadian businesses are attacked. When something goes against us grievously, whether it is something related to the United States and softwood lumber or some other country, it does not do a lot of good to change by doing our lobbying and making a big row inside Canada because that is not where the problem is. The problem is in the other country and there are interests in that other country that benefit by free Canadian trade and by not having Canadian trade abused.

My concept is that we need to extend our efforts more into those countries, to attack those who are attacking us on their home ground and to make a case for the benefits. We need to get the groups on side that benefit by free Canadian trade, such as housing contractors and people buying houses, especially low income people in the United States who need our reasonably priced Canadian lumber. We need to expand the frontiers and the intelligence of our lobbying. In all these ways I have mentioned, we could help Canadian businesses

when they are not being treated fairly by trade actions of other countries.

• (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord for her five minute right of reply.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have five minutes to conclude this debate. Thank you very much.

This is a most important bill for us and for all Canadians and Quebecers. In the midst of this economic crisis, we have to give ourselves the tools we need to create jobs. We are talking here about 21,000 jobs and \$600 million worth of purchases made annually by the federal government. Imagine how that could help us get through this situation where it is said the unemployment rate could soon reach 10.8%. Instead of that, we could reduce the unemployment rate and help our businesses.

We have really done our homework with regard to the bill before us today. We asked legal experts to check the bill. We consulted the unions. I talked to various union representatives to seek their support and I succeeded in obtaining that support because they are in favour of making purchases here, in Canada and in Quebec. I am very proud of their letters of support. I think there is a consensus around my bill.

We must also consider the fact that we have concluded important international agreements and we certainly do not want to risk being sued for millions or billions of dollars because of calls for tenders or purchases that would go against NAFTA or other international agreements that have been signed.

We were careful in ensuring that international agreements would not be affected by this legislation. The bill would allow the federal government to buy Canadian goods and services without violating any international agreements. These contracts would not be covered under those agreements, but they sure would help many of our businesses get through these difficult times, because a lot of them are barely able to stay afloat at this point.

That is very clear in our bill. We are not leaving ourselves open to judicial proceedings. On the contrary, the government would be allowed to spend up to \$600 million. That is no small amount. It is big money that could create 21,000 jobs. And such a number of jobs would help lower unemployment figures across the country. That is particularly important in the current economic context. People are losing their jobs. They had very well-paying jobs and they now find themselves out of work, precisely because businesses are reducing their staff. So, these people are left with nothing. Rather than buying abroad, let us try promoting local procurement.

Hon. members may also have noticed that, in our bill, we are asking to respect a certain percentage for the provinces. This means that the Government of Canada should not buy everything in the same province. It must act fairly towards all the provinces, so that everyone can benefit from this initiative.

Business of Supply

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:01 p.m.)

This is a very comprehensive bill. Even at the municipal level—and I am referring to my riding—the people, mayors and councillors are promoting local procurement. I know that this is already being done through awareness. However, at the federal level, we could have true legislation that would not only allow us to buy at home, but would in fact compel to do so.

I realize that this raises questions, and I know that we cannot ask questions amongst ourselves, because this is a fairly dry issue. However, I sincerely hope that the bill will be referred to a committee. That would answer Liberal members' concerns about the 7.5% and it would allow us to take an in-depth look at this issue. We could then have witnesses come and tell us that they agree with this measure, or that they want something to be changed. Let us make this a viable bill that can truly help all Canadians and Quebeckers to create jobs and to encourage our domestic industries, instead of buying products from abroad.

That is a priority right now. This bill comes at the right time. It is very well drafted, and it was thoroughly reviewed not only by the law clerks of the House, but also by several other legal officers. We must give it a chance and refer it to a committee, so that we can really look at it and deal with the concerns of each political party. It is my hope that, for once—although I doubt it—the Conservatives will try to be part of this group that is the House of Commons and will take a real look at the situation.

•(1150)

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 21, 2009, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[*English*]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: Since it is ten minutes to noon, the House will now suspend until 12 noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:51 a.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1200)

[*Translation*]**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should act urgently to provide the forestry industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis, with assistance which is similar to that given to the automotive industry concentrated in Ontario, and primarily through tax credits, loans and loan guarantees so that companies have immediate access to cash, and tax measures for private woodlot owners.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

I am very honoured to speak to this issue which, thanks to the Bloc Québécois, will be debated in this House today. We often hear the other political parties talk about the forestry crisis. They do acknowledge that there is a crisis but none of them has really done anything to help this sector of such vital importance to Quebec's economy.

Today, the Bloc Québécois will use the opposition day to put forward, once again, concrete ideas to quickly counter a catastrophe that has destroyed the forestry sector and consequently the lives of thousands of families in Quebec. I would also like to point out that the Bloc Québécois was the first federal political party to have appointed a private woodlot critic. I am extremely proud and honoured to have been selected for this task. This just shows how in touch our party is with the concerns and the realities of Quebeckers. This initiative was taken when private woodlot owners were being completely ignored by the mediocre measures proposed by the federal government in response to the forestry crisis.

Thus, the Bloc Québécois has taken up the mandate of being the voice of Quebec's private woodlot owners in the debate on the future of forestry. In the motion being debated today, we clearly state that the government must act urgently to provide the forestry industry with assistance similar to that given to the automotive industry concentrated in Ontario. We believe that it is completely absurd for the federal government to offer the forestry industry a paltry \$70 million when it is giving the automotive industry almost \$9.7 billion.

Business of Supply

In Quebec, forestry is responsible for 88,000 direct jobs, but the forestry crisis as a whole affects close to 825,000 Quebec workers. In other words, this industry is vital to the economy of Quebec and above all to the economy of the regions, such as the Lower St. Lawrence region, where my riding is. So it is not right for a government to stand idly by in the face of a crisis that is threatening so many jobs and so many rural communities. This is, once again, glaring evidence of incompetence or perhaps simply contempt on the part of this government.

It is for this reason, among others, that the Conservative government does not deserve the confidence of Quebecers. It is our clear belief that the Conservative government is making an ideological choice that benefits the West to the detriment of Quebec. The fact is that the government has still done nothing worthy of mention for the forestry sector. In creating a joint Canada-Quebec committee on forestry issues, the Conservative government has created the appearance of taking an interest in this crisis. In fact, there has been nothing concrete to alleviate the worries of forestry workers. Their frustration is all the more justified when we know that Quebec alone accounts for 32.8% of the forestry jobs in Canada and close to 40% of the communities affected by this crisis and that, in the end, according to the government's calculations, Quebec receives only 21.7% of the funding allocated.

In addition to doing nothing to solve the problem, the government is barely concerned at all with the more specific case of the private woodlot owners. Yet private woodlots are responsible for 29,000 direct jobs in Quebec. I myself own a private woodlot, and I know how necessary and urgent it is for concrete action to be taken as soon as possible to avoid catastrophe.

I will take this opportunity to let all parliamentarians know about a few of the Bloc Québécois' proposals to assist owners of private woodlots.

● (1205)

First of all, in fiscal terms, it is absolutely necessary that the federal government recognize management plans as reasonable evidence of profit, so that management expenses incurred can be deductible under section 31 of the Income Tax Act. Under the current tax system, forest management expenses are not deductible from the income of the farm as a whole, and this encourages mismanagement of the forest. The taxation system applicable to private forests thus puts producers at a disadvantage and does not encourage sustainable use of the resource.

At the present time, the Income Tax Act grants no specific status to woodlot owners, and according to Revenue Canada, most owners are considered part-time farmers or hobby farmers. That being the case, their operating losses are not easily eligible. First they have to prove a reasonable expectation of profit. This is very difficult given the current requirements of the tax authorities. It is absolutely necessary to change this situation so as to take account of the specific nature of forestry work and of private woodlot owners.

Second, the federal government must set up a registered silvicultural savings plan. At present, all the income made by lumber producers is taxable in the year when they sell their wood, even if that income represents up to 10 years of work—and that year may be followed by 10 more years without income.

Producers are asking to be able to put a portion of their income into a registered silvicultural savings plan. Though not having the same purpose, the mechanism of such a plan would be comparable to the registered retirement savings plan. The registered silvicultural savings plan would allow producers to shelter a portion of their income, setting it aside for future woodlot development.

Third, the federal government must look into the possibility of setting up an interest tax holiday and capital tax holiday program, so that forestry producers can preserve their assets in a time of crisis while improving the management, productivity and diversification of their property.

In my region, the Lower St. Lawrence, activities associated with private forest management and wood marketing create some 2,000 forest and factory jobs. In addition, the economic spinoffs from private woodlots are vital to our rural communities—my riding consists mostly of rural communities. It is crucial that the situation of private woodlot owners improve, because the survival of these communities depends on it.

Faced with the government's inaction, private woodlot owners are not just standing idle; they are doing everything they can to develop the full potential of their forest heritage. This means that, in addition to being undeniably important to rural communities, private forests can play an important environmental role when managed sustainably. They can help preserve wildlife habitat and ecological diversity, protect air and water quality, store carbon and reduce soil and shoreline erosion. In fact, thanks to the management of private forests, they are more productive today than public forests.

Private forest management in Quebec and Canada is the best solution for sustainable development and I urge the government and the other parties in this House to adopt my motion today in order to support the 130,000 private woodlot owners in Quebec and the 450,000 in Canada.

● (1210)

[English]

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked quite extensively about woodlot owners. It is an important issue and he brought up some very valid points.

Recently, the Government of Quebec provided some assistance to the forestry industry in the form of loan guarantees. From what I can gather, that is the only substantial investment from the provincial government across the country at this point.

I was wondering if my hon. colleague could comment on the situation in Quebec and on how these loan guarantees would be beneficial at this time. In my particular situation, there was a mill closure, an AbitibiBowater mill. One of the reasons was that the machinery was not very modern. Perhaps loan guarantees and the like would help out the pulp and paper industry by providing incentives for mills as well as the woodlot owners.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his comments.

It is true that the Government of Quebec is the only government that has taken recent action to help the forestry industry. Since last fall, and even before that, the Bloc Québécois has been calling on the federal government to take action. Since the federal government did not take concrete action, the Government of Quebec had to do something.

The Bloc Québécois is calling for loans and loan guarantees, so that the companies have the money they need to stay open, and so that they have the financial means to reinvest, conduct research, and so on. We want them to be able to keep their heads above water.

What is new today is that the Bloc Québécois is asking for the same thing for private woodlot owners. There are more and more private woodlot owners that have forestry businesses, and the Bloc feels that they could and should benefit from loans and loan guarantees to help keep their companies running and to continue, during these difficult times, to improve their businesses and to operate in their woodlots.

• (1215)

[English]

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, opposition days are very important. They are an opportunity to get the government to act on things that are very important to the opposition.

Naturally, this is a very important part of what I do as the NDP forestry critic, and I thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. I would also like to tell the member that I support the motion.

However, if this is an opportunity to get the government to act, it seems to me that the opposition motion should be more substantial. In other words, it should talk about such things as employment insurance, protection for older workers to bridge the gap between the time of being laid off until retirement, if they are only a year or two away from retirement, loan guarantees which have already been talked about, pension guarantees and reform.

Why does the member's motion not have more meat to it?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question.

When it comes to talking about EI mechanisms, I urge the NDP members, who support the Conservatives' Bill C-50, to come to the Bloc's side and demand even more sustainable assistance. The assistance could be applied to the private forestry sector, because these workers, primarily seasonal workers, would benefit from these changes to EI.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois chose to introduce this motion about the forestry crisis because the situation is still just as urgent for thousands of forestry workers in Quebec and for my region.

It is not reasonable for us to be here today again, calling on the Conservative government to help the forestry industry, in spite of everything that has been said by the forestry industry for several years and particularly in the last few months.

For several months, I have observed the failure of two ministers in the Conservative government to take any action in my region, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. But even worse is the fact that they have never come right out and clearly told the public that they had no intention of helping them.

Recently, the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec tried to buy time by creating the second committee in less than six months to examine the issue.

The situation we are experiencing in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is the same as in the ridings of many members of this House. In our respective regions, when the sawmill shuts down, the entire local economy is affected.

In my riding alone, 4,000 direct jobs have been lost. And the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean says that is to be expected, because there is a market crisis.

For several months, the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has been announcing far and wide that the forestry crisis is a market crisis, and that Export Development Canada has provided \$16 billion in all sorts of financial services to the forestry industry. But what has to be pointed out is that this is not government spending. These services have been paid for by the companies themselves. Yet the oil companies and mining companies have received over \$27 billion under the same program.

What the industry is calling for is simple. It is calling for loans and loan guarantees and for tax measures for private woodlot owners. That is what the industry has been seeking for months. And yet when we look at the Conservative government's Economic Action Plan, it is spelled out in black and white that the lumber industry has received only \$70 million in 2009, and will receive only a meagre \$100 million in 2010.

That is nowhere near the \$10 billion granted to the auto industry in Ontario, which is experiencing a market crisis just as the forestry industry is.

In actual fact, what the Conservative government's behaviour demonstrates is that it made an ideological choice a long time ago to support the auto and oil industries at the expense of the forestry industry.

The forestry crisis is just as bad, and even worse, than the automotive crisis. It affects 825,000 workers, while in the auto industry 500,000 workers are affected. The government, therefore, has to make some effort to be consistent and show some common sense in order to find solutions.

That is why the Bloc Québécois has chosen to devote an opposition day to the forestry crisis and the solutions that have to be considered. Unfortunately, the government has completely given up and is no longer supporting a sector that is in great need of support.

Business of Supply

Last spring, Robert Dionne, President of the Association des propriétaires de machineries forestières du Québec which represents 250 forestry entrepreneurs, said that the situation was so serious that “our members are worried. They are moving heaven and earth to stay alive.” Over 50 entrepreneurs in Quebec shut down in 2008, and the situation is not much better in 2009.

At that same time, the owner of Entreprises Alain Michaud Inc. in Saint-Ludger-de-Milot in the riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean said that “we have to return to the time when there were tax credits for equipment purchases.”

No new measure has been announced since the spring to address the chronic crisis afflicting the forestry industry.

As members of Parliament, it is our duty to come up with solutions to help thousands of families.

●(1220)

Our fellow citizens have asked us to represent them in Ottawa to defend their interests.

In our motion we are proposing some practical ideas to resolve the forestry crisis.

The motion calls on the government to put a real plan in place as quickly as possible to help the forestry industry, through loans, loan guarantees, refundable tax credits for research and development, the establishment of a policy promoting the use of wood in the renovation and construction of federal public buildings and the implementation of measures to support the use of forest waste to produce energy and ethanol.

I am going to speak more specifically about establishing a policy to promote the use of wood in the construction and renovation of federal government buildings. It would be an example for work on private, non-residential buildings.

In June, the Bloc introduced a bill in this regard. A policy of this sort is intended to increase the demand for wood in the domestic markets of Quebec and Canada and could make us less dependent on exports of this resource to the United States.

In my riding, for example, the Department of National Defence will be building a hangar: hangar number 2. I have suggested to the Minister of National Defence that this construction project be an example for the federal government and be built using wood.

We know what happens when the Americans decide to cut back on housing construction. I would count on the MP for Jonquière—Alma to defend such a project. Instead of saying nothing, he would be helping to increase domestic demand, and other projects could follow. These are solutions that could be proposed, which would provide breathing room to the forestry industry.

It is easy to talk about problems, but solutions have to be put forward. One both useful and symbolic solution would be to have the government promote the use of wood in construction projects, such as hangar number 2 in Bagotville, as I just mentioned.

However, the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean is saying nothing. Even my colleague

from Jonquière—Alma is saying nothing. This policy would provide breathing room. Does he agree with his colleagues who said that there was some concern about promoting such projects where wood is used in building construction?

I would like to know what they find of such concern in this measure. The lack of comment by two Conservative members from the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area leave me perplexed about their positions in this matter.

Why reject a policy to use wood, a policy that costs the federal government nothing? Why?

It must be noted that the federal government owns 13,782 buildings. In 2008 alone, it built and renovated 198 buildings.

Accordingly, the federal government spends a significant amount on the construction and maintenance of its buildings. In 2007-08, the figure was \$827 million. That is not peanuts. This is money that could be invested in specific projects that cost the government nothing.

At the moment, a number of governments have realized that using wood in their buildings is not only a practical way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also a way for them to provide direct assistance to the forestry industry.

I will close on this point. I would like the government to understand that implementing Bill C-429 is a solution. It is a practical solution. It costs nothing to use wood in the construction of buildings.

●(1225)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech made by my colleague, the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. There are a few things I would like to tell him because I do not think he is telling people the real story.

He said nothing was done to deal with the crisis in the forest industry. The hon. member was there, though, along with my colleague, the Minister of State responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and me, when an economic summit was held recently in our region. We heard what the stakeholders had to say. They asked us to do something specific for the forest industry.

So we have done four things.

First, Quebec and Ottawa jointly invested some \$200 million in silviculture. In response to the requests of the forest producers, whom I have met personally, a way was found to help them.

Then they asked for loan guarantees. Thanks to the last budget, Export Development Canada can now provide loan guarantees.

For the hon. member's information, between last January 1 and June 15—in less than six months therefore—the EDC provided \$10 billion in loans to the Canadian forest industry, including \$7 billion to 220 forest companies in Quebec. That is quite a few companies. This amount was \$800 million more than what was provided to the automobile industry.

Business of Supply

The Business Development Bank of Canada now also provides working capital and other kinds of capital.

We took a whole series of steps, but the hon. member does not want to talk about them or see them.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, that was truly mind-boggling. We should speak clearly here. The hon. member for Jonquière—Alma just spoke about the assistance provided by the EDC. Does he know what assistance the EDC provides?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: It provides loan guarantees.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Say, for example, I am a company and a client wants to buy my products. I go to the EDC, which will give me a loan for that specific order I have to fill. And I pay for it. That is not what people wanted for the forest industry at the summit in Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean. What they wanted were loan guarantees like the ones given to the automobile industry.

It was very clear. It was the first point made at the summit in Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean. The two ministers from Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean were responsible for accomplishing it, but they failed. They did not do it.

What he was talking about in regard to the EDC are services for which companies pay. They are not real loan guarantees. They are for orders and deliveries that are made. There is a difference.

• (1230)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what my colleague is saying is important. For months, the Conservative government has been trying to give us a false idea about the amounts of money available for the forestry industry.

I will give my colleague another chance to explain that. Here is what I understand: businesses selling their products on foreign markets pay for accounts receivable insurance.

I would like my colleague to explain that again, for Conservatives keep telling us that they are giving \$10 billion to the industry. But in fact, the Government of Canada simply guarantees the accounts receivable for businesses exporting their products, and businesses pay for this service. Such is the reality. We are not talking about the loan guarantees required by businesses to be able to invest in their working capital. These are guarantees for accounts receivable.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is perfectly right.

If I have a sales contract, EDC lends me the money for that very specific purpose. The Quebec Forestry Industry Council is asking for loans, for loan guarantees. Some business people in the Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean region say they have problems with their cash flow. When a businessperson has a contract with a forestry company, the bank does not want to lend him or her any money. That is the reality. That is what the two ministers and the Conservative Party should understand. The reality is that businesses do not have any cash.

The first point I am being asked to comment about is the loan guarantees which allow businesses to have the cash flow they need to perform better and increase their production.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the motion before the House today. As Minister of Natural Resources, I will speak against this motion for two important reasons. First, the motion itself is disingenuous and misleading. It wrongly implies that this Conservative government has done little to support Canada's and Quebec's forestry industry. Second, and related to the first reason, is that no government in the history of Canada has done more than we have to support the forestry industry.

Before I begin the main body of my remarks, I would like to recap the government-wide efforts made over the last two years to support the Quebec forestry industry alone. First, \$16.7 billion in loans and grants has been committed over the last two years in support of the Quebec forestry sector; second, Quebec is also receiving a portion of the \$1 billion pulp and paper green transformation program; and finally, over \$928 million has already been transferred to Quebec to support and retrain the unemployed. This is in the 2009 fiscal year alone, and a portion of this will be used to support unemployed forestry workers.

These are only some of the programs that have been made available to Quebec forestry companies and to workers, and I have not even touched on the programs made available through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. When one takes a look at these facts, one realizes that the press release issued by the Bloc last Friday is completely erroneous. It tried to claim that only \$70 million has been provided in support, and as we can see, this is completely inaccurate.

As I continue, I want to focus my remarks on some of the particular initiatives undertaken by the Government of Canada in support of our forestry industry. The government has shown bold action and initiative. It has done so in many ways, and I and many others would say that this has built the confidence of the forestry industry and the many communities across Canada that depend upon this important industry.

After the sharpest global recession since the second world war, many forestry communities are still facing difficult times. However, in spite of these current difficulties, our government believes that this sector has a promising future. That is why we are working in close partnership with forestry communities and the forestry sector to realize this potential.

As Prime Minister Harper put the matter earlier this month—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lisa Raitt: My apologies.

As the Prime Minister put the matter earlier this month, in just over 100 days, Canada's economic action plan is already protecting Canadians, stimulating our economy and creating jobs from coast to coast to coast. Ninety per cent of the funding for this fiscal year is now committed. Our economic action plan is helping create or maintain an estimated 220,000 jobs by the end of 2010.

Business of Supply

Housing construction and renovation is up both here in Canada and in the United States. In August, housing starts increased in the United States to their highest level in nine months, and Canada's housing starts also exceeded expectations, advancing 12% in the same month.

It is also worth noting that the drop in the construction industry in Canada has been proportionately much less severe than in the United States, and indeed, much less than in the rest of the world. We are seeing early signs of stabilization and recovery.

It is clear that in Canada government-backed stimulus programs are making a difference. In our government's budget 2009, these programs included: home renovation tax credits, a substantial increase to our ecoenergy home retrofit program and market expansion programs. Together, the housing-related measures included in the EAP will increase domestic lumber demand by an estimated one billion board feet over the next two years, and by harnessing the potential of new markets in emerging technologies, Canada's industry is reinventing itself and preparing for a competitive comeback that will reinforce and sustain its international reputation as a leader in the world's forestry industry.

● (1235)

While the situation remains difficult, we believe that Canada's forest sector is worth investing in. The industry told us that the country needed leadership and strategic thinking. The forest industry wanted measures that would help it weather the short term but would also pay dividends down the road.

Putting it in another way, our forest well is not only our trees. It is our creative capacity to make difficult, complex decisions and the willingness of the forest industry to innovate and its flexibility to adapt. This is precisely the thinking that is behind our economic action plan.

We are seeing light at the end of the tunnel for another reason. Right from our first term, the Government of Canada has been proactive in its commitment to the future of our forest industry. Right at the start, we understood that we needed to respond quickly and effectively when challenges arose. In short, there was not time to sit around and wait for more studies. We acknowledged the challenges and we set a course of action.

Then later in 2007 in excess of \$200 million was provided by the Government of Canada to help in dealing with the mountain pine beetle. When we recognized that greater assistance was needed for Canada's forest industry to become more competitive, \$127.5 million was provided for a long term forest industry competitiveness strategy in 2007.

To further increase the energy efficiency and the environmental performance of our pulp and paper facilities, we also introduced a new \$1 billion pulp and paper green transformation program. This program will enable new investments in pulp and paper facilities across Canada, but it will help them to become greener and more sustainable.

I am pleased to report today that 24 companies, representing 38 pulp and paper mills across Canada, have qualified for credits under this program and that many others across Canada will also benefit from investments financed through the program. Complete details

regarding specific mill and company allocations under this program are available on the Natural Resources Canada website.

The Government of Canada will continue to implement this program as expeditiously as possible and we are now working with recipient firms to ensure that the funding flows to eligible projects in forest communities across Canada as quickly as possible.

We are certain this investment in Canada's pulp and paper sector is value for money and will yield dividends for Canada's forest communities for years to come. That is why we are ensuring that every credit paid out under this program is being invested at mills in Canada in projects that are going to improve environmental performance.

Another important element of our strategy for the forest sector is to develop new and different forest products and new and different markets for those products. Therefore, budget 2009, our economic action plan, committed a further \$170 million to assist industry in developing new products and processes and in exploiting new and diverse market opportunities.

We need to sell more to the world not just one country. The \$170 million are not spread out over several years. It is an investment over two years because the industry's needs are now and we need to ramp up our efforts on diversification immediately.

We are pleased to report that over 80% of this year's \$70 million in spending for this fiscal year has already been committed. Therefore, let me bring the House up to date on the progress being made in the forest sector because of the economic action plan.

First, enhanced funding has gone into the Canada wood program. There are now 129 projects under way which are designed to expand export opportunities for Canadian wood product producers in expanding overseas markets. These projects are valued at \$8.4 million, are up and running in countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Middle East and among member countries of the European Union.

Although growing overseas markets for wood is long term work, we are seeing some encouraging results. Since 2005, we have seen exports of lumber to South Korea and China increase by 20% and 108% respectively, creating and maintaining hundreds of jobs in Canada's forest sector.

● (1240)

Funding from the economic action plan has also gone to the North American wood first initiative. The goal is to expand the use of wood outside the traditional residential housing market.

Wood first is helping 44 projects, worth a total \$5.94 million, which promote the use of wood in non-residential construction such as school and health care facilities both in Canada and targeted regions of the United States. It is through these projects we are making inroads into realizing the multi-billion dollar opportunity to use more wood in Canada and in the United States outside of the residential sector.

Business of Supply

As well, we have recently developed partnerships in China and Korea to construct large-scale wood demonstration buildings that will showcase Canadian products and technology, further helping to develop emerging wood markets for our wood products.

These initiatives are helping the forest sector make inroads into new multi-billion dollar markets where greater demand for high-quality Canadian forest products can translate into more jobs in Canada's forest sector.

A transformative technologies program has also received increased support from the economic action plan. This investment is supporting research and development of emerging technologies that will broaden the range of products produced by Canada's forest sector.

Research areas include new materials using nanotechnology, new energy and chemical solutions from forest biomass and next generation building solutions. For example, because of transformative technologies program support, FPInnovations, which is Canada's national forest research institute, has been working with a national network of university experts on the development of paper-based biosensors. These can detect, report and destroy toxins and pathogens such as SARS and listeria.

Progress is made with bio-products research, such as nano-crystalline cellulose as well. The aerospace and automotive sectors have shown interest in using this cellulose in advancing lightweight, high strength composite materials.

Our transformative technologies program has also been investing in new uses and markets for wood. Until just a few months ago, building codes did not permit construction of wood buildings more than four storeys anywhere in Canada. Thanks to research funded through this program, we have a six-storey wood building being constructed now in Quebec City and a second planned in B.C.

Because of research being done on cross-laminated timber, known in the industry as X-Lam, we may one day soon see buildings constructed from wood of 10 storeys or more. There is a growing interest in the manufacture of X-Lam. This product can be used in floor, roof and wall systems.

The economic action plan has also provided \$40 million in a complementary initiative to develop pilot-scale demonstrations of technologies and products developed under the transformative technologies program that we launched in budget 2006.

Natural Resources Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and industry, are working together to identify potential sites to build operational pilot plants. Construction is expected to begin next year and it will contribute to the commercialization of emerging technologies developed through the transformative technologies program.

There are other programs supported by the economic action plan that are having a beneficial effect on Canada's forest industry as well. The \$1 billion community adjustment fund is creating jobs and maintaining employment in communities affected by the global economic downturn, which very much includes forest-dependent communities.

For example, Canada Economic Development Quebec and the Quebec government have joined forces to help forest-dependent communities with a \$230 million package. Of this package, the federal portion of \$100 million for silviculture and \$15 million for restoration of multi-resource access roads came from the community adjustment fund.

Our extraordinary financing framework is expanding the availability of credit to businesses, including forest companies.

The Canada skills and transition strategy is helping workers with enhancements to employment insurance and funds for skills and training.

Also, Bill C-50, which is currently before the House, seeks to amend the Employment Insurance Act to increase the maximum number of weeks for which benefits may be paid to certain claimants.

• (1245)

The Government of Canada is providing \$9 million to establish an invasive species centre in the province of Ontario. This centre will work in partnership with the province on research related to alien invasive species. This will strengthen Canada's ability to manage invading pests, such as the emerald ash borer.

Furthermore, the leadership for environmental advantage in forestry program, or LEAF, a two-year, \$10 million initiative in budget 2008, supports collaboration between Natural Resources Canada and the Forest Products Association of Canada in promoting Canada's sustainable forest management practices.

Canada has shown strong leadership in sustainable forest management and in environmental performance. This investment in LEAF will allow us to turn our world-class record into a market advantage.

We are aware that the United States government has announced another energy-targeted subsidy program, known as the biomass crop assistance program, that will pay subsidies to producers of wood biomass, such as softwood lumber and wood pellet producers.

The Government of Canada recognizes the challenges that the forest sector is facing and appreciates the potential of the biomass crop assistance program to disadvantage Canadian producers and distort the markets. We have formally raised our concerns about the impacts this initiative would have on the Canadian forest industry with the United States Department of Agriculture. I took the opportunity last week to bring it to the attention of the secretary of energy in the United States as well.

The Government of Canada has discussed this issue with its provincial counterparts and is consulting with industry. We are assessing all our options, while continuing our advocacy activities in the United States.

I could go on, but I suspect I have made the point. The Government of Canada is committed to Canada's forest industry and helping it to succeed, both in the short and long term.

Business of Supply

From the beginning, our government has taken swift action to assist the forest industry as challenges have arisen. We have listened to the industry and we have listened to others. We have responded with programs devised to help strengthen and diversify Canada's forest industry, both for today but also for tomorrow. Because of programs like these, we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Judging from these bold initiatives our government has devised in support of Canada's forest industry, the motion put forward before the House is evidently unfounded.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all I am pleased to see that the minister reads the Bloc Québécois press releases as this means she is quite interested in this issue. I would like to point out that the figures cited in Friday's press release were provided by the federal government and are found on page 122 of the third progress report. Thus, these are very real figures.

Last week, during constituency week, I again had the great privilege and pleasure of touring my riding and meeting with people and groups of producers such as Coopérative forestière Haut Plan Vert in Lac-des-Aigles and Club Agri-Tech 2000 in Saint-Éloi. These people have a keen interest in biofuels and processing forest biomass and agricultural residues.

I will ask the minister a question. Is the minister and the government interested in investing as much money in biofuels as they are currently investing in the oil sands?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer the question with respect to biofuels.

Our government has a stellar record with respect to biofuels. Fundamentally, we have put \$1 billion into the production of ethanol and biodiesel. We are buttressing it with the ability to have mandatory amounts of biodiesel and biofuel in gasoline mixtures.

More important, we have earmarked a further large sum of money to take a look at the biomass and biofuel issues to which the hon. member speaks, which is going from the first generation of using the traditional feedstock for biofuels and taking a look at different ways of doing it in the next generation of biofuels.

It is a very exciting area. This government has been funding that for the past year. We look forward to the exciting projects that are being administered with respect to biofuels.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I come from an urban riding and I can say that if half of what the minister has said has been implemented, I do not think the forestry industry has anything to complain about.

My constituents want to know, while she was making all those announcements that she said she made, was she holding up, displaying or wearing the Conservative Party logo?

She said that no government in the history of Canada has done more for the forestry industry. She is right, because no government

in the history of Canada has ever given away \$1 billion to the Americans. The Conservatives gave \$1 billion to the Americans to do what? To fight our forestry industry.

For those who do not remember, the Conservatives pressured those in the forestry industry by saying that if they did not sign the deal, the Conservatives would penalize them by taxing them. What does—

An hon. member: Shame.

Mr. John Cannis: Shame, indeed.

What does the forestry industry want? It wants to be treated as fairly and equally as the auto industry or any other industry. Give the forestry industry the money it needs.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I am actually touched that the hon. member cares to know what I was wearing on certain days. It is difficult being a minister, making sure one is wearing different clothing, especially being a woman in this field. I can assure him that the one thing I do wear very proudly is my Canadian pin or the Canadian Forces pin that I am wearing today. Those are the two things that are important as we work for Canadians here.

With respect to the total plan with respect to forestry, there is no question that forestry is important. It is important in Ontario, as well as in Quebec and across the country. That is why these programs are targeted nationally, in effect. It is looking at the entire country, in terms of where forestry is important, and it is important in different ways in different provinces.

I had the ability, in preparation for the economic action plan, to speak to all my counterparts across Canada, including the minister in Ontario, about the best things that we could be doing. That is why I was very excited to be able to announce with her, in Sault Ste. Marie, the invasive species centre. That is very important in terms of dealing with the real effects on the forestry industry here in Ontario which has to do with invasive species and making sure that we are looking after the forests that we have here and being stewards of the forests as well.

• (1255)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past week in my riding of Timmins—James Bay, it became known that Grant Forest Products, which is one of the largest players in the forest region in the north, is now in a court-ordered bankruptcy protection. It might be taken over by the U.S. multinational Georgia Pacific. We saw how the Conservative government rolled over when Vale walked away with respect to Inco. We know the government will do nothing to protect the resources of a Canadian company.

I would like to question the minister on some of the more far-fetched claims she has made in terms of the government's commitment.

Business of Supply

The government's main commitment to dealing with the forestry industry was to sell us out the very first chance it got with the softwood lumber deal, where it gave \$1 billion to our competitors, where it crippled our markets, where it threatened that if our companies stood up and continued to defend their interests, they would be penalized.

Now we see the spectacle of the government having to come back, cap in hand, having given up every right that we wanted, every trade negotiation, and we are now being told we are going to have to pay another \$60 million to \$70 million for the government's complete mishandling of the file.

When the minister comes into the House and asks for this Parliament's support, I would like to ask her two questions: number one, will she apologize to this House for the campaign of misinformation that her government ran in terms of promoting this bogus deal; and, number two, when will she bring this in? I want to be able to stand in this House and say there is no way that on our watch we are going to pay another \$70 million so that our competitors can continue to tool and retool and come against our industries.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I am quite disheartened by the hon. member's comments with respect to the softwood lumber agreement. Clearly, there is one true fact here, which is that this agreement brought stability and is welcomed by the community of forest products, without question.

I had the great ability to go across the country and speak to the individual —

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. minister was asked a question and I think the House would be well served if we could hear her give the answer.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, as I was indicating, I had the ability during the past year to travel from coast to coast to coast to speak to the people in the industry, to speak to the people with respect to working in the communities in forestry. They unequivocally indicated that this was a good deal for Canada. It was the right deal for Canada.

It was this government that delivered on that deal. Maybe that could be the problem that the hon. member has. It has brought stability. It has given \$5 billion back to the industry. It has been an extreme success.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud the minister for her hard work on so many different programs that I can say have really helped the forestry sector in northwestern Ontario. They are working to correct some of the structural defects and the challenges that we face in northwestern Ontario which are somewhat unique.

I want to ask the minister a question about the pulp and paper green transformation program. On her behalf I had the chance to make those announcements for all of northwestern Ontario, as I often do for the interests of stakeholders from Thunder Bay to the Manitoba border. They were delighted with this program. Frankly, it

has more benefits than just lessening the environmental footprint of pulp and paper mills.

The technology transformations that will take place have other benefits. I was wondering if the minister might just speak to those for the benefit of this House.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kenora for all his hard work and constant encouragement with respect to doing the right thing regarding the forestry industry in Canada.

The pulp and paper green transformation program is unique in that it is there in order to help industry become more competitive by greening the industry's own activities, making it more sustainable, and lowering their costs by lowering the total amount of energy going into the plants as a result of bringing in greener transformation technologies.

Picking up on the last point, this is exactly what industry wanted. This is the tool that industry indicated would make it more competitive and would make it more prosperous in the future, and industry would in turn be able to supply jobs and sustainability to the communities.

• (1300)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to this motion. This motion addresses a long overdue concern and it is certainly required in light of the government's lack of action.

To begin, I wish to get right to the point and confirm that the Liberal Party will be supporting this motion. This issue is too important to be indecisive about and to try to play politics when the viability of a whole national industry is at stake.

We must act immediately to provide the necessary resources to safeguard the thousands of jobs and expertise that the forestry industry provides our country. The government must understand that blaming world markets and sitting pretty, as it has done throughout the forestry crisis, is not the way a governing party should run our country.

Enough of blaming others. Enough of playing politics. The time to act is now. This motion provides a clear directive.

[*Translation*]

I received a copy of the motion and reviewed it carefully. Two things jumped out at me. The first is that this motion is good for Quebec. Of course, that is not surprising, as it is a Bloc Québécois motion.

As a member from Quebec, I am always looking out for my province's best interests, and this motion and its directives would most certainly help our forestry industry. The second thing that struck me was that this motion is manifestly good for Canada.

[*English*]

I do not think the Bloc members had this intention in mind when they drafted it, but this motion is helpful for all of Canada.

Business of Supply

Mainly because the forestry sector is entrenched throughout the country, every corner of Canada is affected by this industry. It is one of the four founding industries of our country. It is hard to think of a Canada without a forestry industry.

As a country, we pride ourselves on natural resources. With the second largest land mass in the world, it is easy to see why. So, it is no surprise that our forestry industry is a cornerstone of our past, present and hopefully future economic greatness.

The Liberal Party understands this. The Liberal Party has tried to look at the long-term success of this industry, but the party opposite has consistently thrown roadblocks at these attempts.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

On November 24, 2005, the Liberal government, together with forestry industry stakeholders, announced a concrete plan for the forestry sector known as the forest industry competitiveness strategy, with a budget of \$1.5 billion over five years. The strategy included \$215 million to develop new technologies to improve competitiveness, \$50 million to develop bioenergy and cogeneration capability, \$90 million to support forestry innovation and value-added products, \$66 million to grow wood markets, \$10 million to enhance professional skill levels in the forestry sector, \$150 million to support economic diversification in communities that rely on the forestry industry, \$800 million in loans to help forestry companies be more competitive, and \$100 million in loans to help small businesses in the forestry sector.

When the Conservatives came to power in 2006, they tossed the plan out. Now Canadian forestry workers are paying the price for that decision. Instead of investing in improving technology, skills and competitiveness to strengthen the industry and save jobs, Canada is now losing tens of thousands of jobs. Canada has lost 20,000 forestry sector jobs since the Conservatives came to power.

[*English*]

These job losses and lack of vision on the part of the Conservative government hurt more than just the forestry industry. They hurt the people in the communities who rely on the forestry sector to survive. This is why we are here today. We are here to help the people, families and communities that rely on this industry throughout Canada for their very survival and future growth.

If we look back at the TV coverage of those critical days during the automotive collapse, the cameras often focused on the hard-working men and women walking out of the factories with long faces of despair and worry. It made a great 30 second clip on the 6 o'clock news. Now, do not get me wrong. I am not saying that the automotive industry was not in crisis and that it did not require government intervention. What I am saying is that the same thing is happening in the forestry sector. However, no one has brought to light the worried and concerned faces of the thousands of men and women facing this terrifying and unnecessary loss of a way of life.

[*Translation*]

These small rural communities do not attract the attention of the big television networks, and all we hear about are big companies that are trying to restructure financially in order to stay afloat. Small

family-owned businesses and community forestry operations need our help, and they need it now.

Many people living outside these communities do not even realize that if the forestry industry ceases to exist, entire established communities will perish in turn. One feeds the other. These communities depend on the forestry industry, and if the main source of income dries up, the local restaurant will close as well, followed soon after by the corner store, which will likely be forced to close after the owner has laid off the only employee. The local grocery store, the garage and the gas station, all these small businesses will also watch as their clients leave to look for jobs elsewhere. Families will struggle to make ends meet at the end of the month, communities will struggle to keep their people, and young people will lose hope and leave to find work in major urban centres. Communities that used to be prosperous and independent will turn into ghost towns, deserted by the people who used to live there, where only a few die-hards hold out hope for renewal.

[*English*]

I do realize this is a worst case scenario. It is definitely doom and gloom. However, it could happen and it has happened, and all from a lack of government direction and a will to act. These stories need to be heard. These stories are the consequences of the government's lack of initiative to assist the people it represents when they are in need. The Conservatives do not want to believe that their own demagogic and narrow-minded refusal to intervene has led to this situation. They would rather blame it on all sorts of outside factors which, while real, are hardly the whole story.

The Conservatives are wrong in that they could have prevented it; they could have made a difference. Should they accept this motion as the right thing to do, they could still help these people and communities emerge from these tough economic times better positioned and better off to fight another day.

There are ways to help, there are ways to assist and there are ways to make a difference. I know that we want to make a difference for all Quebecers and all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

How can we make that difference? For starters, we have to listen to them. I am happy to say that my party has done just that. I have personally visited Quebec and British Columbia and listened to forestry sector representatives talk about what they need. I have spoken with company owners, plant supervisors, employee groups and numerous associations. I have been struck by how they have to struggle in these difficult economic times.

Business of Supply

I have listened to their solutions for the present and their dreams for the future. My colleagues have also travelled and listened to similar stories and concerns in the Atlantic provinces and northern Ontario.

What is surprising about all these meetings, visits and consultations is that no one in the forestry sector expects the government to hand them a blank cheque. The industry has never asked for gifts or handouts. What the industry needs is tools. It has asked for these tools so that it can fight, survive, modernize operations and keep companies open and effective. That is how it is going to keep its skilled workers and keep communities viable.

[*English*]

The industry has asked the federal government for tools in the form of tax credits, loans and loan guarantees so that its companies would have access to the much needed capital to keep the lights on, the saws running and their employees paid. It did not ask for a free ride. It asked to have the chance to fight and that is what this motion is all about. More important, this is exactly what my party has offered the industry since 2005.

I will now go back in history somewhat and discuss the softwood lumber agreement. We all know that the government likes to rewrite history. If one stands idle a tad too long these days, history just seems to disappear from government websites.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal Party has always supported and encouraged a two-pronged approach to resolving the softwood lumber dispute: both adjudication in the courts and negotiations.

On September 19, 2006, the Liberal Party voted against the softwood lumber agreement, and on December 6, 2006, it voted against Bill C-24, the Softwood Lumber Products Export Charge Act.

The Liberal Party wanted to make sure the Conservative government would adhere to the North American Free Trade Agreement and keep its campaign promise to recover all customs duties illegally collected by the United States.

The Liberals believe that the softwood lumber agreement is deeply flawed, for the following reasons.

It represents a reversal of the position taken by successive federal governments and supported by NAFTA and World Trade Organization trade panels, that our softwood lumber industry is not subsidized.

It jeopardizes Canada's ability to help industries that are already in trouble by handing over part of our sovereignty over the management of our natural resources to our American competitors. The consequences of that capitulation will be felt in future disputes that will certainly arise, not only in the softwood lumber industry but also in other industries against which the same charges are levelled by their American competitors.

It creates an export tax that is in fact higher, at the current rate, than the illegal American customs duties of the past.

It strips NAFTA of any credibility as the arbitrator of trade disputes and cancels out the principles that govern this trading relationship.

It forfeits \$500 million to the American forestry industry, which is using it to fund attacks on the Canadian industry in the courts and the political arena, and forfeits another \$500 million to the American government.

It contains anti-fluctuation provisions that will deny the Canadian industry the flexibility it needs to deal with unforeseen circumstances such as the pine beetle infestation.

Despite our strong legal position, backed up by many decisions of international and national trade tribunals in Canada and the United States, the Conservative government rushed the negotiations by setting arbitrary deadlines to get the most political mileage out of the agreement for the Conservative Party of Canada.

The Conservatives' campaign platform took precedence over the interests of an industry that has a major influence in all regions of Canada. The Conservative government issued an ultimatum to force the hand of Canadian producers: accept this agreement or the government will cut you loose. The loan guarantees put in place before the 2006 election were cancelled and the Conservatives made it plain to the industry that it would not get any federal aid if it decided to assert its rights in the courts instead of accepting the agreement.

What it agreed to do—and this is what the Liberal government had proposed—was to accept a negotiated settlement or continue the fully justified legal actions, which we would have supported by providing loan guarantees, reinvestment support, community and worker adjustment and assistance with legal costs.

The Conservatives claim that their softwood lumber agreement put an end to the dispute, but the United States began consultations questioning the forestry policies of Ontario and Quebec within seven months of signing the agreement.

Nova Scotia, British Columbia and Alberta face the same attacks. The \$500 million the Conservatives handed over to the Americans by signing the softwood lumber agreement is what is being used to finance these attacks.

On March 4, 2008, the London Court of International Arbitration handed down its decision concerning the first lawsuits the Americans filed against Canada with respect to the softwood lumber agreement signed in 2006. The court ruled that Canada had violated the terms of the agreement by calculating the quotas incorrectly for the first six months of 2007. The court's ruling forced Canada to remedy those violations within 30 days and imposed a 10% export tax on the provinces in question, to a maximum of \$68 million.

That ruling was a direct result of the fact that, in 2006, the Conservative government agreed to the imposition of quotas and taxes on the volume of wood exported to the United States, when the price of softwood lumber was generally under \$355 U.S. per thousand board feet.

Business of Supply

•(1310)

[English]

We have lost all credibility on the international stage. The government sold out our forestry industry for political gains and is now claiming that global markets are the cause and effect of the problem. The irony in all this is that the Conservatives now claim that the government cannot support the requested loan guarantees to forest companies because it is a violation of the softwood lumber agreement.

I am sorry to dispel their illusions but the Conservatives are being dishonest. Government lawyers are arguing as we speak in the London Court of International Arbitration that loan guarantees are not a violation of the softwood lumber agreement. They have in fact posted their legal defence on loan guarantees on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's website.

One could be mistaken in believing that the story ends here. However, in the spring of this year, a report from the subcommittee on industry dealing with the difficulties that numerous industrial sectors are facing concluded with the dissenting opinion of the subcommittee on the forestry industry. It says:

In relation to a recommendation on the forestry industry, the Liberal Party of Canada supports a recommendation as follows: "That the government of Canada establish a credit facility specifically for the forestry industry".

The Liberal Party continues to work actively with the forestry sector to assist it. We also realize that this is not a new problem, unlike the government which has stuck its head in the sand in the hopes that this problem will go away.

•(1315)

[Translation]

We must do more to support this industry on behalf of the thousands of men and women affected by this crisis. We must act now. We need solutions now.

We must help an industry in crisis, and we must do so immediately, with no more excuses. It is time to get the job done, and to make this Parliament work for the well-being of our struggling industries.

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my Liberal colleague for her most interesting speech.

I can see that my colleague listened carefully to the concerns expressed recently with regard to the crisis in the forestry industry. We in the Bloc Québécois and I especially have listened too.

Today there is something new in this debate. Yes, we are talking about the crisis in the forestry industry, but we are also adding to that private woodlot owners. Since the beginning of 2009, I have had the opportunity to meet a large number of private woodlot owners in Quebec as well as groups who represent them.

Who are these private woodlot owners that we are talking about today? Most of them are farmers with a forestry component; some of them are people who own woodlots in the countryside; there are even some people from our cities, large and small, who own

woodlots. Those are the people who have been forgotten since the crisis hit the forestry industry.

As I was saying earlier, I had the opportunity to go around my riding and listen to what these people had to say. I can assure the House that they too want loans and loan guarantees to help them get back on their feet or stay afloat.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question as such in what the member said, but he is right about what I was referring to with respect to smaller communities.

There is more than softwood lumber per se involved. All the supporting industries, including private woodlots, need this support. I am totally in favour of extending loans and loan guarantees to them as well, but they must have access to competitively priced loans that they will be able to repay.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I really like the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. I know that she is a hard-working rookie. Unfortunately, her remarks are completely dishonest with respect to what actually happened in this House. I realize that her speaking notes came from the Liberal Party, but it was the Liberal Party that forced this sellout softwood lumber deal through.

It is well known that, at committee, the Liberal members were the ones who made sure that we were saddled with this sellout softwood lumber deal, and that the Liberal senators made sure that it was passed by the Senate.

The reason why the Canadian people and communities that depend on lumber now have to pay tens of millions of dollars in charges and penalties is because of the Liberal Party. It is obviously because of the Conservative Party, but also because of the Liberal Party.

Now that she knows that the Liberal Party is to blame for the softwood lumber agreement being passed by the Parliament of Canada, is the member prepared to apologize on behalf of her party to those Canadians feeling the impact of the softwood lumber agreement?

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster used the words in French "complètement malhonnête". "Dishonest" is a word that has been deemed unparliamentary if he is referring to another member. Maybe he would like to withdraw the remark.

•(1320)

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I said that the hon. member is very honest, but that the Liberal Party's position is not. If that was unparliamentary, then I apologize.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for that clarification.

The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's support, but perhaps he was not in the House the day the agreement was adopted. The Liberal Party voted against the softwood lumber agreement and the Liberal Party has always been against that agreement. We do not support it and we maintain that the agreement does not benefit the industry. It could not be any clearer.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her speech. It was very insightful.

[English]

However, my question is about what the minister mentioned. She mentioned stability in this industry.

When I look at the industry, I see Thunder Bay with a mill that lies basically inoperative. Its line of credit did not work and it could not keep going. Smooth Rock Falls is in the middle of tearing down what it had of its mill. Dryden has a big field where a mill used to be. Now Grant Forest Products in Englehart is having a hard time, and it looks as though it is going to go to American owners. We are losing what we have.

When I hear the word “stability” coming from the minister, I am not sure but she is probably the type that goes into a graveyard and finds it very peaceful. That is not the kind of peace I want in northern Ontario.

I would like to ask the hon. member about the Conservatives' opinion of what stability is and what she thinks of the minister's comments.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. I cannot speak for the minister or try to define her concept of stability. It is clear that an industry that has lost 20,000 jobs in the past three years is not a stable industry. It is an industry that continues to see entire communities disappear, or just about. I do not really see where stability comes into the picture. It is certainly not in support for the industries in terms of loan guarantees or loans. I do not know what her concept of stability is.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative minister told us there has been this great economic recession. Our towns were being wiped out before the recession. They were being wiped out because of unfair trade practices with our number one competitor. Yet the government's solution was to cripple access to our number one market.

Now Conservatives are telling us that they have a little project here and a little project there. However, if they were to talk to the workers at Tembec or in Opatatika or the Abitibi region, they would say their industry has been completely wiped out. There is not an operating mill pretty much anywhere in northern Ontario, other than a small mill left in Elk Lake. That is an unprecedented situation.

The government abandoned the forestry communities. It abandoned one of the largest industries in this country, and it signed away our access to our only market. We are going to have to pay another

\$60 million or \$70 million in fines on top of this, thanks to the agreement that the government signed on softwood.

Mr. Peter Julian: And that is just the beginning.

Mr. Charlie Angus: This is the first stage of what will be many penalizing attempts to shut down our industry as we try to retool.

I would like to ask the hon. member if she will stand with us and vote against the government when it comes back one more time to squeeze money from our industry to pay to our competitors in the United States.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. The government's inaction with respect to the forestry industry has been disastrous.

[English]

There was absolutely no initiative to help the industry when it would have made a difference. Obviously the decisions of the international court in London have made it even worse for the whole of the industry.

The Bloc motion is asking the government to open its heart or its finances to help the industry at this very crucial moment.

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I must go back to that question. The Liberal senators made sure that this agreement was adopted by the Senate. In committee, the Liberal members opposed all amendments and put an end to all discussion and all debate on this softwood lumber sellout agreement. Because of the Liberal Party, Canadians now have to be governed by this scheme which caused the loss of thousands of jobs across Canada. They had to pay an initial penalty of one billion dollars. And, as my colleague from Timmins—James Bay just mentioned, they will have to pay additional fees and penalties of \$68 million.

Do the members understand that this sellout agreement was adopted by Parliament because of the Liberal Party? If not, they just have to consult the record—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry but I have to interrupt the honourable member.

The honourable member for Brossard—La Prairie has only 30 seconds left.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I just want to repeat that the Liberal Party voted against the agreement submitted to Parliament. We voted against it.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River, who is very familiar with this issue.

Business of Supply

I will start by talking about the Liberal Party's agenda and the impact of that party's support for the Conservative Party on softwood lumber. There were 110 votes on the softwood lumber agreement, and the Liberals voted in favour of that agreement 108 times. I would like to clarify something about the softwood lumber agreement: the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois all voted in favour of it. Now the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois are trying to distance themselves from this bad decision they made in the past.

Today we are discussing this motion on the forestry sector and the crisis it is suffering because of this vote three years ago on the softwood lumber agreement. At the time, the NDP very clearly stated that if this bill on the softwood lumber agreement was passed, it would be at the cost of tens of thousands of jobs in Canada and thousands of jobs in Quebec. Essentially, we said that we would be obliged to shut down our softwood lumber industry. The NDP said this very clearly, and we also heard it from witnesses from Quebec, British Columbia and other parts of Canada. In spite of everything, the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of that agreement. That was irresponsible. It was irresponsible at the time and it still is today.

In my own riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, we have lost Canfor, Western Forest Products and International Forest Products — three softwood mills that had to close down because of this agreement on softwood lumber. Today, even though we will support this motion, it is very clear that responsibility for the collapse of our softwood lumber industry continues to lie with the members of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois. They supported an agreement that killed our industry and provoked this crisis.

People will say there are other factors as well, but the collapse of our industry and the forestry crisis began when we started to implement the sellout agreement on softwood. That was when Quebec workers started to lose their jobs. That was when the workers of British Columbia started to lose their jobs. That was when the mills in northern Ontario started to close their doors. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, mills began shutting down. Since the fateful day of October 12, 2006, tens of thousands of jobs have been lost. The crisis was unfortunately provoked by the adoption of that agreement.

As the members of the NDP said many times three years ago and continue to say today, we did not have to adopt that agreement. That agreement was implemented on October 12, 2006. The job losses were immediate because of that vote by the Bloc, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party—the three brothers who voted together to kill our companies.

One day later, on October 13, 2006, the U.S. Court of International Trade—for, naturally, we were obliged to apply to an American court—found completely in our favour. It said that the \$5 billion stolen by the Americans would have to be returned to Canada, returned to the Quebec industry, returned to the British Columbia industry, returned to the Ontario and Manitoba industries and to the Saskatchewan and Alberta industries. Those illegal duties imposed at the border would have to be removed. We won hands down. Every member in this House should have known that this decision was coming soon.

● (1330)

Instead of listening to the NDP members, who said very clearly that we should wait for this decision—a decision that proved we were totally right—the hon. members from the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of this sell-out, this softwood lumber agreement, which started costing jobs the moment it was passed.

That is the big problem in all the regions of Quebec, for example in the lower St. Lawrence, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, in the Mauricie and the Outaouais. We started losing jobs the minute the vote was held. While the Bloc was voting for the motion, jobs were being lost in Quebec. As soon as the Liberal Party members who helped pass this bill—this sell-out—voted in favour of it in committee and the Liberal senators voted the same way in the Senate, jobs were lost in northern Ontario. As soon as the Conservative Party members from British Columbia voted for the bill, jobs were lost in their province. The effect was immediate, instantaneous. There could be no better proof that the NDP's position was right—that is, to wait for the decision of the Canadian International Trade Tribunal rather than giving everything and putting everything on the table, as we did.

What has happened since? An unprecedented crisis in the forest industry: dozens of mills and plants closed all over the country, tens of thousands of jobs lost. Now we are starting to see the consequences of the decisions that were made in this sell-out, one after the other: there is the \$68 million in additional penalties that the working people of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan will have to pay, and that is only the start.

The second consequence is going to cost the working people of Ontario and Quebec \$200 to \$300 million, and that is before the next step that we know the Americans will take regarding the fee issue in British Columbia. Some people estimate this at about \$1 billion.

The members of the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party who voted in favour of this agreement completely forgot to read the anti-circumvention provision. We told them at the time and industry representatives told them too: this provision means that every time the Americans do not like something, they can challenge it and they will win. This agreement was bad and poorly written.

I fail to understand how anyone representing Canada could have voted for such a bill. It was Mr. Emerson, the former Liberal minister who crossed the floor and became a Conservative, who introduced the bill and said all was well and we would not have these effects. Now we know that the effects are very serious and are getting worse by the day. It is not as if the agreement will get better in a few years. It is getting worse and worse.

It does not make sense for the Bloc to table this motion today without mentioning the softwood lumber agreement. We cannot simply ignore the fact that the Quebec members of the Bloc and the Liberal Party support a motion that undermines the Quebec industry, just like the Conservative members from British Columbia, who voted for a bill that undermines the industry in their province.

Business of Supply

I know that my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River is going to talk about the amendments we are proposing so that this motion makes sense. We know for sure there is a crisis. What Canadians are realizing more and more, though, is that it was caused by the members of the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, who joined forces to bring our softwood lumber industry to its knees.

What we need to do now, and what the NDP is doing here today, is make improvements and adopt a strategy that will really help the working people who still have a job in this industry.

• (1335)

That is what we are doing today.

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was just going over some notes. The hon. member speaks very well. He has passion and really gets into his speech. He is there to blame everyone around him for what is going on.

However, when we talk about the lumber agreement that took place in October 2006, it was a confidence vote. It was something that really made a difference and it really affected all people who were involved in the forestry industry including my riding and northern Ontario.

When I listen to the NDP members, it is like they are out there saving the world, they are out there to protect everyone. I have one question. Why did they abstain on that vote?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think northern Ontarians very clearly said how they felt about the softwood lumber agreement and how they felt about the Liberals being the henchmen of the Conservatives on getting the bill through the House.

The House will recall that before the election that was held immediately after the softwood lumber sellout there were a couple of very strong NDP members from northern Ontario, from Sault Ste. Marie and from Timmins—James Bay. People in northern Ontario from Sudbury, Algoma to Thunder Bay, right across northern Ontario, with only two exceptions, said that the NDP was the one that had credibility on the issue of the softwood sellout and it was the one that was standing up for northern Ontario. That is why there was a sweep of northern Ontario by NDP candidates in the last election. It was because the people of northern Ontario understood that the NDP was standing up for them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my colleague that his simplistic way of looking at problems—as he has just demonstrated—gives people only a partial view of the situation. We must understand that markets have collapsed, particularly for paper companies, since, among other things, less newsprint is being used. This brings about challenges for the industry, which needs restructuring. The main problem for the industry is not the softwood lumber agreement, but access to credit through banks, at a reasonable rate.

When businesses asked for help from the Bloc Québécois members, they said they wanted loans and loan guarantees. As for the softwood lumber agreement, even though it left much to be desired, businesses, workers and unions asked us to find a

settlement. The industry was at the end of its rope and could not survive anymore.

Thus, I would like the member to try reflecting a little bit on that and to change his point of view.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I like the member but I disagree with her. The Bloc Québécois should have apologized to all workers in Quebec for the position it took on this. We are talking about thousands of jobs. Thousands of Quebecers lost their jobs because the Bloc refused to stand up for them and say that the agreement was not in the interest of Quebec workers and the Quebec industry and it would vote against it.

Had Liberal and Bloc members from Quebec join the NDP at the time to vote against that agreement, it would not be in place. Winning our case in court on October 13, 2006 would have ensured that we would have fair trade with the United States today. We would not have had to pay \$1 billion, then \$68 million, and then maybe \$200 or \$300 million in fees and penalties.

It was to be expected. The NDP said that this would happen. The Bloc may very well say that it is not its fault, that it is someone else's fault, that Mr. Charest said it had to support the agreement, and it did. The fact is that thousands of families in Quebec lost their jobs because the Bloc did not do its job on this issue. I cannot change my position. The Bloc is responsible for the loss of thousands of jobs in Quebec. I am sorry, but the Bloc Québécois was wrong and I would very much like to see its leader apologize to Quebecers for this bad decision.

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc colleague for bringing the motion forward. It is an interesting motion. I will be supporting the motion. I will be suggesting to my colleagues in the NDP that they support the motion and I would suggest to the government that it also supports the motion.

It is an interesting motion, not necessarily for what it says but also for what it does not say. I would like to begin by speaking about what it does say. Part of the motion reads, “—with assistance which is similar to that given to the automotive industry—”. That is an interesting thing to say in the motion, and I would like to spend a few moments with some statistics regarding the forestry industry and the automotive industry in Canada.

Let me say at the outset that it is wonderful that the automotive industry is restructuring. I hope it is on its way up. It will be competitive and remain competitive for many years, and it is wonderful that it has received the support it has.

Business of Supply

By contrast, the forestry industry has not received support. Indeed, the Government of Ontario has said quite frankly that forestry is a sunset industry in the province of Ontario. I dare say the government believes the same thing. That is most unfortunate because when we look at the statistics, it is quite surprising to see the contribution that forestry has made to the Canadian economy. For example, the total revenue from forestry is about \$84 billion a year. The total revenue from the car industry just before its troubles was about \$94 billion a year. The total exports are also in the tens of billions of dollars for both the automotive industry and the forestry industry.

The interesting statistic is the percentage of the GDP contribution. Forestry is about 3% of the total GDP. The auto industry is also about 3% of the total GDP. In terms of direct jobs, there are more than twice as many jobs in the forestry industry, about 300,000, as opposed to the automotive industry, which is about 135,000 before its most recent troubles. Most telling, when we put the direct jobs and the indirect jobs together, we are looking at almost 900,000 direct and indirect jobs in the forestry industry, as opposed to about 440,000 direct and indirect jobs in the automotive industry. We could probably say that both of these industries in terms of dollars are somewhat comparable.

I am pleased to see in the motion put together by the Bloc that it talks about the automotive industry and about assistance that is similar to the automotive industry because they are much the same.

Another point I would like to make is this. When we look at not just the total GDP but the total GDP of manufacturing, the forestry industry is about 12% of the Canadian manufacturing GDP. The auto industry is also about 12% of the total manufacturing GDP. I am glad to see that in the motion.

Unfortunately, there are a number of things missing in the motion and I would like to address them. It is interesting that the government talks about the billion dollar package for the forestry industry. Back in June I made my views quite clear on it, that while any support from the government for the forestry industry was welcomed, it was not exactly what was needed in terms of black liquor subsidies, and that I would continue to work to ensure that we had a forestry package to reposition, over the next couple of years, the forestry industry, and I clearly illustrated that it was very valuable to Canada's economy.

● (1345)

It is interesting that there was a round a recent announcements. For example, \$33 million for AbitibiBowater was announced in my riding, in which it has two operating mills. They are not operating at capacity, naturally, but I do not think any mill anywhere in Canada is operating at capacity. The \$33 millions is part of the \$1 billion forestry package announced by the government in June.

Unfortunately, there is a clarity issue. First, no strings are attached to it. In other words, AbitibiBowater does not have to spend that \$33 million on AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay or, indeed, on AbitibiBowater in Fort Frances. As we know, AbitibiBowater is in creditor protection.

Second, there is also no indication as to when and how this money can be used to keep people working in northern Ontario and in particular in my riding. What I am endeavouring to do is to ensure

that the forest industry, in my riding, in northwestern Ontario across Canada, as this repositioning and reconstruction happens, is absolutely in a position a year, or two or three years from now to compete on the world stage. Unfortunately, the government is falling short. It would have been nice to have a little more clarity on that issue in the motion.

We have another round, if I am not mistaken, of corporate tax cuts coming early in the new year. Unfortunately, those tax cuts, although some on the government side might claim that they will help the forestry industry, only help if companies are making money. If companies are not making money, or if they are in creditor protection or bankruptcy, they do not help.

We need to ensure that the forest industry has the ability to move forward. Tax cuts are not the way to help the industry at this point in time. I guess the tax cuts will be good for big oil and gas, banks and those sorts of industries, but they will not do anything for the forestry industry. That is most unfortunate.

The softwood lumber agreement has already been mentioned a couple of times. A minister of revenue claimed that the federal government could not provide loan guarantees. He said that they would contravene the softwood lumber agreement. He also had strong objections because he was worried that various American organizations, lobby groups and others would sue the government or would go to the World Trade Organization, which might impose fines as has recently happened.

Those tens of millions of dollars will be paid by the taxpayers. The latest fines in the softwood lumber agreement, and there are bound to be more, the taxpayers will pick up the tab. Why? Because forest companies do not have any money, and they could not pay the fines anyway.

Given what I have said about the motion and, unfortunately, what is not in the motion, the motion could be improved. Therefore, I wish to move the following amendment: That immediately following the words "urgently to" add "proposed to end the softwood lumber agreement in order to be able to", and after "private woodlot owners" add "and negotiate an immediate end to the U.S. black liquor subsidy, including introducing compensatory benefits to Canadian producers retroactive to January 1, 2009.

● (1350)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I do not consent.

The Deputy Speaker: There is no consent. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the NDP for his comments during his speech. I am happy to see that he agrees with the Bloc Québécois about the fact that it is inconceivable that billions of dollars are being invested in the automotive industry, while the forestry industry receives only crumbs.

However, I would like to ask my colleague a concrete question.

Today, we are talking about private woodlot owners. What does my colleague think of the proposal from the Bloc Québécois that fiscal action be taken so that private woodlot owners would have special status in the Income Tax Act and be able to deduct their expenses for silvicultural work? What does he think about a registered silviculture savings plan to help owners plan the sustainable use of private woodlots in Quebec and in Canada?

[English]

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I am not completely conversant with the private woodlot issue in Quebec. I can only assume that it is inserted in the motion because it is a very important and perhaps even a controversial issue in Quebec. I have no problem voting for the motion if the member believes this is good for ordinary working families in Quebec.

There are private woodlot issues elsewhere in the country that do not involve tax credits or other things. We have a bit of a problem in northwestern Ontario. Because many private woodlots are close to the border, wood is cut and then sent directly to the United States for processing. I personally believe that is a problem.

With regard to Canadian wood, whether it comes from crown land or from private woodlots, we should make every effort to process that wood in Canada, first, before it is exported.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of experience with private woodlots in our region in northeastern Ontario. Private lands are being cut right down to the water and being shipped over to the mills in Quebec. We would never see a reciprocal agreement with our Quebec neighbours because they would not allow that to happen. Therefore, I certainly have concerns.

However, I want to comment about the decision by our colleagues in the Bloc not to work with us on a motion about the black liquor subsidy, which would help industry. Their position on the softwood issue is they will get more money and some loan guarantees. There is not an industry that the Bloc knows of in Quebec that should not be given money. For example, look at the rotting old Quebec asbestos mines. Those guys will ship this poison around the world and insist that people subsidize it.

What we need are markets and access to them.

When the Bloc Québécois voted to crush our access to the U.S. market, the members voted knowing that part of the agreement was we would not be able to give loan guarantees. Nor would we be able to retool our industry. Every time we would do that, the U.S. competitors would go against us, which is what they have done.

Business of Supply

Now we are paying \$70 million in fines thanks to the myopic vision of the members of the Bloc Québécois, who could have stood and said that opposed to Canada having a say in their domestic forestry planning, they were giving it over to the U.S. Therefore, Quebec's forestry planning now gets to be vetted by the U.S., just like Ontario's, just like B.C.'s, and we pay through the nose any time we attempt to help.

On an issue like the black liquor subsidy, why are our forestry workers once again being sold down the river and being sold a misplaced bill of goods from the Bloc, which has sold us out on the softwood lumber issue?

• (1355)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion of my colleague from northern Ontario. We are all very passionate about the forestry industry.

The truth about the softwood lumber agreement is, although the Minister of Revenue would disagree, we can provide loan guarantees for the forest industry in Canada. There are two Canadian legal opinions on that and they both say, provided there is a commercial rate of interest, that it does not contravene the agreement. That is the first point to talk about.

The other point that my colleague brings up is the black liquor subsidy. I have been very clear on that, as has the NDP. What was needed was a direct answer to the Americans on black liquor subsidies and, unfortunately, we did not get it.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas has three minutes to start his speech before the statements by members.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

I would like to first congratulate my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for having brought before the House this important motion being debated today. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of our colleague, Ms. Gagnon, Bloc candidate for the riding of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. She is also supporting this motion because forestry is one of the main resources in this region, as it is for almost 200 towns and villages in Quebec.

I would also like to again quote the motion we are debating today. It states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should act urgently to provide the forestry industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis, with assistance which is similar to that given to the automotive industry concentrated in Ontario, and primarily through tax credits, loans and loan guarantees so that companies have immediate access to cash, and tax measures for private woodlot owners.

We know that urgent assistance is required by the forestry sector, which has been hard hit by this economic crisis, and that the government has given significant assistance to the automotive sector. It has provided \$10 billion in support to the automotive sector and only \$70 million to the forestry industry.

Statements by Members

In terms of the Quebec forestry industry, several thousand jobs have been lost since April 2008. A total of 25,000 jobs have been lost out of the 88,000 Quebec jobs in this sector. This is a major crisis and the reason why assistance for this industry is urgently needed.

I understand that the Speaker wants me to wrap it up but I will continue after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

FOOTBALL

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the defending national champion, Vancouver Island Raiders football team, completed another perfect season: 10 wins, 0 losses.

Hadi Abassi, Raiders' president and 2008 Nanaimo Citizen of the Year, along with head coach, Matt Blokker, a.k.a. "Snoop", have shaped the Raiders into a three-time B.C. conference and two-time defending national champions.

The Raiders have established a winning program on and off the field, with a five year record of 54 wins and 7 losses. The Raiders was the first junior team in Canada to establish a scholarship foundation, allowing players to choose between academics or skilled trades. It is an example of how the Raiders family train its athletes for future success.

The Raiders are led by all star tailback, Andrew Harris. Andrew set a new record during last year's championship game, racking up an amazing 412 rushing yards to seal a Raiders' victory.

I would like to recognize Hadi Abassi and the entire coaching staff in preparing these young men for success. On November 14, the Raiders will host the Canadian national championships. We wish them every success in pursuing a third national victory. Go, Raiders.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Friday was International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Currently, up to 6.2 million Canadians live in poverty and many cannot afford life's essentials. A shocking one in seven children live in low income situations. Sadly, poverty rates have seen a continuous increase in recent years, especially among aboriginal people, those with disabilities, recent immigrants and the one in four Canadians who toil in low-paying, often part-time jobs.

Just last month, the Conference Board of Canada gave Canada a C for its progress in child poverty and a D for its work in addressing the working poor, which is why I introduced Bill C-414, the Canadian low income supplement. This bill would virtually eliminate federal taxes for those who make less than \$20,000 a year and puts real money in the hands of those who need it the most.

However, we also need a national affordable housing strategy, a productivity agenda, and we must enable people to access the skills they need to break out of the poverty cycle and achieve their dreams. Inaction is not an option.

* * *

[Translation]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, October 16 to 25 is Science and Technology Week and it will be celebrated today on Parliament Hill.

This event, which brings together representatives from government, industry and the academic world, showcases activities across Canada to make young people aware of the opportunities available in science and technology.

While a number of companies are here to present their achievements, one has to wonder if this government truly understands the challenges surrounding scientific research and its funding. In fact, this government has some purely ideological criteria, objectives and directions when it comes to funding. Led by a creationist minister who does not believe in evolution and who has been called upon to step down, in particular by ACFAS—the Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences, this government's policy on science and technology is far from credible.

The Bloc Québécois will see that this partisan interference ends, and will also see to it that Quebec gets its fair share of research funding, with no strings attached.

* * *

[English]

PERSONS CASE

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, October 18 was an important landmark for Canadian women. It is the 80th anniversary of the court case where women were finally recognized as persons under the law.

The famous five showed leadership, daring and courage in their struggle for women's equality. Women could finally begin to take their rightful place in the political life of our nation.

Yesterday, the Women's Events Committee of London, Ontario, honoured five of our sisters who have shown the same daring, leadership and courage. London's famous five are: Sister Patricia McLean, Jane Bigelow, Dr. Mary McKim, Winn Whitfield and Kem Murch. Their determination has been critical to the progress made since 1929, but we have not come far enough.

Tragically, the government does not care and has failed the women of Canada. Women face violence and poverty. There is still no affordable housing policy and no safe universal child care. The lack of equality haunts women right across this country.

The famous five of history and the famous five of London, Ontario, have shown the way. It is time for this Parliament to follow.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to extend my congratulations to the county of Strathcona in my riding of Edmonton—Sherwood Park. Strathcona county won top prize in the international Communities in Bloom challenge for the first time since entering this competition.

Communities in Bloom is a Canadian non-profit organization committed to fostering civic pride, to environmental responsibility and to improving the quality of life through community participation. The program now includes more than 500 communities across the country and an international challenge involving countries from around the world.

In winning this award, the county of Strathcona has been commended for its commitment to promoting ecological preservation, environmental protection, waste free production and social equality.

I join with other community leaders in congratulating the county of Strathcona on its award and a job well done.

* * *

PERSONS CASE

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we celebrated a historic anniversary of the utmost importance.

Eighty years ago, the decision of the judicial committee of the Privy Council to legally recognize women as persons came into effect.

[*Translation*]

That decision was a huge step toward equality for all Canadian women.

Today, we all consider that men and women to be equal, but let us not forget that this is because of a decision made 80 years ago. Women had to fight for their right to be recognized. It is now our duty to ensure that these hard-won rights will always be protected and preserved.

[*English*]

Women have been full-fledged persons for 80 years. Let us keep working hard so that equality between men and women continues to move forward.

* * *

KENYA

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer, I travelled to Kenya, Africa with a group from Grande Prairie to witness the devastating effects that a worsening drought was having on the population.

It was clear that the most vulnerable people in these dry conditions were the children, especially those children who have been orphaned as a result of HIV-AIDS. The only hope for many of these children is

to find a place of refuge and a place like the Mully's Children's Home.

There is no water anywhere and, as we all know, without water things die, the crops die, animals die, trees die and eventually the people die.

In response to the need for water, a group of 12 volunteers from my community have set out to raise \$300,000. The city of Grande Prairie and area have been tremendously supportive. We have over 26 schools, 8 churches and 3 restaurants involved in the "Milk it for Mully" fundraising campaign. We also have countless other people involved in three other fundraising events.

I want to thank all of the volunteers of the schools, the churches, the businesses, the kids, the local media and the donors for their ongoing support. Together we can restore hope for the orphans of Kenya.

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[*Translation*]**CFB BAGOTVILLE**

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence recently announced the reconstruction of Hangar 2 at CFB Bagotville. Having neglected the building for years, the minister has finally decided to take my many requests seriously.

Unfortunately and incomprehensibly, reconstruction is not scheduled to begin for three years. We have received information about the building suggesting that it poses a serious risk to the health and safety of workers and has a major negative impact on daily operations.

I am therefore asking the minister to begin the work sooner. I am also asking him to act on the proposals in the Bloc Québécois' Bill C-429 and insist that Hangar 2 be rebuilt using wood. That would be a meaningful gesture on the part of the Conservative government to support the forestry industry and to set an example when it comes to using wood in federal buildings.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want convicted criminals to serve sentences that properly reflect the seriousness of their crimes.

Accordingly, our government introduced Bill C-25 to get rid of the two for one credit for time spent in pretrial custody, which reduces the detention period after sentencing by half.

Bill C-25 is supported by the attorneys general of all the parties in all provinces, as well as by victims groups and police associations.

However, Liberal senators are in the process of gutting Bill C-25, and promise to do the same to other bills meant to get tough on crime.

Statements by Members

The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering has even said that protecting the public against dangerous criminals is too expensive. We have always known that the Liberal leader and the Liberal Party were soft on crime—

• (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

* * *

[English]

MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of having great universities in my riding. Today I rise to salute one of them: McGill University.

[Translation]

McGill University was recently named one of the world's top 25 universities by the prestigious *Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings*. McGill ranked 18th in the world for 2009 and was the top public university in North America and the top Canadian university. McGill is also the only Canadian university to have been in the top 25 for six years running.

[English]

McGill's life sciences program is ranked 10th in the world. From William Osler to Wilder Penfield to Brenda Milner, McGill's contributions to medical science are legion.

I would like to congratulate the principal and vice-chancellor of McGill, Professor Heather Munroe-Blum, and all the world-class academic staff, outstanding students and alumni for this truly remarkable achievement and prestigious recognition.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is committed to getting tough on criminals and crime. For too long, the justice system has put the rights of criminals before those of law-abiding citizens and victims.

We already know that the Liberal senators are gutting a bill to end the unwarranted practice of the two for one credit for pre-trial custody. Now we understand that they will be doing the same for a bill that proposes minimum mandatory sentences on drug traffickers.

Our government is pursuing an aggressive anti-crime agenda. Auto theft, identity theft and white collar criminals are all in the Minister of Justice's sights. However, the Liberals are preoccupied with their continual fixation with prison farms.

We want to crack down on dangerous criminals. The Liberals want to ensure that prisoners have the right to grow fresh carrots and tomatoes. Safe streets or fresh salads, that is the choice.

When it comes to being tough on crime, Canadians know that the Conservatives are the only choice.

HIKE FOR A HERO

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today about how Sudbury is supporting one of Canada's heroes.

On October 4, I, along with close to 1,000 other Sudburians, hiked for a hero. This hero is Corporal Bill Kerr.

Corporal Kerr is part of the Irish Regiment of Canada based in Sudbury. Bill volunteered for two tours in Afghanistan. On October 15, 2008, while on foot patrol, Corporal Kerr was critically wounded by a roadside bomb, losing both legs and part of his left arm.

The hike raised money to build Corporal Kerr and his family an accessible house that they can call home. On behalf of the home for a hero project committee, I am pleased to announce that as a result of the hike for a hero event, over \$199,000 has been raised to date.

As the co-chair for the event, Derik McArthur, stated:

Once again Sudburians have shown that we are a caring community that not only supports our troops, but we take care of our own.

I echo his sentiments and congratulate all Sudburians for helping a truly Canadian hero, Corporal Bill Kerr.

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JUSTICE

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want individuals found guilty of crimes to serve a sentence that reflects the severity of those crimes, which is why our government introduced Bill C-25 to end the ridiculous practice of two for one credit for time served.

Bill C-25 was supported by provincial attorneys general from all political parties, as well as victims groups and police associations and yet the Liberal leader's own senators are now gutting Bill C-25 and they are promising to do the same with other tough-on-crime legislation.

The member for Ajax—Pickering is now saying that protecting the public from dangerous criminals is too expensive. We have always known that the Liberal leader is soft on crime and now he is just proving it once again.

•(1415)

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives were in opposition, they condemned the Liberal Party's backroom deals and favouritism. Today, though, there is no difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives. For example, 47 Conservative members, including ministers, have handed out 181 partisan cheques done up in the Conservative Party colours and bearing the member's or the Prime Minister's signature, when in fact this is government money.

When it spent \$108,000 on a one-hour press conference on the economic recovery plan, the Conservative government chose to spread propaganda rather than explain the real impact of its measures. This government does not distinguish between money it has promised and money it has spent, and it is constantly changing program names and classifications. It is hard to know where the \$12 billion has been spent, if it has been spent.

We also condemn the \$1.4 million contract awarded to a firm that employs a Conservative senator who sits on the Senate transport and communications committee.

The Conservatives promised transparency and ethics, yet today we are wondering whether they are worse than the Liberals.

* * *

[English]

SALMON FISHERY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 9 million Fraser River sockeye vanished. That is a tenfold decline. It is a disaster for people, fish-based jobs and biodiversity.

Respected salmon biologists believe that this disappearance illustrates the impacts of climate change on water temperature and flows affecting salmon. Add in stresses from habitat loss, disease and lice, overfishing, pollution, predators and, alas, we have a crisis. Where is the minister?

This emergency deserves a response. First, fund a scientific inquiry by recognized experts, have them report back by next spring proposing immediate measures and then commit to act on their advice.

Second, create a partnership of government agencies, universities and private groups to track fish migration so that we know where they go, where they die and why.

Last, reverse the decline in resources for DFO research assessment and enforcement.

Climate change is an ongoing ecological challenge for salmon but there are actions that must be taken now.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently senior Liberals told the media that their leader was going to have “an

Oral Questions

adult conversation” with Canadians to tell them why he would increase their taxes.

This should surprise no one. The self-described tax and spend Liberal was the first in his party to call for a carbon tax on everything. He said he would raise the GST and he has admitted that he would “have to raise taxes”.

Why he would raise taxes is also very clear. He needs money to pay for all his billion dollar spending promises: a 45-day work year, bullet trains, a national power grid, a permanent secretariat for international meetings, and now the latest, billions in a new environmental scheme.

The Liberal leader's view on the economy is very simple: tax more, spend more. Canadians are realizing it more by the day, a Liberal government is something we just cannot afford.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a pattern is becoming all too clear. The Conservative government is using stimulus spending to buy votes and reward its friends.

This morning, we learned that one of the Prime Minister's newest senators works for a company that has just won \$1.4 million in infrastructure spending.

At a time when the middle class is struggling, would the Prime Minister explain why infrastructure spending that is needed by all Canadians ends up in the hands of a member of his own—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would find it very interesting if the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, would say that outside of this place.

Neither the minister nor his office had any involvement with this contract. It was done at arm's length from the government by the crown corporation in question. Like all crowns, this crown is expected to operate in a clear and open manner when awarding contracts.

The member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, makes some very serious allegations. I would challenge him to put the evidence of those allegations before this House immediately.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are some questions that must be answered.

At what point did the Prime Minister's Office learn that Senator Housakos was the vice-president of a firm looking for government money?

Oral Questions

Did Senator Housakos lobby the Prime Minister's Office or other departments in order to obtain infrastructure money? Why does this government believe that this conduct is acceptable?

• (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no reason to jump to the conclusions that the Leader of the Opposition does. If he has any evidence of any wrongdoing, rather than pontificating in this place, he should put his facts on the table and be accountable for those.

We have been completely open, completely transparent with the infrastructure spending that we have made. The grant in question was made by a crown corporation, with no lobbying and no involvement whatsoever by my office or the office of the Minister of Public Works.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is part of a wider pattern. More than 50 Conservative MPs have handed out \$600 million in cheques with their own signatures on them. The Prime Minister walks around and his spokesman says, "We're shocked. We're shocked. Let's round up the usual suspects," but everybody knows nothing is authorized by the government unless it goes through the Prime Minister's Office.

Would the Prime Minister tell the House whether he personally signed off on this strategy? Did he or did he not approve these actions?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker.

Let us be very clear. The members of Parliament who support our economic action plan should be very proud of its achievements. Members of Parliament should not apologize for their achievements.

Here is what the Prime Minister said:

Listen, we are the government... I don't see why we can't try to get credit for what we do. I hope we do so. There is nothing to be ashamed [of] in that.

Do members know who said that? It was Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal logo was not on the cheques.

On May 20, Senator Leo Housakos of BPR Engineering organized a fundraising cocktail party for Conservatives in Montreal. Four other BPR executives were present.

That same day, the government awarded a \$1.4 million contract to BPR.

How did taxpayers' money get into the coffers of a company that has Senator Housakos on its payroll?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear that the government did not give this company a contract. That is not what happened.

[*English*]

The real reality is that the government in fact made no such contract with this company. There is a crown corporation that operates at arm's length. No minister or minister's office had any involvement in this matter.

If the member opposite wants to stop her drive-by smears, she should put some evidence upon the table, or is she not concerned with the facts?

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are the masters of drive-by smears.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has the floor.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Senator Housakos, the PM's main fundraiser in Quebec, was vice-president of BPR.

When the media came out with the story, the Conservatives tried to cover up his relationship with BPR.

Can this government explain how taxpayers' money ended up in the coffers of a company with such close ties to the Conservative Party?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say to the member opposite, if she has any evidence, if she has any facts with respect to the outrageous allegations she is making, if she wants to stand up in her place and prove me wrong, and prove that this is not a drive-by smear, let her do it.

Let her stand in her place. Let her table the allegations she has made. Better yet, let us see if she has the guts to make those allegations outside this place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although it promised to clean up the Liberals' sponsorship scandal mess, this government is doing exactly the same thing by using taxpayer money for party purposes. First we learn that they distributed hundreds of cheques with the party logo on them, and now we learn that a company with a Conservative senator on its payroll was awarded a federal contract.

How does the Prime Minister explain this influence peddling and this partisan use of taxpayer money?

• (1425)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those are very serious allegations. My colleague is talking about influence peddling; that is a serious charge. He must know that the Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges corporation is independent of the government.

The contract was awarded in an open and transparent manner.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is funny; Conservative ministers were there to announce the renovation of the Champlain Bridge. Now, they want nothing to do with it. It is rather odd, to say the least.

This government does not have money for unemployed workers, for families, for the forestry industry or the manufacturing industry. But it does not think twice about spending more than \$100,000 to announce its latest progress report on the economic recovery. That is unacceptable.

How can the Conservatives explain this?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. We know that renovations on the Champlain Bridge had become necessary, and this government has finally provided some political direction.

We voted for a parliamentary appropriation to repair the bridge, and after that, a corporation that operates independently of the government, Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated, took over.

Once again, that party is trying to confuse everyone, because it will never manage anything. All it ever does is complain in this House.

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the government refused to modernize the Access to Information Act, it broke a 2005 election promise and ignored repeated requests from both the standing committee and the commissioners responsible for the act. The government said that it would clean house after the Liberals' 12-year regime, but it has all kinds of skeletons in its closet.

Why is the government refusing to be transparent? What does it have to hide?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the hon. member missed it, but we passed the Federal Accountability Act, which was the most significant step in access to information in the last 25 years in this country.

Despite opposition from the members of the Liberal Party and other members, we have now made 70 different organizations, including crown corporations, including the Canadian Wheat Board, subject to the Federal Accountability Act. That is accountability. That is transparency.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he did not answer the question, but whatever.

The government came up with an economic plan that does not meet Quebec's needs, and now it is hiding information about the true impact of its most recent budget from Parliament and the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Why is the government hiding the truth from Quebecers?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to transparency and openness. This is why we have done more than has been done in many, many years under previous Liberal administrations.

Instead of complaining, the hon. member should get up on her feet and applaud this government for all it has done for transparency and accountability.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our Copenhagen bill is very clear. We want science-based greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. That is what investors in the new green economy want. They want to know the rules of the game. Without solid targets, there will be no investment. It is as simple as that.

Canada is lagging behind while our competitors are doing what needs to be done. When will the Prime Minister jump on the bandwagon?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is proposing a climate change bill that would devastate the economic recovery and force Canada to diverge from the very singular targets that our government and President Obama have identified.

The NDP, the Bloc and the Liberals just do not get it. They would have Canada move away from a North American target and isolate Canada continentally.

Everyone agrees that a climate change plan must be done in partnership with our international trading partners and must include economic realities.

● (1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is suggesting that we should wait, somehow cap-in-hand, for the American administration to come up with its plan.

Hon. John Baird: Cap and trade.

Hon. Jack Layton: I wish they would support cap and trade, Mr. Speaker.

Meanwhile, we have the environment minister saying that the discussions in Copenhagen will be a failure. That is a heck of a way to go into a negotiation: predict failure and then indicate that we would not take any action until the other side comes forward, until our neighbour takes action first.

When will the government and the Prime Minister demonstrate some leadership on the most important issue facing the world today, which is the climate change crisis, or does he still think it is some kind of a—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Oral Questions

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that effective action on the environment would require a balanced approach. Canada is taking that balanced approach to meet our global responsibilities in a way that balances environmental protection and economic prosperity for Canadians, and is comparable to the level of effort from other industrialized countries.

We have committed to reducing our total greenhouse gas emissions 20% by 2020, which leads to a 60% to 70% reduction by 2050. Those are the toughest targets in Canadian history.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not quite follow the argument. The Conservatives are saying that they want to develop environmental policies that are in harmony with the U.S. Yet at the same time, the government is asking the U.S. government to weaken its air pollution rules so that Great Lakes freighters can continue to use polluting bunker oil.

According to the EPA, ship exhaust contains cancer-causing chemicals that travel hundreds of kilometres, and that pollutes the lungs of people in Canada, not just in the U.S., as well as producing disease, particularly in children and in the elderly.

Why is the government then refusing to improve air quality for millions of Canadians exposed to—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with all of our major trading partners and with international maritime organizations to have better standards, so we can have cleaner air with respect to our transportation systems, particularly in the area of maritime transportation.

It is essential that we work together with the United States because we do share a common border, we do share the Great Lakes, and we are committed to working constructively with the Obama administration and with leaders in Congress on achieving this important public policy goal.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many more examples of the Conservative government wrongly using taxpayers' money to promote the Conservative Party.

This time, could the President of the Treasury Board tell Canadians just how much of that taxpayers' money was used for a one hour long self-promotion in Cambridge that was clearly very slick and very clearly promoted the Conservative Party?

Could the President of the Treasury Board tell us just how much money was spent for that?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House of Commons mandated the Prime Minister with two important goals: first, to fully implement the economic action plan of the Minister of Finance. He has done yeoman work with the assistance of his ministers and MPs, and with the public service in doing just that.

He also had a second important responsibility with which the House entrusted him, and that was to report back to Canadians on that important work. He did that in Cambridge, Ontario. He did that in Saint John, New Brunswick. The Prime Minister never makes any apology for getting off Parliament Hill and listening to the real voices of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has become clear that the Prime Minister is incapable of apologizing for anything.

I cannot believe that the hon. member does not know the answer which does beg the conclusion that he is trying to hide something and rightly, he should be ashamed.

One hour of a Conservative Party infomercial cost Canadian taxpayers more than \$100,000. I ask the hon. member this. Whose money does he think he is spending anyway?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at one moment the member opposite claims that we are keeping numbers a secret. I think those numbers were all in the newspapers this morning. That is generally the research bureau of the Liberal Party.

More than half of the money the member opposite talks about is the cost to print the document, the report to taxpayers that she herself demanded that this government follow.

We do not apologize for being accountable to Canadian taxpayers. We do not apologize for having our Prime Minister speak to Canadians in every corner of the country. That is a responsibility that this government responds to and we are up to the challenge.

● (1435)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the dishonesty of the Prime Minister's propaganda campaign knows no limits. Squandering taxpayers' money for everything from Conservatives' cheque signing to plastering their logo on government announcements, the Prime Minister has found a new low. Using maintenance in government buildings as an excuse to manipulate the public mind, Conservative operatives in Kensington, P.E.I., set up an economic action plan sign for replacing a boiler room door.

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine calling a door replacement stimulus? Prime Minister, which cost more? The door or the propaganda sign?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government does not have to make apologies for making accessibility improvements to federal government workplaces across the country and in P.E.I.

I have seen the Liberal Party members on their feet many times today complaining about cheques. The member for Malpeque explicitly talked about a project in Kensington.

I would not use a prop, Mr. Speaker, but I have in my hand a picture of the member for Malpeque with a cheque, "a cheque for Kensington", his smiling face and the grant recipient. I have it right here. I would be pleased to table it right after question period.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, order. I am sure the minister perhaps wants the photograph autographed by the member but that can be arranged later.

[*Translation*]

The member for Hull—Aylmer.

Order, please.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the one hand, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities says that the Bridge Corporation is independent. On the other, we just heard the Minister of Public Works and Government Services say that the Conservatives gave the Bridge Corporation policy direction.

Who is telling the truth?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, when it comes to health and safety, this government gives directives to our crown corporations to make sure that our transportation systems are safe. We do not apologize for that at all.

In addition to having signed cheques, not signed cheques because they are not signed yet, I have to get them to sign after question period, we have the member for Malpeque's picture signing a cheque. We have the member for Richmond Hill who has actually signed the cheque and we also have the Liberal member for Scarborough—Agincourt. If any more of them want to stand up, I have plenty more.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, contrary to its claims here in the House of Commons, the government has known since May 2006 that Afghan prisoners faced the risk of torture. The report by the Canadian diplomat posted in Kandahar more or less confirms this and supports the questions raised several times in this House by the Bloc Québécois.

How can the Minister of National Defence claim in this House that he never saw Richard Colvin's report on the treatment of Afghan prisoners?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the important issue, really, is what Canadians have done to improve the transfer arrangement that was left in place by the previous government.

It is important to note that there have now been over 170 visits to Afghan prisons. We continue to mentor the Afghan army and police, as well as corrections officers. The transfer arrangement has been greatly improved, as has the Afghan penal system as a result of the hard work of Canadians.

As for this report, we receive hundreds, if not thousands, of reports annually through the Department of National Defence, as

well as the Department of Foreign Affairs. That is why it did not make it to my desk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister just claimed that he never saw the report. He claims he never saw that report and maintains that it never reached his desk. The minister must not be very curious, to say the least.

Even as the Bloc Québécois asked him about it, and as various groups were denouncing how the Canadian Forces were treating Afghan prisoners, the minister did not ask any questions. And supposedly no one in his political entourage brought this report to his attention. Is that what the minister would have us believe? What he is saying is far from convincing.

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to all of the improvements that we have seen in Afghanistan with respect to the treatment of Taliban terrorist suspects, we have also seen this particular issue be the subject of at least three court challenges. We have three different independent investigations going on into the circumstances. This is an issue that has been deliberated on fully.

I am not going to comment on the hon. member's intellectual abilities, but I will note that when it comes to Bloc members, I wish they would spend just as much time standing up and protecting the interests of Canadian soldiers as they do for the vigour they seem to have for Taliban prisoners.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been rumours suggesting that the government is about to establish two categories of targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: less stringent intensity targets for the oil and gas industry, and absolute targets for everyone else. This will mean that Quebec, which has already done its duty when it comes to pollution, will also have to pay for the negligence of others.

Does the government really intend to establish two categories of targets?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member well knows that climate change is a global issue. It needs a global approach. That is why Canada is working with our international partners. There is the clean energy dialogue that is ongoing with President Obama in the United States as we prepare for Copenhagen. We need to work hard on this and we need the support of the member across.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the minister refuses to answer, is that not proof that the government is about to grant special favours to the oil and gas industry, by applying the polluter-paid principle rather than the polluter-pay principle?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members need to participate in greenhouse gas emission reductions, including that member, including the Bloc, including the NDP, including the Liberals.

It was during 13 dark years that the Liberals did absolutely nothing. In fact, it was the Liberal leader who said that his party got into a mess on the environment. Yes, it did. We are getting us out of that mess. We are reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the former and current ministers of defence all claim that they were not aware of Richard Colvin's reports on the treatment of Afghan detainees at the time. As far back as the fall of 2006 questions on that matter were being raised in this House.

When did the Minister of National Defence become aware of the reports? Has he now investigated who in the military and the Department of National Defence was made aware of the reports and when?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that it was due to the shortcomings of the arrangement that was in place when our government took office that we did act to improve the arrangement. We then obviously undertook further prison visits. We undertook to train more Afghan army, police, as well as correctional investigators. As a result of that, we have drastically improved the system as it currently exists in Afghanistan.

I would remind the hon. member as well that we continue to investigate certain issues which are of a serious nature and we are co-operating fully.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the government has been throwing obstacles in the way of the Military Police Complaints Commission and it is not answering questions in the House.

Colvin claims his reports were sent up the chain of command in the military, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the minister was the minister of foreign affairs in the beginning, and the Department of National Defence.

How is it possible that no one in cabinet, including the Prime Minister, was aware of Colvin's reports, or is this a case of continuing wilful blindness on the part of these Conservatives?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a result of these issues, as I mentioned, we are continuing to support, I want to indicate it was, in fact, the decision of the chairperson of the Military Police Complaints Commission to shut down its hearings. He is invited and welcome to begin those hearings again at any time. Also, he has decided, with respect to a decision by the federal court, which clearly outlines the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission, to appeal that decision. That has delayed proceedings as well.

We are co-operating. We have provided documents. We have provided witnesses. We will continue to do so. I intend to hear from the Department of Defence, as well as foreign affairs, as to where this report stopped, because it did not make it to the deputy minister or my desk.

* * *

● (1445)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister shirks his responsibilities at the United Nations; the Minister of the Environment attacks China as it takes its first steps toward reducing its greenhouse gas emissions; outraged by the minister's attempt to water down a possible agreement, developing countries walk away from negotiations in Bangkok; and the minister announces that no agreement will be reached in Copenhagen.

When are these Reform Conservatives going to stop sabotaging any progress on the world stage?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I came upon a very interesting quote from the member. He says, "It doesn't matter who occupies the White House, the Americans will rush, in my view, to put a price on carbon. I think we should beat them to it". We do not support a carbon tax.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is just sheer insanity. Not only are the Conservatives undermining international progress, but they are lobbying the United States to weaken clean air and health standards. Here is how bad it is. The U. S. EPA wants to reduce smog around the Great Lakes by banning dirty bunker fuel. Last year smog helped kill 2,700 Canadians and put 11,000 more people in hospital, costing our economy \$1 billion.

Why is the government blocking American efforts to improve air quality, increase efficiency and protect the health of Canadians? What is it that the government does not get about death and smog?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question that rings in the House is this. It was from the Liberal leader, who said "Why didn't we get it done?" That is the question the member needs to ask. Why did those members not get it done when they had an opportunity?

This government is taking the environment very seriously. We have carbon capture and storage and cleaner fuels. We are helping energy efficiency within homes. We are getting it done right here in Canada. We are getting it done internationally.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want individuals found guilty of crimes to serve a sentence that reflects the severity of those crimes. Too often the sentences of offenders simply do not correspond to the serious nature of the crime.

Oral Questions

The end of the two-for-one credit is that convicted criminals are spending less time in sentenced custody and released back onto the streets in our communities sooner. Bill C-25 puts an end to this. Our bill has the support of victims' groups, police associations and provincial attorneys general.

Why are Liberal senators gutting this bill despite it being passed unanimously by the House?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have always known the Liberals have been soft on crime. Now they are doing their best to prove that. Two weeks ago they gutted the bill on truth on sentencing. Now they are making threats to gut our bill on drugs.

I guess it is summed up by the Liberal member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca who said that this area of fighting crimes was the Achilles' heel for the Liberal Party. He said that his party supported the legislation because they were spooked by Conservative attacks that they were not tough on crime. If the shoe fits, then wear it.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister for everything that moves in Quebec just admitted, here in this House, that the Champlain Bridge repairs were the result of, and I quote, “political direction”.

Since the \$1.4 million given to BPR by Senator Léo Housakos was a matter of “political direction”, the question is: what does Senator Léo Housakos do for BPR, an engineering firm? He is not even an engineer. He is just a Conservative.

Is this acceptable, yes or no?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Outremont should be pleased because, yes, the government made the political decision in its budget to allocate \$220 million to repair the Champlain bridge. That is what I said.

The money was then managed by an independent crown corporation, namely Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated. The process was followed openly and transparently. If the opposition has evidence to the contrary, then let it say so outside the House.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that I am one person who has never been afraid to say the same thing outside the House as inside.

[English]

The Conservatives were elected on the promise that they would do better than the Liberal Party on the sponsorship scandal. What do they do? They create their own, except that this time they are using taxpayer money to promote the Conservative Party directly: big taxpayers' cheques with big Conservative logos.

What is next? Putting the Conservative logo on Canada's Olympic uniforms? No, they have already done that. When will the government clean up its act and stop using taxpayer money for partisan political purposes?

● (1450)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government needs members of Parliament to stand and vote in favour of our economic action plan. This government needs the support of members of Parliament to support our infrastructure investments right across the country.

There is nothing wrong with members of Parliament fighting for good projects in their regions. There is nothing wrong with members of Parliament fighting to have cleaner water through sewer investments, better roads, better bridges, better public transit and better projects like the project in Halifax that we announced. Working with the NDP government and the city of Halifax, we are helping to build a brand new library right in downtown Halifax.

We are getting the job done and we have nothing to apologize for.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister still has not kept his promise, and the Government of Quebec is still calling for the reconveyance of the land in front of the National Assembly and two other Parks Canada lots adjacent to the fortifications.

Will the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs respond favourably to Quebec's request so that Quebecers do not continue to be deprived of this historic land in the heart of their national capital?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on June 24, when he was in Quebec City to celebrate Quebecers' national holiday, the Prime Minister announced that, as Benoît Pelletier requested in his 2006 letter, he was transferring not only the National Assembly land, but also Honoré Mercier Street. Discussions on how to proceed are under way.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to blocking the reconveyance of land in the heart of our national capital and attempting a power grab on the issue of the securities commission, the government is dragging its feet on appointing a negotiator to discuss Quebec's repatriation of full powers over culture and communications.

Are we to understand that the government's refusal to name a negotiator amounts to a rejection of this historic request by Quebec?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, what is very clear is that the Bloc Québécois is here just to manufacture crises, as Jacques Parizeau said a few months ago. With the Bloc, either there is a crisis, or there is about to be one.

Oral Questions

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government shows a lack of leadership and no clear, consistent message in its H1N1 response. Public health officials say that vaccine is our best defence against the virus, but only one-third of Canadians plan on taking it because of all of the confusion about it.

How are Canadians supposed to know what to do when even the Prime Minister adds to the confusion?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in terms of vaccine rollout, we are on schedule. The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada has stated that the vaccine will be at the hands of the provinces. In fact, this weekend, we started pre-positioning the distribution of those vaccines in all provinces and territories.

Last Monday, we released an information booklet that has since received 60,000 hits. We do weekly press conferences to update Canadians on what we are doing so there is no confusion out there. We are on schedule and we are implementing a pandemic plan for Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the latest CP-Harris Decima survey shows that only 33% of Canadians intend to get vaccinated against the H1N1 flu. Why is that percentage so low, even though experts are clearly saying that Canadians are five times more likely to get the H1N1 virus than the seasonal flu?

The Prime Minister failed in his primary task of properly informing Canadians, since he himself favours the seasonal flu vaccine over the H1N1 vaccine. Who should Canadians believe: the Prime Minister or the experts?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, chief public health officers from this country have been advising all Canadians to take the vaccine for H1N1. The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada and the medical experts have advised us to produce this vaccine for distribution to provinces and territories.

I have confidence in the information I am receiving from the experts, the medical experts, the Chief Public Health Officer of our country, and they should, too.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, senior diplomat Richard Colvin wrote 26 different reports on Afghan prisoner torture and sent the reports to over 79 senior military and government officials, including the head of the Afghanistan task force. Yet the minister of national defence at the time, the current Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister have denied seeing any of these reports.

Would any of these three blind mice like to explain whether they suggest we are dealing with extreme negligence and incompetence by officials or are they misleading Canadians?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those are pretty strong words. The reality is we have this question coming from a member of Parliament who was not around when we came to government and then undertook the very important task of improving the Afghan penal system. We took very clear steps to improve the inadequate transfer agreement that was in place. We took the steps of training Afghan officials to ensure that human rights were respected. We continue in that important work.

The member has now asked, I believe, nine or ten questions on the Military Police Complaints Commission. I only wish he would bring that type of enthusiasm to support the men and women of the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Colvin's report focused on a plan compiled by the Prime Minister's own National Security Advisor and was sent to commanders at the Department of National Defence and all relevant government officials, and the issue was top of mind at the time. Yet the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister both said in the House that allegations of prisoner abuse were baseless. Just who did they ask before making such declarations?

Are the people of Canada to believe that neither the Prime Minister's own National Security Advisor nor any of the relevant senior officials brought these reports to their attention? If so, can they explain this gross incompetence?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member may have a natural rhetorical flourish, but the reality is this government acted. We acted decisively in putting in place a new transfer arrangement. We have in fact helped to improve the correctional system. Most important, there are at least three separate investigations going on with the allegations of which he is concerned.

The important thing to note here, and for everyone to understand, is these are allegations about what Afghan officials did to Afghan terrorist suspects and what the military police knew about it, that and only that.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since forming government, we have consistently taken action to get tough on all kinds of crime. Victims of crime have always been the focus and at the very heart and centre of our government's justice agenda. We believe that those who fall prey to fraudsters and swindlers are often victimized just as much as the person who has been mugged in an alley.

Would the Minister of Justice tell us about our government's plan to address the issue of white-collar crime in our country.

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. In the last Parliament, we introduced legislation that would eliminate House arrest for serious white-collar crime. What did the opposition do? It gutted that bill. Does that shameful act not suggest that people convicted of serious fraud get the opportunity to spend their sentence at home?

Today I am proud to say that we put on notice legislation that would include mandatory prison sentences for white-collar crime. I am hoping this will have the support of the opposition. The Liberals have no trouble fighting among themselves, how about fighting crime for a change? Would that be so bad?

* * *

NORTEL

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recent media reports talk about people like John Malik, who worked for Nortel and now faces ruin. His pension plan is underfunded and John may lose his health and life insurance benefits at a time when he needs them most.

When I last asked this question, the government said that this matter was not something we should be dealing with at the federal level. It said this issue “has no place on the floor of this House”.

When is the government going to stop telling people like John that it is not going to help them and start doing the right thing and offering some help to him and seniors across Canada?

● (1500)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that everyone in the House cares about people who are facing some difficulty. However, the fact is that when dealing with pensions and long-term disability issues, all of those are registered with the province of Ontario. They are a provincial responsibility. I know the hon. member is going to suggest making changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act but they cannot be retrospective.

We are trying to help build a better business and economic environment in our country, which will help everybody, including pensioners.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, using the Delcan report as a basis, the former director of Laval University's civil engineering department found that the Quebec City bridge is deteriorating very quickly and that only political will can result into concrete measures being taken regarding this issue. The same document, which was prepared for Transport Canada, tells us that the initial work was not done properly and that it will have to be redone.

Can the minister responsible for the Quebec City region tell us whether or not she will support the Bloc Québécois motion calling on the federal government to resume its ownership of the Quebec

City bridge and complete the work that is needed as soon as possible?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in question period, this government takes the health and safety of Canadians, particularly those in Quebec City and the bridge in question, very seriously. A legal issue with the bridge arose under the previous government, which has led to litigation.

We are committed to working with the Province of Quebec, Canadian National and all the parties involved to ensure we can come up with an agreement that is in the best interests of Canadian taxpayers and that will benefit the people of Quebec City.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary has worked hard to make the Trail Regional Airport a huge success story. However, the airport will be shut down during the Olympics for over a month.

The city of Rossland has the possibility of hosting the Russian biathlon team for pre-Olympic training. The airport is a significant economic driver. A loss of revenue will mean an increase in property taxes, not a good way to celebrate the Olympics.

I have written many letters and met with ministers and government officials. My request for an urgent meeting among the Minister of Transport, the Trail city council and the president of Pacific Coastal Airlines has been denied.

Why does the Minister of Transport wish to impose economic hardship on the citizens of the lower Columbia basin?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite has spoken to me repeatedly on this issue. We are working very diligently with our Olympic partners to provide a secure environment with the very minimal possible disruption to neighbouring regions of the province of British Columbia. This is a significant challenge.

Our commitment is to work in co-operation to ensure we do enough to ensure our athletes and the travelling public are safe. That is our objective.

It is interesting to note that the NDP did not want to support the Olympics taking place in Vancouver-Whistler. That is something that those of us on this side of the House strong supported.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike Bloc members, who vote against anti-child-trafficking and exploitation measures, and unlike Liberal senators, who vote against the will of this House, against the will of Canadians, and who oppose putting an end to the two-for-one credit for criminals who are serving time, our government is taking concrete measures to fight crime. It is time for all parliamentarians to make victims of criminal acts the focus of their concerns.

I would like to know what the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and our government intend to do to fight white-collar crime.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the last session, we introduced a bill to target major crimes of fraud and theft exceeding \$5,000. These are serious crimes and many people have told us that we need to crack down on such offences. However, what did the opposition do? It gutted our amendments to the act. That is shameful.

This means that these criminals, these white-collar bandits and others can serve their time at home, on their couch. People no longer want this to be the case.

A bill will be introduced and will provide mandatory jail sentences for serious crimes. I hope that the opposition will support us at last.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Jeremy Harrison, Minister of Municipal Affairs for Saskatchewan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I am pleased to table the government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled, "Chapter 7—Economy and Efficiency of Services—Correctional Service Canada", December 2008, Report of the Auditor General of Canada, in both official languages.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the government's response to the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled:

"Chapter 1, National Security: Intelligence and Information Sharing of the 2009 Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada".

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I am pleased to table the government's response to the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security entitled, "Review of the Findings and Recommendations Arising from Iacobucci and O'Connor Inquiries", in both official languages.

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table, in both official languages, two government responses. The first is the government's response to the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights entitled, "Ending Alcohol-Impaired Driving: A Common Approach".

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second is the government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security entitled, "Statutory Review of the DNA Identification Act".

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and pursuant to Standing Order 109, I am pleased to table the government's response to the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates entitled, "In Pursuit of Balance: Assisting Small and Medium Enterprises in Accessing Federal Procurement".

* * *

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 several petitions.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have a new colleague join me here. Our tough on crime agenda is the right thing for Canada and we are looking for support right across the chamber here. This is encouraging.

Our government believes our justice system should not put the rights of criminals ahead of the rights of law-abiding Canadians. We have introduced numerous pieces of legislation that once passed will further protect Canadians.

We passed the Tackling Violent Crime Act and we have established the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. These are all steps in the right direction.

However, other bills that we currently have before Parliament are many, including the bill that would end the two for one credit for time served, to abolish the faint hope clause for murderers, to stop the use of house arrest for serious crime and require mandatory jail time for serious drug offences. These are all steps in the right direction. This is what Canadians are looking for.

[*Translation*]

As we have already said, we will take other measures to punish white collar criminals.

[*English*]

As I have already indicated in question period, we have put on notice a bill that will take direct aim at white collar crime in this country. I am again hoping that the opposition parties will listen to what Canadians are saying and make every effort to get these bills through and stop obstructing urgently needed law and order legislation.

Whether here in the House of Commons or in the Senate, we obviously need the co-operation in both, but these are all steps in the right direction for the safety and security of Canadians.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to see that the member for Yukon has rejoined this side of the House.

When the government is in difficulty, whether it is allegations around the partisan handing out of infrastructure money or government cheques with Conservative logos appearing at ceremonies, its initial reaction is to push the reset button and pretend that there is a great crisis with respect to obstruction of justice legislation.

That is not true. Tomorrow, for example, we will be discussing Bill S-4 in the House, the identity theft bill. The only identity that appears to have been misappropriated may have been the Government of Canada's identity at recent cheque presentations. The government has had some difficulty with that.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

The minister knows very well, for example, that we will support a bill strengthening the Criminal Code in the case of white collar criminals and economic crimes. As to preventing those who are guilty of massive fraud from carrying out their sentence at home, we will support the government in order to remove this part of the Criminal Code, something we called for several weeks ago.

[*English*]

The Minister of Justice looks for examples where the opposition has obstructed legislation with respect, for example, to removing the faint hope clause for those convicted of murder. We supported that legislation and we look forward to seeing the minister in committee this afternoon to continue to expedite that bill and pass it as quickly as possible.

With regard to restricting conditional sentences, or what has been known as house arrest, the minister knows that we support that legislation. We have in fact called on the government to strengthen that legislation and remove what is becoming an increasing practice of assigning conditional sentences, because we think the public finds

Routine Proceedings

that is no longer appropriate. The government is looking for an artificial crisis where one does not exist.

[*Translation*]

The minister can rest assured that his bills will be passed as quickly as possible with the cooperation of the Liberal opposition in this House.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out right off that no government, Conservative or Liberal, has ever introduced in Parliament bills that put the rights of criminals ahead of those of law abiding citizens. Quebec, like Canada, enjoys a level of security that compares favourably with other democracies. No system is perfect, and the Bloc is prepared to collaborate with whatever improvements are needed to the justice system.

Thus, we have been proposing since 2007 the abolition of parole after one sixth of a sentence has been served and even introduced a bill to that effect, which the government rejected. We refused, however, to blindly imitate the worst of American practice because it leads nowhere. In the States, they imprison proportionally six or seven times the number imprisoned in Canada, and the crime rate is higher. The chance of being a victim of homicide is three and a half times greater there than it is here. That is what comes of having more people in prison and more unregulated weapons.

The Bloc Québécois advocates a justice system that is truly effective in reducing crime, a system based on the individualization of sentences. This approach has served us well and continues to do so. It must not be chucked out for short sighted electoral purposes.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when one hears the minister stand in the House, take advantage of the right he has to make a ministerial statement and put forth the ongoing ideological rant from the Conservatives about being harsh on crime in this country, they should look at the history of what has happened to see how serious they really are.

We wasted a whole year. The justice committee did not meet for a whole year, from March 11, 2008 until March of 2009. In every case, it was because of an action by the government. Initially, the chair of the committee filibustered and refused to call meetings. We wasted the whole of spring 2008 on that.

In the fall of 2008, the Prime Minister unilaterally decided that he would call an election, in breach of his own law. In December 2008, the government took the position that it would prorogue because it was afraid of what the opposition parties would do to it.

At any of those times, did the Conservatives ever ask themselves about the legislation that was needed to deal with crime right across this country? No, they did not. We have them up here again today. This year, they have been really slow at introducing any new bills into the House and then getting them to committee.

The committee missed a whole year of being able to do anything and every one of those delays was because of the conduct of the government, not any lack of work or co-operation by the opposition parties. When he stands in the House and says those things, we should look at his credibility.

Routine Proceedings

• (1515)

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): 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 NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the Spring Session 2009, held in Oslo, Norway, from May 22 to 26, 2009.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development requesting an extension of 30 sitting days to consider Bill C-300.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to an alleged question of privilege.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in relation to the amendments to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization convention.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 20, 2009, at 5:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Does the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

PETITIONS

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure today to present a petition on behalf of a large number of people in my own constituency, many of them parishioners at Saint Vincent de Paul Parish, who are very concerned about and opposed to Bill C-384 for a number of reasons, one of which is that it does not define terminal illness.

The undersigned are very concerned that this bill, if passed, would endanger Canadians and that it would open the door to deadly abuse. They feel that there are better ways to deal with those who are ill, even terminally ill, and they urge this House to vote against Bill C-384.

I am pleased to present this petition on their behalf. I want to thank, in particular, Kitty Wiley for the work that she did in putting this together.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a number of petitions signed by several hundred people calling on the Government of Canada to enable prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide by updating the Canadian Criminal Code to reflect the new realities of 21st century broadband access.

These petitioners are from Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec. It is an honour to present this petition on their behalf.

• (1520)

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present three petitions from residents of the communities of Rollet, Beaudry and Cloutier, in my riding, asking that the post offices in their vicinity remain open.

[English]

ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF PEACE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first one deals with the establishment of a department of peace. The fact is there are 3,000 to 26,000 nuclear weapons held by the United States and Russia on a 15-minute-launch warning status that threaten to destroy our world due to potential technical systems failure or an accident. Fifty of today's modern nuclear weapons could kill 200 million people, and there is no medical response. The petition is calling on Parliament to establish a department of peace that will reinvigorate Canada's role as a global peace builder and that will have the abolition of nuclear weapons as a top priority.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with a NATO review of nuclear weapons policy. There are no ongoing multilateral negotiations for an agreement to eliminate these weapons of mass destruction. A model nuclear weapons convention has been filed before the UN General Assembly as a discussion document to encourage progress towards nuclear disarmament. The petitioners, residents of Canada, demand that the government of Canada call for an urgent review of NATO's nuclear weapons policies to ensure that all NATO states fulfill their obligations to negotiate and conclude an agreement for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my final petition deals with Canada Post. Canadians are calling on the government of Canada to maintain the moratorium on post office closures and withdraw the legislation to legalize remailers. We also call upon the government of Canada to instruct Canada Post to maintain, expand, and improve postal services.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table in this House a petition signed by over 3,600 British Columbia residents as well as several Albertans. It draws attention to the ongoing scourge of dangerous driving and criminally negligent driving still plaguing this country. The petitioners draw the attention of this House to the fact that vehicular homicide needs to be added into the Criminal Code. They call upon Parliament to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to allow a new charge of vehicular homicide.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present three petitions from residents in my riding, two of which deal with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

The first one calls on the government to support the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, through an increase in the funding and stability of the CBC.

The second petition asks the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to support the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation through increased support for stable and adequate funding.

ELISA LOYO GUTIERREZ

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is signed by literally thousands of constituents in my riding and across the country. The petitioners wish to draw the attention of the House of Commons to Elisa Loyo Gutierrez, a 25-year-old Mexican-Canadian woman, who died under highly suspicious circumstances at her place of work in the Philippines on or about the date of December 23, 2008. The petitioners call upon the government of Canada to engage in a complete review of this case.

Routine Proceedings

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand and table a petition on behalf of some of the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country asking our government to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table two petitions in support of animal welfare in Canada.

The petitions recognize that there is scientific consensus and public acknowledgement that animals feel pain and can experience suffering. Therefore, these petitioners are calling upon the federal government to adopt effective animal welfare legislation that will improve the condition of animals and promote animal welfare.

• (1525)

PAY EQUITY

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petitioners call upon the government to stop the wage roll-backs and restore pay equity for public service workers. Bill C-10, the Budget Implementation Act, empowers the government to roll back negotiated wages and arbitral awards retroactively as well as radically change the rules governing pay equity in the federal public sector. This infringes upon the rights of civil servants to freely and collectively bargain wage increases with their employers and adversely affects the rights of public sector workers, particularly women, to equal pay for work of equal value.

Bill C-10 would prevent civil servants from filing and adjudicating gender-based discrimination through the Canadian Human Rights Code and would trade away their human rights at the bargaining table. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government of Canada to rescind the provisions of Bill C-10 that violate workers' rights to collective bargaining, including the arbitral awards of equal pay for work of equal value.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present two petitions from the citizens of Kitchener Centre. The first draws attention to the fact that people who experience mental illness need to be protected by the law, that youth in Canada are as vulnerable as youth all around the world and that predators through the Internet and without penalty are encouraging and counselling suicide.

This petition asks Parliament to enable prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide by updating the Criminal Code in accordance with 21st century broadband access.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I wish to present acknowledges that animals can feel pain and can suffer. Over one billion people around the world rely on animals for their livelihood. Animals are often significantly affected by natural disasters and are seldom considered during relief efforts. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

Routine Proceedings

PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the clerk of petitions, I would like to present this petition on behalf of a number of my constituents on the subject of the protection of human life.

These petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that Canada is a country that respects human rights. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says that everyone has the right to life. It has been 40 years since the decision on May 14, 1969, when Parliament changed the law to permit abortion. Since January 28, 1988, Canada has had no law to protect the lives of unborn children.

Therefore, these petitioners call upon Parliament to pass legislation for the protection of human life from the time of conception until natural death.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 326, 404 and 411.

[Text]

Question No. 326—**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:**

How much funding has the Department of Fisheries and Oceans allocated to the marketing of Atlantic fishery products since 2000 inclusive, broken down by year and by sector (lobster, snow crab, salmon, etc.)?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has not allocated any funding to the marketing of Atlantic fishery products. Marketing of food products is the responsibility of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Question No. 404—**Mr. Andrew Kania:**

With respect to Employment Insurance claims made by residents of the constituency of Brampton West: (a) what is the number of claims that have been made since January 2008 (i) broken down by month, (ii) in total; (b) what is the percentage of claims that have been approved since January 2008, (i) broken down by month, (ii) in total; (c) which claims have been denied since January 2008, (i) broken down by month, (ii) in total, and what were the reasons for their denial; and (d) what has been the average period of time it has taken to process the claims that have been made since January 2008, (i) broken down by month, (ii) in total?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a) to (d), the department does not have the requested data at the Brampton level.

Question No. 411—**Ms. Raymonde Folco:**

Given that the government has stated its intention to double aid to Africa: (a) what are the additional amounts that will be invested in Africa in the next budget, 2009-2010; (b) what African countries, that are members of la Francophonie, will benefit from these funds; (c) what are the amounts distributed, by countries, in the bilateral projects; and (d) what are the amounts distributed through the multilateral programs?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 summit, G8 leaders pledged to double their aid to Africa by 2010. Canada reached its commitment to double assistance to \$2.1 billion, compared to \$1.05 billion in 2003-04, one year ahead of G8 commitment.

African country members of La Francophonie that will continue to benefit from these funds include those that are CIDA's countries of focus: Ghana, which is an associate member of La Francophonie; Mali; Mozambique, which is an observer; Senegal; as well as those in which CIDA will maintain a modest level of programming: Benin, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Morocco, Niger and Rwanda.

The 2009-10 aid budgets, including bilateral and multilateral projects and programs, are still being finalized and therefore dollar amounts are not available at this time.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question Nos. 402 and 409 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 402—**Mr. Andrew Kania:**

With respect to government spending in the constituency of Brampton West, what was the total amount of government funding since fiscal year 2005-2006 up to and including the current fiscal year, itemized according to: (a) the date the money was requested in the riding; (b) the dollar amount requested; (c) the dollar amount received; (d) the program from which the funding came; (e) the department responsible; and (f) the designated recipient?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 409—**Ms. Raymonde Folco:**

With regards to Canadian International Development Agency funding and programming: (a) what programs and initiatives has the Agency undertaken specifically around conflict management in Africa and what were the total costs associated with each for the last three fiscal years; (b) what equipment and resources were purchased through the Agency's budget for conflict management initiatives in Africa; (c) what programs has the Agency undertaken specifically designed for development aid in Africa and what are the total costs associated for each; (d) what programs has the Agency put in place and how much funding has been reserved for emergency relief aid to Africa; (e) what is the total bilateral aid funding for Africa in last three fiscal years; and (f) what is the total multilateral funding for Africa in the last three fiscal years?

(Return tabled)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Business of Supply

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Speaker: Further to the tabling of the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(3)(a), a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Wednesday, October 21, 2009, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[Translation]

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by eight minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1530)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FORESTRY INDUSTRY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When the House debated this motion earlier, the member for Chambly—Borduas had the floor, and he has seven minutes remaining.

The member for Chambly—Borduas.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I remind members that we are discussing a motion introduced by my Bloc Québécois colleague, the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, on this opposition day. I will share my time with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

The forestry industry is the sole economic backbone of many regions in Quebec. In fact, the Quebec forestry industry accounts for 88,000 jobs in various sawmills and pulp and paper plants, or about a third of all Canadian jobs in this sector. The economies of some 230 cities, towns and villages in Quebec are heavily dependent on it, and 160 of them are totally dependent. Nearly half of all forestry communities in Canada are in Quebec.

We are in the middle of the worst economic crisis in history. As a result, more than 25,000 jobs have been lost since April 2005 in the Quebec forestry industry and related sectors.

The Bloc Québécois has introduced a number of measures that we have run by business owners and their employees—the primary stakeholders. The Bloc Québécois is presenting three measures with three main objectives, which are supported by those in the industry.

The first is to provide immediate support to the industry; the second is to help the workers and communities affected to get through the crisis; and the third is to modernize the forestry industry.

Very concrete measures have to be implemented with respect to these three components. In our opinion, access to credit is now the main problem for these industries. This is one of the reasons why,

four years ago, we supported the softwood lumber settlement with the United States. As we know, this morning the NDP made much of this fact. We find it regrettable that the NDP wanted the crisis of four years ago to go on. It would like to have seen no assistance to the forestry industry four years ago, so as to settle its fate once and for all. However, the softwood lumber agreement gave this industry four more years of life.

What is unfortunate is that the Conservatives refused to implement the transitional measures that we proposed here, notably credits to help people through this crisis, and also to help companies engage in secondary or tertiary processing, or to take a big step in this green shift that we on our side of the House would particularly like to see. Clearly the green shift is of little concern to our friends opposite, but it is of great concern to us.

I am not going into great detail here, for I have little time left. We also wanted measures to support workers who lose their jobs. The first thing was to modernize the employment insurance program. We tabled concrete proposals and bills in this House to abolish the waiting period so that people could receive their EI benefits sooner, thus injecting immediate money into the local economy. We also asked for the employment insurance eligibility threshold to be lowered to 360 hours for everyone. There was much debate on this subject last summer. We asked for a benefit rate increase from 55% of income to 60%, an increase of insurable earnings to \$42,500, and calculation of these benefits over the 12 best weeks. And this would be a good time to restore the program for older worker adjustment, commonly called the POWA.

● (1535)

If these measures were put in place, even without the POWA, the number of persons who could hope to receive employment insurance benefits would rise from 46% to 65%.

The measures that were introduced by the previous government excluded so many people that only a minority of them can now hope for employment insurance benefits, even if they contribute to the plan. In other words, we are talking about 148,000 more potential recipients of employment insurance. Imagine the beneficial effect that would have on the economy of each of our regions, each of our constituencies. On average, there would be \$30 million more per year coming into our constituencies. That is money that belongs to workers and employers, except that the government has hijacked it and is depriving our regions of this economy, of this economic breath of air.

We would also like to see substantial support for seasonal industry. Something quite tragic is now happening in this House. The government has tabled Bill C-50, which concerns people who would be able to receive an extension of their employment insurance benefits, but only those who have not been unemployed in the previous 7, 8, 10 or 12 years, provided they contributed for 30% of their time and did not draw 35 weeks of employment insurance benefits. This means that all seasonal workers are excluded. The great majority of women and young people are excluded. Almost all the workers in the forestry industry are excluded.

Business of Supply

This is a bill of exclusion. The Bloc finds it very unfortunate that the NDP supports this bill which is anti-worker and anti-employed.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques and Chambly—Borduas for their presentations.

I would remind my colleague that in 2005, 2006 and 2007, under two different governments, the Bloc called for loan guarantees for companies. At that time, we knew we had problems with the Americans and proceedings were underway relating to special taxes on softwood lumber. We were seeking loan guarantees to enable companies to stay afloat as long as the cases then underway had not been completely dealt with by the courts. When two different governments denied that request, we had to sign an agreement in which Canada, and mainly Quebec, was the big loser.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. If we had been able to see the cases in the courts through to the end, would our industry, in both Canada and Quebec, be in a better position today?

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, we do not have a crystal ball. We cannot know what the outcome would have been. However, we did have a good chance. The assessment of the softwood lumber agreement by the industry, that is, the forestry companies and workers, at that point, four years ago, was that it was the right thing to do at the time. It meant that the industry could survive for four more years.

That was not the assessment of our Liberal and New Democratic friends, who would have chosen, four years ago, not to ratify the agreement and to kill the forestry industry. The problem is not the agreement, it is the fact that the Conservatives have done nothing in the meantime to support the industry. They chose rather to focus all their efforts on supporting the auto industry and the banks. This was particularly true in the case of the auto industry. They have funnelled \$10 billion to the auto industry, and only \$70 million to the forestry industry, even though the forestry industry employs many more workers than the auto industry.

• (1540)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech. I want to ask him about scandals we see here in the House of Commons.

It seems to me that the lack of assistance for the forestry industry is, in a way, becoming another scandal. Nearly \$10 billion has been invested to support the auto industry, and the meagre sum of about \$70 million to support the forestry industry in Quebec.

Nearly \$55 billion has been stolen from the unemployed over the years. The Liberals are the ones who stole that money. The Conservatives continued on the same path and have stolen a further \$5 billion. We are looking at a theft of nearly \$60 billion from the independent employment insurance fund. Meanwhile, people are going hungry, they are losing their jobs and they have no resources left.

They have also continued to encourage the whole tax haven situation. From one end of Canada to the other, we are looking at tax evasion on the order of \$100 million, because of these tax havens.

I would like my colleague to tell me why these governments, in the House of Commons, are stealing and not helping our workers, and how sovereignty for Quebec could be a sounder option for all Quebecers.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, one thing is certain: we could make our own choices. We could determine the contribution rates, of course, and choose what we want to do.

My colleague talks about money being stolen. I will be a little less blunt and call it a direct misappropriation of a huge amount of money, \$57 billion over 13 years, first by the Liberals and now by the Conservatives.

I find it quite disturbing, for example, that this support targeted at one industry only is acceptable to our Conservative colleagues from Quebec—particularly the Minister of State Responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec—who can witness first-hand what is happening. We are not jealous about the help for the automobile industry. That is fine. However, if the government really wants to help it should at least provide equivalent assistance to the forestry industry.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc's motion today is very important and urgent. The forestry industry in Quebec is having a hard time remaining competitive and recovering from the world economic crisis and has been for a number of years already.

The current government, under the Conservatives, committed to providing \$70 million in assistance to the forestry industry, a paltry \$70 million to help 825,000 workers involved directly and indirectly in the forestry industry, while it gives the automotive industry concentrated primarily in Ontario nearly \$10 billion for 500,000 workers.

Quite frankly, we have to ask who are they kidding?

Let us find the solution. In my riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, there are towns such as Malartic, Val d'Or and Matagami that are holding their own now because they have fairly prosperous mines. However, other towns such as Lebel-sur-Quévillon, Senneterre, Waswanipi, Chapais and Chibougamau are one industry towns and dependent primarily on forestry.

Very close to us and part of the same region are towns and villages such as Amos, La Sarre, Ville-Marie, La Morandière, Champneuf, Barraute and Béarn where the one industry has closed.

Meanwhile, the government is happy to create phoney committees to study the reasons for the forestry industry crisis. The urgency of the situation calls not for studies but for actions focused on results. Precious time has been lost to entrepreneurs, who desperately need to find solutions which the government is unable to identify.

The auto industry, located primarily in Ontario, was set up and is maintained thanks to a whole lot of subsidies. My colleague from Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean knows something about this, since he was an adult at that point.

This industry receives \$9.7 billion in addition to all the subsidies it got for locating. Some ten Canadian cities are affected and some 500,000 jobs are maintained in this specific sector, which represents around \$19,000 per job maintained or \$970 million per city involved. The figures are so simplistic that there is no need for an army of accountants at the Department of Finance.

I recall my Bloc colleague Yvan Loubier. He was finance critic and gave his little pocket calculator to the Liberal colleague, who is still in the House, and who was a minister at the time. With this calculator, my colleague managed to predict very accurately what a whole range of accountants could not. The government had surpluses, and the figures were full of mistakes and totally wrong.

Equivalently and in all fairness, the current government should have given \$16 billion just to the forestry industry, including \$5.25 billion to Quebec alone. Is this not a long way from the ridiculous \$100 million for Quebec, which represents, if used only for the forestry industry, a mere \$369 per job or the big figure of \$435,000 per town or village affected? Of course, it is more accessible than the same \$100 million from the communities support fund not earmarked specifically for forestry at the time. The municipalities did not have access to the treasure chest, as they had not been given the key or the combination to it.

Will it be the same this time? This is a real rebuff for Quebec. It appears as illogical as it does because it is, considering that the \$9.7 billion is allocated for non renewables, to which must be added the costs of depolluting and decontaminating of an American industry.

In essence, we have contributed to the American treasury to the detriment of a clean and renewable resource, industries and towns and villages in Quebec for what amounted to \$22.8 million in assistance.

•(1545)

That is far from the \$970 million given to Ontario cities, but they think Quebec will put up with it.

I leave it to the people of Quebec to decide how good the policies of this government have been, certainly not to the government itself, which has failed to demonstrate any logic or sense of fairness in the distribution of assistance in Canada, whether in regard to the softwood lumber crisis, the mad cow crisis, equalization, GST harmonization, and many other things.

One of the most flagrant cases, which can stand for all the rest, is Lebel-sur-Quévillon. Through a slight change to the law, some assistance could have been provided under employment insurance. We had first reading. We asked for agreement to move immediately to second and third reading because there was an emergency. But the government was opposed.

We made it to second reading, but before third reading is reached, the town of Lebel-sur-Quévillon will have been emptied of its workforce and it will be more and more difficult to re-start a plant that could have been successful. It is a very modern plant that was able to produce its own energy. It had good spin-off effects for the region because it enabled the sawmills to fill a need by selling their woodchips, for example, to a pulp and paper plant. This reduced consumption of the actual primary material, softwood lumber.

Business of Supply

The labour force could have been kept in the area, both for the new industries that were developing at the time as well as the paper plant itself and the surrounding sawmills. The town managers who wanted to acquire and operate sawmills and the paper plant were also gaining credibility. The town was diversifying its economy. It seemed to be prospering and on the right track.

Ultimately, people are beginning to realize that this government is not very different from the ones that preceded it, if only because of its propensity to say "my way or no way". We do not really have a French expression for that, but it means basically that if the government's bills do not pass, no bills will pass. If the House does not support the government bill on young offenders, for example, there is no way we will make some progress and pass the amendment on parole after a sixth of the sentence has been served.

As I told my colleague a little while ago, we have suggested some approaches that have been recognized by other levels of government as likely to make a real contribution to helping the forest industry without being an undue burden for the government.

The government and the opposition could have cooperated as a Parliament and taken steps to keep the Canadian economy afloat in both Quebec and the rest of Canada. Apart from the oil companies and the automobile industry, not much has been done in the rest of Canada. We are seeing unemployment and social problems, therefore, now that it has been a year since plants have closed and people are not likely, at this point, to get their jobs back.

•(1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problems within the forestry industry go back four years ago to the softwood lumber deal, and I have read a lot of interesting points in some of the briefing notes.

It appears that the government is restricting its thinking to matters such as tax cuts to help the forestry industry. Would the member care to comment on how the government seems to think tax cuts will help an industry that is not making any income?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, that is what we have always argued. Even if there were tax cuts or refundable tax credits, that does not help someone who has no income to declare and no taxes to pay. However, if there had been non-refundable tax credits, as the Bloc Québécois has called for, it is highly likely that the industry would be in a better position, even today, because it would have greater vitality. The same is true for the loan guarantees that were requested. They would have enabled companies to stay afloat much longer. What actually prompted the government to sign the agreement was the weak economy in all of the cities, the plants and workers who were facing this crisis, and the proceedings initiated by the Americans. If the economy had been stronger, the plants would have continued operating for another year or two or three. Even with the crisis we are seeing today, the fallout would have been easier to endure.

Business of Supply

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the government has introduced Bill C-50 concerning employment insurance. The OECD had done an analysis of the impact of the economic crisis specifically and called for an employment insurance scheme to counter the effects of the crisis. Bill C-50 is plainly less than we are entitled to expect.

I would like my colleague to explain why, for example, we are challenging the figure of 190,000 people who would be affected by Bill C-50, in terms of the increase in the number of weeks of benefits after regular benefits are exhausted. How can the Bloc come up with a figure well below 190,000 people affected? What we are talking about instead is 60,000 people who would be affected. And it would not cost \$935 million, it would cost \$300 million.

I would like the member to tell us, more specifically, what the government's intentions are regarding Bill C-50.

• (1555)

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, I do not sit on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. However, there is no need to be on it in order to do a quick calculation when one lives with workers as we do in Quebec. Our calculation is based on the fact that the number of people entitled to EI amounts to only some 43% or 44% of workers. The remainder are not entitled to it.

We also asked that people be paid right off, that is, for the two week waiting period to be eliminated. That would have allowed workers living in single industry towns to remain at home and await the reopening of the industry when they were laid off.

The figure of 190,000 claimants allegedly entitled to help was totally distorted. First of all, in the forestry industry, the layoffs took place in the two or three years prior to the final closings. These workers cannot benefit from the plan proposed in Bill C-50. The same may be said for a lot of women who work part time. They will not have access. That is where the calculation is distorted.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for a very quick question.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know that Bill C-395 introduced in the House affects many workers in the hon. member's riding.

How could this bill better support the workers in Lebel-sur-Quévillon affected by the forestry crisis?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, during an economic crisis such as the current one, businesses will generally be a lot more restrictive in their bargaining with employees, and disputes often last longer than usual. Very often, after a dispute is settled, the business decides to close its doors and lay off workers, even before they return to work. In this regard, Bill C-395 eliminated for benefit calculation purposes the period of time the workers were on strike or locked out.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will share my speaking time with my hon. colleague from Kenora.

I am pleased to take part today in this debate that is very important for the various regions of Quebec. Given my position within the

department, I am pleased to rise today to go back over the pieces of disinformation spread by the party opposite.

It is important to report the real facts about this issue and make further comments to counteract this disinformation, instead of scoring points on the backs of the workers and their livelihood.

Canada's forestry industry is going through difficult times across the country. I have been in regular contact over the past few days with people from the industry in several provinces, but my comments today will focus on the provincial jurisdiction of Quebec.

Quebec's forestry industry has been experiencing problems for 10 years or so. This is not something new. Changes have occurred over time which, in some cases, have deepened the forestry crisis: the Coulombe report, the chief forester, the 20% drop in timber supply for companies, energy costs, variations of the value of the Canadian currency, fibre costs, the global financial crisis, the mortgage crisis in the U.S., the selling price of lumber, the drop in the market, and so on. It is too easy to blame the government. That is what the party opposite keeps doing anyway.

From 2000 to 2006, we no longer had an agreement with our leading financial partner, the United States, with respect to trading softwood lumber with Canada and Quebec. There were countervailing duties of approximately 30%. That is why a new softwood lumber agreement was signed. The provinces and the Canadian lumber industry as a whole asked us to sign a new agreement with our U.S. partner so that the borders would reopen. That is what we did at the time, and this has brought back to Canada nearly \$5 billion that was entirely redistributed to our forestry industry.

We signed this agreement, which brought in \$1 billion to Quebec. That money was then entirely redistributed to the province's forestry industry. These are important points.

When we signed the agreement with our U.S. partners, it was with the idea of pursuing this development and of respecting that deal. In recent years—that is in 2006, 2007 and 2008—before the mortgage crisis, nobody talked about the softwood lumber agreement. Everything was fine and we were getting good prices for our products. But we have to look at the market now. It is very important to do so.

When we signed the softwood lumber agreement, it brought in \$1 billion to Quebec to allow its industries to modernize and to invest so as to protect jobs. Statistics for Quebec show that 50% of the softwood lumber produced by sawmills in that province is exported. Moreover, 96% of this lumber is exported to the United States. It is easy to see the impact of the mortgage crisis in the United States. Indeed, while there were close to 2 million housing starts in that country every year, there are now only 500,000. Between 2007 and 2009, the demand has declined by 65%. That is really where the problem lies right now. Moreover, the sale price of wood has dropped by close to 50%.

Business of Supply

Between 2000 and 2009, there was a 42% drop in the demand for newsprint in North America. This compounds the major market problems that we are experiencing right now. Recently, worldwide sales for the latest Harry Potter book were greater in its electronic version than in the paper one. This is a precedent which clearly shows what is happening to the market and where we are headed.

I often hear members opposite compare the automotive sector to the forestry industry. It is very easy to do that. In fact, it is too easy.

We have an agreement with our U.S. partners on the management of the competition, on both sides of the border, in the softwood lumber sector. At the time, that agreement was signed with the support of the Bloc, to allow the Canadian forestry industry to continue to sell its products under certain rules and under a contract signed by both sides.

The automotive industry is different in that it is a free market with an agreement signed by the President of the United States, the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Ontario. Together, they reached an agreement to support the industry. They did not do that at the expense of another sector. They did it to save jobs. We also wanted to save jobs when we signed the softwood lumber agreement, and we will continue to respect what we signed.

When we talk about the market, it is interesting to look at the statements made by union leaders and company presidents. I am going to mention a few of those statements.

On October 15, last week, following a work slowdown in a plant located in Saint-Félicien, which is the town next to mine, the union leader said that, unfortunately, it was really a market issue and that houses were just not being built in the United States.

• (1600)

A short while ago, when a temporary shutdown was announced in June at the Fraser Papers' mill in Thurso, the company explained its decision on a weak pulp market. I could go on. Regarding the mill in Beupré, the company said the demand had declined drastically, with a 30% drop between November 2008 and June 2009 alone. I could give numerous examples.

It is far too easy to put the blame entirely on the government for not providing loan guarantees, and more importantly, it is not true. Efforts were applauded in this House when this government provided support to Quebec's forestry industry. Efforts were also applauded when Investissement Québec, a paragovernmental organization, provided support to Quebec's forestry industry, and AbitibiBowater in particular.

The Government of Canada is continuing to support the forestry industry. On June 17, and I have the press release here, in a joint announcement with AbitibiBowater, Export Development Canada, a Crown corporation—and it is important to explain how it works—said it would be providing \$42.1 million in financial support with respect to debtors in possession. These funds were provided as working capital financing to maintain adequate liquidity.

Frankly, what we are being asked to do is what we have already been doing through EDC.

Shortly after, on August 27, EDC made a similar contribution to Kruger, this being in the public domain. There is obviously a degree of confidentiality surrounding such dealings, but Export Development Canada announced it would be contributing \$27 million in financing for Kruger. I could go on with more examples, but I will stop here because of the time allotted to me.

Through Crown corporations and various partners, the federal government is supporting the forestry industry in Canada and Quebec. In Quebec alone, over the past 20 months, Export Development Canada has made \$16 billion in support, financial products, accounts receivable insurance, credit facility and loan guarantees available to 220 companies in 2009 and 226 in 2008.

What are these products? Part of the truth was spoken today. When a letter of guarantee is issued regarding accounts receivable and a company has sold trading partners anywhere in the world, say in the United States, \$100 million in lumber, Export Development Canada guarantees that it will be paid. What does the company do with that letter? It is certainly not going to sit on it. It takes it to its lender and arranges for funds to be advanced. This constitutes access to credit or a loan to allow the company to continue operating. That is how it works.

So, this is \$16 billion over the past 20 months. Through our pulp and paper green transformation program, commonly called the black liquor program, we provided \$1 billion to support the pulp and paper industry, which produces kraft pulp, including several millions of dollars that were used in Quebec.

Earlier, someone talked about a phoney committee which is providing \$235 million to Quebec. Indeed, Export Development Canada is supporting the province, but there is also the community adjustment fund, with \$1 billion distributed to all the provinces, and Quebec getting about \$215 million through Canada Economic Development. In the spring, we set up a Canada-Quebec working group which injected \$235 million into Quebec's forestry industry, and they call that a phoney initiative. In fact, this is probably much more than the Bloc will ever do during its stint here in the House of Commons. We provided \$235 million for silviculture, forest resources management, multi-use roads and product traceability, and we will continue to support the industry with \$170 million for new products and new markets.

As regards work sharing, in 2009, Quebec alone is getting \$928 million to support training, employee transfers and also assistance relating to employment insurance. Currently, over 4,300 workers in Quebec benefit from work-sharing agreements to help them through this period. Let us also not forget that the home renovation tax credit stimulated lumber sales. It is through programs such as those that we are helping.

Business of Supply

All company presidents still want the softwood lumber agreement. This spring, we established a Canada-Quebec team that has begun working and that is doing a good job. That working group got together recently and defined three major thrusts, three commitments with the Quebec government. The first one is to help the industry restructure. We are not going to fill the role of the forestry industry. It has to restructure itself. This is something we agreed on with all the company presidents.

They are all asking us to comply with the softwood lumber agreement. In recent weeks and months, we have had the opportunity to meet a number of them. They represent all types of businesses, from small ones to large ones. Everyone agrees that the softwood lumber agreement must be protected and that together we will avoid a repeat of what happened with Gaspésia. In fact, some partners even said that we must respect the arrangement regarding Gaspésia.

• (1605)

We will continue to do the job. The fact that businesses in Quebec are integrated is a big plus. They own as many pulp and paper mills as softwood lumber mills. That is why we must absolutely protect the softwood lumber agreement.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I did not necessarily intend to ask questions or make a comment, but in light of what the minister just said it might be appropriate to put things into context.

He spoke of Gaspésia. I would like him to elaborate because Gaspésia is a matter in which the governments got involved to help save a municipality, a company, a region. They did not achieve the desired results, but nonetheless, let us not forget that governments have to approach such matters responsibly and not have a double standard.

The softwood lumber issue cannot be viewed through rose-coloured glasses. The facts are the facts. The facts provide hard numbers that prove that there is a double standard in the current government's action when it comes to the forestry industry compared to other measures it took, for example with respect to the automobile industry.

We are simply saying that the effort made for the auto industry was indeed substantial. It was necessary because industries and jobs were at stake. The same is true in the forestry industry. It would be irresponsible of a government to say that if something happens in a certain province or a little further west it will make a large-scale effort, but if it is a little further east, in Quebec, it will leave things be. The forestry industry, to my knowledge, is present across Canada. The Bloc Québécois' intervention is not simply an intervention by a political party; the Bloc Québécois represents the unanimous consensus in Quebec.

I would invite the minister to be more moderate in his comments. Believing that everything he says is true and everything we say is false just does not work. It may be time to put a little water in the wine.

• (1610)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, let us take the example of Gaspésia. Unfortunately this case is situated in a region that is going through difficult times. Here millions of dollars were injected into a

project where even the union partners recently said that they did not want a repeat of the experience. It is an example of sound use of funds that were invested and will have to be invested by the partners, including the Quebec government, of course.

That being said, when we talk about the automotive sector versus the forestry sector, there is an agreement. We signed an agreement on softwood lumber governing the business relations between our country and the United States, whereas in the case of the auto industry it is a free market. This must be acknowledged. There are rules in play, and we agreed to sign.

The latest ruling on quotas should be an example to us of the caution required when the time comes to deal with forestry issues.

I recently met with the president of AbitibiBowater, Mr. Paterson, and to a question I asked him about the impact of no longer having a softwood agreement, he mentioned countervailing duties that could range from 30% to 40%. The impact of the quota penalty is 10% on top of the 5%, which takes us to 15%, and we wonder whether our industry will pull through. Imagine if it were 30% or 40%.

So the whole forestry portfolio has to be managed with a great deal of caution so that we can get through this crisis. Companies do not close down when they can get good prices for their products. We are fully aware of this. As for the automotive industry, which represents 12,000 jobs in Quebec, no one wants to choose one province over another. If there are any who do, they are not among us in government; we do not want to create a crisis among the provinces. It is the last thing on our minds.

[English]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the motion. The great Kenora riding has long-standing been tied to the forest sector and has been particularly hard hit in this global economic recession and, in fact, for some time before that. However, this Conservative government in the last couple of years has done more for the forest sector than any other government in history. Therefore, I have to speak out against the motion.

I will preface my remarks by saying that although I will be speaking specifically about the motion and its implications for Quebec, I appreciate and recognize that this government's forest policy has been to address national concerns in the forest sector and has done very well for the province of Quebec.

To highlight some of the things we have done in Quebec over the last two fiscal years, \$16.7 billion in loans and grants have been committed over the last two years in support of the Quebec forest sector. In addition, Quebec is also receiving a portion of the \$1 billion pulp and paper green transformation program, a program I had an opportunity to announce on behalf of the Minister of Natural Resources in Thunder Bay and the great Kenora riding last week. It was very well received by stakeholders in that riding and in Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Business of Supply

Finally, over \$928 million has been transferred to Quebec to support and retrain unemployed workers, people affected or displaced by the forest sector's current challenges. This is in the 2009 fiscal year alone. This policy was developed very much with the forest sector in mind and is now occupying itself with long-tenured workers who have been displaced, for example, in some critical mass in the forest sector.

When we look at the support by the Conservative government across the entire country, there can be no doubt, and this is the kind of feedback we have had in the great Kenora riding, which shares a certain makeup as some of my colleagues from the northern parts of Quebec, that it has really made the forest sector a top priority in its policy platform.

It is clear that having a wealth of natural resources is no longer the only ingredient for economic success. The forest sector, in fact all our resource sectors, must build on Canada's other strengths to transform our resources into value-added products and to keep high quality, high skilled jobs in Canada.

We know that economic success in today's climate requires the right combination of resources, people, knowledge, expertise and systems. Our government is determined to ensure these economic fundamentals are firmly in place to reinforce the competitiveness of Canada's natural resources economy, to support sustainable industry and to provide a clean, healthy environment.

Today, while Canada's economy remains strong, or stronger than most, global pressures are being felt particularly by the forest sector and forest-dependent communities, many of which are in the great Kenora riding. In the face of these pressures, staying strong depends on supporting innovation and on industrial and entrepreneurial creativity. We must develop skills and expertise, create new products, find new value in untapped forest resources and establish new markets.

To meet these challenges and to make the most of the many opportunities that they present, the Government of Canada continues to work closely with provincial and territorial governments, with communities and within the industry. Indeed, in the great Kenora riding I have been very active with other levels of government and stakeholders in the private sector to work to diversify within the forest sector in the riding. This requires a commitment to research.

Therefore, in 2007 we established the \$127.5 million forestry industry long-term competitiveness initiative, which is already leading to some significant achievements. For example, Canada's forest research institutes have now been consolidated into FPInnovations. This has produced the largest ever public-private forest resource organization in the world.

FPInnovations will help the forest industry to spur innovations in ways that will produce results now and reap ever greater benefits later on. Evidence of its success can be easily seen in the number and variety of initiatives that are appearing in the forest sector today. As well, through Canada's economic action plan we are continuing to build on early successful initiatives.

• (1615)

Budget 2009 provides a total of \$120 million over two years to advance innovation in the forest sector by accelerating promising

research and development that will help transform and diversify the forest sector. This funding includes \$80 million over two years for the transformative technologies program that is administered by FPInnovations. It also includes an additional \$40 million to develop pilot-scale demonstration projects of new products for use in commercial applications.

[Translation]

The transformative technologies program supports research and development in emerging advanced technologies that will broaden the line of products manufactured by Canada's forest sector. Research areas include new materials using nanotechnology, energy and chemicals produced from forest biomass, and next-generation forest products.

For example, thanks to support from the transformative technologies program, FPInnovations, Canada's forest research institute, has been working with a national network of university experts on the development of paper-based biosensors. These can detect, report and destroy toxins and pathogens such as SARS and listeria.

• (1620)

[English]

Progress is being made with bio-products research, such as nanocrystalline cellulose. The aerospace and automotive sectors have shown interest in using this cellulose in advanced lightweight, high-strength composite materials. These and other technologies, where the Government of Canada is supporting world leading forest sector research, hold the potential to revolutionize the way we think about and the way we use wood fibre, while creating exciting new economic opportunities for forest communities across Canada.

Our transformative technologies program has also been investing in new uses in markets for wood. We heard talk in the debate earlier today not only about the need to strengthen our position in North America but to also look beyond the borders of North America into the world. Until a couple of years ago, we did not have the confidence that we could be competitive and now we do.

Thanks to the research funded through this program, we are able to do a bunch of things in Canada that demonstrate our capacity to take products to the world. For example, we have a six-storey wood building being constructed now in Quebec City and plans for one in British Columbia. Because of the kind of research we are doing on cross-laminated timber, we may soon see buildings constructed of wood for buildings of 10 storeys or more.

Business of Supply

There are a number of other pilot projects I would like to highlight, but there are too many to list in the confines of the 10 minutes graciously extended to me by the Speaker.

However, the economic action plan has also provided \$40 million in a complementary initiative to develop pilot-scale demonstrations under the transformative technologies program.

[*Translation*]

Canada's economic action plan is also providing \$50 million to develop and diversify markets for Canadian wood products and to expand the North American lumber market. The creation of new markets in North America is a priority for Quebec lumber producers.

[*English*]

We are taking other federal measures, supported by our economic action plan, that are having a beneficial effect on our forest sector. We are taking decisive action to support the transition of the pulp and paper industry in Quebec and across Canada, as I highlighted earlier.

The community adjustment fund continues to have real impact in communities affected by the global recession and its impact on the forest sector, with a special emphasis on those communities.

Our extraordinary financing framework is expanding the availability of credit to businesses, including forest companies.

We have a sophisticated Canada skills and transition strategy to help workers with enhancements to employment insurance and funding for skills and training.

The Government of Canada is providing other important research, such as that in the invasive species centre in the province of Ontario. This centre will work in partnership with the province on research related to alien invasive species.

Again, these are a number of examples of the kind of leadership we are taking in the forest sector. There are a number of other commitments that we have made.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada recognizes the challenges facing the forestry sector, and realizes that the biomass crop assistance program may put Canadian producers at a disadvantage and distort the markets.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada has discussed a variety of issues with provincial and municipal governments around the forest sector. We continue to believe that we are taking the right steps. That is what we are hearing. We are standing up strong for the forestry sector and its communities.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my friend just north of me in the Kenora riding knew I would stand and ask a question, so he is no doubt prepared.

He mentioned the billion dollars for pulp and paper, which some, most or part of may not be spent. He mentioned the \$170 million for research and outlined a couple of projects. However, anything else that the member talked about is money that has simply not been

spent. For example, companies pay for the insurance they get through the EDC, \$14 billion, but that money has never been spent.

Would the member for Kenora tell me exactly where he gets his numbers?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, it was a great pleasure for me last week to make the announcement on behalf of the minister to a number of pulp and paper mills throughout northwestern Ontario. I am often tasked with the affairs of northwestern Ontario, not just the great Kenora riding. I had an opportunity to speak to senior officials in some of the pulp and paper mills who were positively affected by this, and I will share this with the member so he knows.

In one case they were over the moon about this news. They assured me they would be putting those resources, those credits to good work in an effort to not just reduce the environmental footprint, but to deal with some structural defects in the northwestern Ontario forest sector, namely to reduce overall energy costs, incentivizing black liquor as an environmentally friendly but competitive way of meeting our energy demands, in some cases by 100%, we hope, is the result of those announcements.

Those are the numbers. They are not from the phone book from which the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River is reading.

• (1625)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for my hon. colleague. He seems to be well in tune and he outlined some of the programs that currently exist, so perhaps he would like to give me a detailed answer to this question.

In my nearby hometown of Grand Falls—Windsor, the AbitibiBowater mill shut down, affecting 1,000 people, plus. It is hoping to diversify with a wood pellet plant as a source of energy and a source of heating. It is very popular in Europe. Export markets are possibly there. Exactly what program can those people avail themselves of to help get this plant going and helping put people back to work?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I would not qualify that as a brief question, but certainly there are programs available with respect to opportunities to diversify within the forest sector. I might add that it is important for the Conservative government to continue to work with the provinces and—

Mr. Scott Simms: I asked for a program. You don't know.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I assume the member for Kenora wishes to finish his response.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is important to diversify within the forest sector and provide opportunities for hard closures to make transitions into other areas within the forest sector, and we believe our government is doing that. There is a number of examples in the Kenora riding. I would be happy to share those with the member at some point in time.

Business of Supply

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest as the member for Kenora talked about the announcement made a little while ago in Thunder Bay about AbitibiBowater, when \$33 million from that \$1 billion fund was promised. However, there are a couple of complications that the government apparently is either not aware of or unwilling to deal with.

First, why does the member think announcing \$33 million for AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay is a good thing when there is no obligation for it to spend that \$33 million? Second, AbitibiBowater is in creditor protection and it is not allowed to spend the money anyway.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on anything but what the officials from those companies told me. They were very enthusiastic about the announcement and very confident that this would significantly contribute to their competitiveness within the pulp and paper mills. Fort Frances and Thunder Bay operations in particular were very enthusiastic.

I would encourage the member to get behind this important announcement for the benefit of the communities and the workers at those mills who we have been working to support in a myriad of different programs and strategies. That is an invitation to treat.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from the riding of Québec.

I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois and also on behalf of the citizens from all regions of Québec.

The Bloc motion seeks to raise the awareness of this totally apathetic Conservative government, to wake it up. This government refuses to accept its responsibilities in an unprecedented crisis that has affected a sector found in many, if not all, Québec regions.

Let us not forget that there are pulp and paper workers even in downtown Montreal. In fact, Québec paper companies have head offices and regional offices in that city.

I would first like to quote Mr. Guy Cheverette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Québec Forest Industry Council (CIFQ), who appeared before the Subcommittee of Canadian Industrial Sectors on March 12. He stated:

The [forestry] crisis is just as big, even more so, than that in the automotive sector, since it affects 825,000 workers, compared to 500,000 [auto industry] workers. It seems to me you have to make an effort to be coherent, an effort to use common sense.

The current crisis has struck at the very heart of Québec regions and a number of Québec communities. I rise today to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. My colleague for Berthier—Maskinongé in the Mauricie region, my colleague for Laurentides—Labelle, who is from a region which employs forestry workers, especially in the Upper Laurentians, or others, such as my colleague for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine who is present, can bear witness to the fact that their regions have also been affected by the forestry crisis.

Eighty-eight thousand Québeckers work in logging operations, sawmills and pulp and paper plants. Their jobs account for one-third of all Canadian forestry jobs. Québec has 70 cities and towns and 160 villages that are highly dependent on the forestry industry. Some of those listening to us currently live in villages that are entirely dependent on forests.

In my riding, in Haute Côte-Nord, Scierie Jacques Beaulieu, a family operation, was sold to Kruger. It is the main employer in Longue-Rive, in the Haute Côte-Nord area. Kruger recently closed down its operations in three sawmills in the Côte-Nord area, two in Haute Côte-Nord and one in Moyenne Côte-Nord.

The village of Hauterive currently has a totally unacceptable unemployment rate of between 22% and 24%, a direct result of the forestry crisis.

This government chose to use its budgets and its economic stimulus measures to help the auto industry, which is located primarily in Ontario. It is providing some \$10 billion in subsidies to the auto industry.

In the Conservative Minister of Finance's latest budget, the amount allocated to the forestry and manufacturing industries, \$170 million over two years, was peanuts. This is a double standard. Everything for Ontario and its auto industry, and nothing for the forestry industry and forestry workers. Let us not forget that 160 communities rely directly and exclusively on forestry.

• (1635)

Since April 2005, over 25,000 jobs have been lost in Québec's forestry sector and related industries. I know what I am talking about because I spent 14 years working in the pulp and paper industry for Abitibi-Price, AbitibiBowater's predecessor. The situation has deteriorated since 2005. Workers in the industry are entitled to their fair share. Let us not forget that Québeckers pay \$54 billion per year. When Québeckers ask the federal government to invest in Québec, they are not asking for charity, they are asking for respect.

This is what we call dignity of work. Pulp and paper workers are proud people devoted to their jobs and their companies. But the fact is that right now, the industry is in crisis. During a crisis, the government must provide suitable solutions. But the Conservatives are not stepping up. The Bloc Québécois proposed a comprehensive plan to help the forestry industry, a plan with three main goals, the first of which is to provide immediate support to the industry via loan guarantees, among other things. We have talked to people in the industry who say that they do not necessarily want subsidies, they want loan guarantees.

When a person is deep in debt and goes to the bank or credit union, chances are the banker or the credit union manager will refuse to lend that person money because his or her industry or company is too unstable. That goes without saying. So we are asking the government to provide loan guarantees. It is legal, for crying out loud. I do not know why the Conservative government is so stubbornly refusing to help the industry. These measures are legal, pure and simple.

Business of Supply

We also want to help the workers who are affected. That is one reason why we have proposed various employment insurance measures, such as immediately eliminating the waiting period. Thus, workers who have the misfortune of losing their jobs, either permanently or temporarily, could receive employment insurance benefits immediately. The two week waiting period must be eliminated. Eliminating that waiting period will immediately put money back into the economy. In fact, this would mean that account payments to credit unions and other creditors would continue coming in. Someone who has lost their job would therefore not have to tell the manager of the credit union that he or she had to stop making payments for five or six months. We are familiar with the amount of debt people are carrying at this time. People cannot tell Visa or Visa Desjardins or another credit card company that they are stopping their payments and they will begin paying again when they find another job. The bills continue to come in, which is one of the reasons why we are calling for an elimination of the waiting period.

The Bloc Québécois action plan also aims to help a third sector, namely, to help modernize the forestry industry, to make it greener and more productive. This afternoon the Cascades plant in Lachute announced that it had invested \$33 million, thanks to help from the Government of Quebec, to go green. This is something this industry really has to do and it deserves help.

Since I only have a moment left, I would like to close by saying that, because of its ideological decisions, this Conservative government has turned its back on the Quebec forestry industry and has focused its attention on the Ontario auto industry and the western oil industry.

• (1640)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the current crisis in the forest industry was caused largely by the sellout softwood lumber agreement, which was signed and instituted by this Parliament, by the Conservative Party with the support of the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois.

A few weeks ago, we saw the communities that depend on softwood lumber forced to pay \$68 million in fines. Now the Americans have brought another suit that will probably result in \$200 million or \$300 million in fines to be paid by the working people of Ontario and Quebec. They will have to pay these fines because the softwood lumber agreement is so poorly worded that the anti-circumvention clause can be used by the Americans for anything at all, including loan guarantees.

My question is very simple. Earlier today, the NDP tabled an amendment to the Bloc's motion. It said that Canada should withdraw from the softwood lumber agreement. We are already paying too much in legal fees and too much in penalties and fines. We have to go through an American court to achieve some balance.

The Bloc rejected this amendment. Why did it reject an amendment whose purpose was to have Canada withdraw from an agreement that has cost the jobs of thousands of Quebecers?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, we were in a certain situation at the time. I admit that the agreement may not have been the best, but it was better than nothing at all.

I worked in labour relations for 16 years. I also practised law. There comes a time for reaching a settlement. This issue was really hurting workers in the forestry industry in Quebec. My colleague represents Ontario, where they are talking about the fines that have been imposed for exporting too much to the United States.

I would like to hear in a future speech from the NDP members whether they agree with the Bloc's proposal that these fines should be pro-rated to reflect the companies that exported to the United States. According to our figures, 60% of the companies that exported too much to the United States were from Ontario. As a result, Ontario should assume 60% of the \$68 million in fines, rather than having it shared equally, as seems to be the case under the current settlement. I would like the hon. member to ask one of his colleagues in the NDP whether he agrees that Ontario sawmills should pay 60% of the \$68 million bill.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, in my view, the \$68 million bill should be paid by the members of the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party who foisted this sellout on working people in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

As everyone knows, I am not from Ontario; I am from British Columbia. My riding lost 2,000 jobs as a result of this sellout. It was obvious that there would be massive job losses in Quebec, as well as in British Columbia and Ontario. It was very predictable. We only had to read the agreement to know that the anti-circumvention clause meant that the Americans could take anything that the provincial or federal governments did as an excuse to impose huge penalties on the workers and communities that derive their living from softwood lumber, as well as on all Canadians. Quebecers have seen an awful lot of that.

My question is very simple. Why is the Bloc Québécois refusing an amendment that would enable us to start—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has 30 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, it is true that the member knows his riding and his home province much better than I do. His French is so good, I had forgotten that he is a member from British Columbia. He is bilingual and studied at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. Many Conservative members would do well to follow his example when it comes to knowing French.

I stand by what I said earlier, which is that a flawed agreement is better than none at all.

• (1645)

[*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 Richmond Hill, Afghanistan; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Québec.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the debate today is very important to Quebec as a whole. As my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord said, it is a debate that affects the regions of Quebec, where companies have closed and pulp and paper plants have slowed production. My colleague also condemned the situation in which all these communities find themselves. What we are asking for today is that the government provide the forestry industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis, with assistance similar to that given to the automotive industry concentrated in Ontario, and primarily through tax credits, loans and loan guarantees so that companies have immediate access to cash, and tax measures for private woodlot owners.

The automotive industry has received \$9.7 billion in assistance. In comparison, the government has provided only \$170 million to help the forestry industry, which has been in trouble since 2005. We are asking for loan guarantees, but also in the area of research and development so that these companies can modernize their equipment.

It is clear that the Conservatives have completely forgotten an important industry in Quebec. They are not in action mode now; they are in study mode, with a Quebec-Canada committee that will come out with a report in May. It is not a report that is needed. What is needed is for the government to wake up now to what is happening and provide appropriate financial assistance for all the industries across Quebec that are being forced to close their doors or scale back production, which is what is happening in my colleague's riding of Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

Last week, he and I met the industry's spokespersons. They told us that if there were, and if there had been loan guarantees and assistance provided for research and development, they would make it through the current crisis much more easily. Clearly, the Conservatives do not at all see this reality in the same light. Currently, the government is getting agitated, it is meeting people, but it is not making decisions. We listened carefully to the speech of the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean. He talked about the help provided to the forestry industry. However, that help is not something like loan guarantees, not at all. That type of help was provided through the Canada Economic Development office, and it was also provided to other businesses in other sectors.

Let me provide an overall picture of what the forestry sector represents in Canada. It is an important industry that provides 850,000 jobs, compared to 500,000 for the automotive sector. This is why we were justified in expecting something else. The spokespersons representing that industry in Quebec, including Mr. Chevette, asked that it be treated respectfully and that we should support it considering what it is going through. Over 88,000 Quebecers work in the forestry sector, which includes sawmills and a number of pulp and paper mills. Close to one third of Canadian jobs in that sector, or 32%, are located in Quebec. This percentage speaks volumes. That is why we are still asking the government to help. We are putting pressure by tabling this motion in the House, so that the government realize the importance of this issue. Forty per cent of the towns and villages that are affected by the forestry crisis, and they are located in Quebec. This means 230

towns, including 160 that are totally dependent on that industry. According to the Quebec Forest Industry Council, which provided these figures, in Quebec 25,000 jobs have been lost in this sector since 2005.

This crisis is not new or recent. It is not like we caught the government off guard. It was asleep. It was asleep at the switch, while businesses in that industry were shutting down day in and day out. The numbers clearly show the importance of the forestry industry. For that reason, the government could also have been much more proactive with a true reform of the employment insurance program.

● (1650)

The OECD said that to get through the financial crisis, we needed to help people who were losing their jobs and prevent them from falling into extreme poverty. Once again, the government did the complete opposite. It introduced Bill C-50, which is woefully inadequate.

With this bill, the Conservative government targets long-tenured workers. But we could probably talk about long-tenured or long-lasting unemployed workers in the forestry industry.

Naturally, the Bloc Québécois cannot support Bill C-50, because it will exclude too many people. With this bill, 35% of people who receive EI will not be eligible, particularly because they will have had to receive less than 36 weeks of benefits in the last five years to qualify.

Many other people will be excluded: women, part-time workers, young people, and workers who have been laid off intermittently. A worker will have to have worked almost permanently and have had few claims for employment insurance. That is why the Bloc Québécois thinks it is a poor measure to help this sector of the industry, which has been seriously affected.

According to the government, this measure would apply to 190,000 people. But we disagree with that figure. It would be closer to 60,000 people, because, to be eligible, a worker would have had to use up all regular benefits. But in reality, only 25% of unemployed workers use all of their regular benefits. Thus, it would not cost the government \$935 million, but would instead cost \$300 million.

The government is playing with the numbers, and will tell people anything at all. This bill falls far short of what is needed to help those who are losing their jobs, and especially those who will be excluded from Bill C-50. Real reforms would have made it possible to do more and to help all workers, not just those in the forestry industry, but those in other sectors as well.

We also would have liked the reforms to increase the benefit rate from 55% to 60% of earnings.

The Bloc also recommended that insurable earnings be increased to \$42,500 and be calculated based on the 12 best weeks. It also recommended eliminating the waiting period.

Business of Supply

Adding weeks to employment insurance is nice and all, but people are still not getting employment insurance benefits from day one to help pay the bills. We have every right to ask why the government came up with measures that fall so far short of meeting needs and helping people cope with the reality of job loss.

I do not have much time left to discuss the 2009 budget, in which the government gave far more to Ontario than to Quebec. In 2009, they talked about \$4 billion for measures targeting Ontario. So far, the auto industry has received \$9 billion.

I could also have talked about other forestry industries. The government could have come up with green initiatives to help them. It could have promoted the use of wood in the construction of federal buildings.

• (1655)

There are many things this government could have done to help forestry companies diversify their product lines to keep production up.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her speech.

I would like her opinion on the fact that at least a year ago, the U.S. government subsidized pulp and paper mills for what is called black liquor. If black liquor is mixed with diesel you get a green substance, which is odd.

They received those subsidies, but our government did not react immediately. There is finally a bit of help going to that sector, but, in the meantime, there are mills like the ones in my riding that were losing money competing with U.S. mills and they refused to pay taxes to the City of Castlegar because of it.

Could the hon. member tell me why this government is reacting so slowly, or not at all, when there are U.S. subsidies? Why were Canadian subsidies not given immediately to help our mills?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, one thing is quite clear: this government is not interested in helping the forestry industry in Quebec or anywhere else in Canada.

My colleague is referring mainly to the loan guarantees. The government has shown bad faith on that and is giving the American lawyers arguments to defend the softwood lumber agreement. In fact, it has been said that this government's ministers provided arguments in defence of countervailing duties and the snap-back provision if ever the forestry industries received help.

Solutions could have been found to provide our companies with loan guarantees. It is quite clear that the government does not want to help the forestry industry.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to speak.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank my Bloc Québécois colleague, the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, for today's motion.

It is a very important matter for us in Newfoundland and Labrador, for the east coast of Quebec and all of Canada.

[*English*]

Here we are today debating a motion that deals with an industry in crisis.

At this time I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Toronto Centre. That, in and of itself, provides a taste of diversity: one member, completely rural, myself, representing 170 towns, debating with the member for Toronto Centre, not so rural. Nonetheless, here we are talking about an industry that is vital for me and this country. I want to thank my colleagues for bringing this motion to the House.

The opposition motion, in part, states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should act urgently to provide the forestry industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis...

I would go even further to say that this crisis started well before that, certainly in the newsprint industry because of the fact that the average price for newsprint, which was just over \$500 American per ton, put it in a grave situation. The demand has been lower and lower for the last 10, 15 to 20 years, coupled with the fact that over the past two or three years the Canadian dollar has been above 90¢ American. That, of course, hurts our exports.

In the particular situation of the riding of Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, therein lies Grand Falls—Windsor which is the largest town in my riding. It boasted one of the largest, most successful newsprint mills on the east coast of this country, a mill that was 100 years old since its inception in the early part of the last century. It was started by interests in England who came to Newfoundland and Labrador for the sake of the rich forests to provide them with a product in order to produce their papers in Europe.

The reason I think it is so important that we are debating this today is because of the lack of action in this particular case to some of the key measures that we are proposing, some of which are outlined in this motion.

I will go back a step to just a few years ago. I was elected in 2004 and in 2005 we were very proud to be working on a bill, certainly an incentive for the forest industry, that we thought was ideal for this country. At the time, we announced a real plan to make the forestry sector more competitive. We were saving jobs through loans, supports for research, new technology, skills development and community adjustment.

The Reform-Conservatives, however, cancelled that plan upon forming government in 2006. At the time, they came out with a \$1 billion plan, a price tag that was roughly close to ours, and they created what they called the community adjustment fund. They even made the announcement in front of a logging mill in New Brunswick.

Business of Supply

The problem with that was that the program was an incentive for communities that had failed. In other words, if the major industry of that particular town had disappeared, had folded, then they could avail themselves of projects or, what we commonly refer to in Newfoundland and Labrador, as make work projects and people could obtain employment that way.

The mill in my riding was functioning at the time in 2005 and it could have availed itself of a service that provided some of the incentives that were contained in our package. This was introduced on November 24, 2005. It included: \$215 million for the development of new technologies to enhance competitiveness; \$50 million to develop bioenergy, cogeneration power technology, that would have been a great incentive for the mill in Grand Falls—Windsor; \$90 million to support innovation; \$66.3 million for wood product market development; and \$800 million in loan support to help forest companies invest to improve competitiveness and to help diversify the community.

The other thing we talked about at the time and what we push now is the fact that a lot of these mills are old. As I mentioned earlier, the mill in my riding that was shut down recently spanned 100 years. An incentive for it, and an incredible incentive it would have been, would have been to allow the mill to make investments to improve its machinery because it was so old at that time. This is not just the idea of a tax cut. This is also introducing the idea of a subsidy to create more efficient machinery involved in the business of paper making. That is one example. It also included supporting investment in new equipment, which I mentioned, and supporting skills and training programs for forestry workers.

• (1700)

I will now talk about the EI situation. A little while ago, Bill C-50 was introduced for long tenured workers. The problem was that the situation with long tenured workers in this particular bill did not apply to loggers because they are seasonal workers. This bill did not cover them.

In addition to that, if the mill had shut down for a period of, on average, seven weeks of the year, people in that mill also did not qualify because they had claimed EI for too much of the year. Therein lies another problem. Indeed, it is a shame. In this particular case, that is why we think Bill C-50 falls flat. I would impress upon my colleagues down on the left of the House, pardon the expression, the NDP, because they, too, play a role in allowing people to access EI easily, much easier than what it is right now.

We would indeed re-establish Canada's leadership in the world and we would have opened up markets for forest products.

I saw some of the debates earlier and I was reading some of the transcripts of what has been said in the House about the SLA. The Conservatives claim that the government cannot support loan guarantees to forest companies because it would be in violation of the SLA, the softwood lumber agreement. However, that is not entirely true. They, themselves, are arguing in the London court of arbitration that loan guarantees are not a violation of the SLA. They have in fact posted their legal defence of loan guarantees on the DFAIT website.

It is give here, take here. The argument is here. We cannot do that. We cannot push forward with strategic loan guarantees, similar to what was done in other sectors, because of trade agreements. That is not necessarily true. They even refuted their own argument on the DFAIT website.

This is the situation in which we find ourselves, which is why I am glad we are having this debate today. We can point out to all the Canadians working in the forest industry just what the Government of Canada can do for the entire industry.

Going back to a situation I spoke of earlier, diversification, I would like the government in this particular situation to make it accessible and easier for some of these companies to be larger players in the world of forestry products. I will give an example, which I mentioned earlier.

The town of Grand Falls-Windsor is now hoping to get into the pellet industry. It is small little wood pellet but a great source of energy. It is cheaper, more environmentally friendly and, for us, it could create an industry of exports. Right now in Europe, that industry has reached a maturity in many countries and, therefore, it is incumbent upon us to aid that industry. Currently, however, it is extremely difficult to get access to capital in this particular situation because it does not have the component of a strategic subsidy, companies with loan guarantees.

The ongoing trade dispute is hardly a shock to the government. We and many members of the opposition repeatedly warned the government that the softwood deal amounted to a sellout of Canadian interests and that would see the erosion of Canadian control over its own industry.

I was taken aback by a comment that was put out there by BMO Nesbitt Burns analyst, Stephen Atkinson. He claimed that the agreement effectively handed U.S. companies veto power over provincial forest policies. Well, that is very interesting because last year, when AbitibiBowater declared bankruptcy, because of issues of severances, of timber rights and water rights, which are resources belonging to the people, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, which I congratulate it for doing so, expropriated those, as well as provided the severance payments for the individual workers. There is a province that had to pick up where the federal government was behind and continued to turn a blind eye to this particular situation.

Therefore, I would compel the entire House to vote for this motion because it widens the debate and allows us to bore down to particular issues that will help failing mills. My mill no longer exists but a lot can be done to help mills in places like Kenora, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta. So much more needs to be done but so far we have seen so little. For the vast number of forestry workers across this country, this is such an imperative time to do that.

Business of Supply

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his fine speech. It is clear that he is quite familiar with this issue and cares about the forestry industry.

I would like to ask him a question. I have been in this House since 2004—so not all that long—when the Liberals were in power. The crisis in the forestry sector is nothing new. It has been a problem for many years. At the time, the Bloc Québécois was calling for loan guarantees to support an industry that was beginning to crumble and lose many jobs. The Liberal government of the day did nothing and did not grant loan guarantees to the forestry industry.

Why are you willing to go ahead with them now? Why did you hesitate not so long ago, and say no to these same loan guarantees?

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, this was the incentive created on November 24, 2005. I do not think I could have said it any plainer than that.

I would like to commend the Province and Premier of Quebec for providing some of these loan guarantees. I believe that they have already done it in the House as well. It would be interesting to see the fallout from this and the situation with trade infractions and the like.

One situation is AbitibiBowater. It is now under bankruptcy protection and is receiving some money and funding through certain programs. However, the problem is that it is unable to spend it because of the situation that it is in. Unfortunately, for many people across this country it would be a little too late.

The stimulus package that the government brought back in 2007 was short on detail. In effect, it had a general overall program, which I am sure my hon. colleague would agree with, but in this overall program of job creation, it did not focus on the one particular industry we speak of. Again, to answer his question, it was November 24, 2005.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is not really answering the question. I would like to ask him the same question again.

When the forestry crisis was first developing in Quebec and in Canada, many jobs were being lost. There was a problem with the United States concerning the free trade agreement. I am referring to the softwood lumber crisis. The industry was calling for loan guarantees, but the Liberal government refused to grant those loan guarantees.

Now, after listening to the member, I completely agree with him: there is nothing in the free trade agreement that prohibits the government from offering these loan guarantees, but at the time, the Liberals said no to those same loan guarantees. I would like the member to respond to that.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, let me see if I can follow the path here. We are talking about a softwood lumber agreement that the Bloc supported. I will leave that as is. He talked about the incentives that we want to do. I repeat: November 24, 2005. I will give him a date and details. I listed \$60 million to \$80 million investments in improving machinery and loan guarantees, subsidies for many of these mills to clean up, and environmental remediation. All of these were in there. He was elected in 2004. I am sure if he were to check the records he would find out all about it.

As a matter of fact, I would love to sit down and talk about the forestry industry with my colleague all day. We could talk about these things that we did. There were mills back in the early part of this decade that took advantage of environmental cleanups and to this day many of the mills are still standing.

As I pointed out for the member at the beginning, if he has issues with the softwood lumber agreement he should perhaps talk to the leadership of his party.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment further on woodlots and what we could do in his riding? Second, how disappointed is he that the Conservatives sabotaged the committee on EI? Could that have helped his forestry workers?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Yukon who certainly has done a great deal for rural affairs since I have known him in 2004.

In the meantime, let us talk about the sabotaging of the EI bill. I will go back to the point that they keep missing. A lot of long tenured workers in the forestry sector will not benefit from Bill C-50 as the Conservatives claim they will.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, for allowing me to share his time. He did express the thought that there was some irony in the fact that as the member for Toronto Centre I wanted to say a few words in this debate. However, the reality is that the forestry industry is perhaps the one industry that unites this country. There is not a province that does not have a significant forestry industry. Certainly that is true in my own case, in Ontario.

As a former first minister of the province and leader of the opposition there for many years, I had the opportunity to visit—

Hon. John Baird: He was a very successful leader of the opposition.

Hon. Bob Rae:—every single pulp and paper mill in the country. I say to my colleague across the way who is heckling me that the most significant restructuring of the forestry industry took place in the early 1990s. That was something I was very much personally involved in from time immemorial. I think probably one of the only pieces of legislation that the government of which he was a member did not repeal, and for which I was responsible, was the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. I think that act established a very successful regime in terms of managing the forest that has received a great deal of attention around the world.

Business of Supply

However, the reason I wanted to participate in the debate is twofold. First, I want to say that of course we are, in this party, going to be supporting the motion.

However, I did want to say to my colleagues in the Bloc that no one should believe for an instant that the forestry industry is an industry that is confined to or exists only in the province of Quebec. In fact, it is the one industry that all Canadians understand. There are over 300 communities across the country that depend directly on the forestry industry for their livelihood, and those are only the direct jobs and communities directly involved. And then there are literally hundreds of thousands of other jobs across the country that have depended on, and that will continue to depend on, the forestry industry. It is not a matter of pitting Quebec against Ontario, or British Columbia against the rest of the country. We can look at any of northern Saskatchewan, northern Alberta, British Columbia where it is certainly the biggest resource industry, northern Manitoba, northern Ontario, Quebec, or the Atlantic provinces. My colleague from Newfoundland who has just spoken has expressed very clearly the relationship that the forestry industry has with so many communities across the country. Because it is an industry that unites the county, or should unite the country, I think we need to engage once more in a discussion about the appropriate role of government, both federally and provincially, in dealing with this structural change that is under way in the industry, which has had such a devastating impact on so many communities, and what we can do to restore the industry to a position of health and indeed to a position of leadership in the world, where it will be able to define the jobs of tomorrow as it has very much defined the jobs of Canada's past.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

I just want to say two things in this debate.

First, contrary to what I hear my Bloc Québécois colleagues saying, the forestry industry is not a uniquely Quebec industry. It is present in Ontario, British Columbia, the west, the east, the Maritimes, the Atlantic provinces and also Quebec, of course. As Canadians, we share this industry. It is not an industry that sets Quebec apart from the other provinces; on the contrary, it unites the country. Conditions are very similar everywhere. In fact, more than 300 cities, towns and municipalities across the country depend almost exclusively on the forestry industry. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of jobs in Canada, even in downtown Toronto, depend on this industry. It is as important to the country's future as it was in the past.

The second thing I want to say is that it is a fundamental myth that the forestry industry is an industry of the past, because that is not true.

• (1720)

[*English*]

One myth is that it is a uniquely Quebec industry, or British Columbia industry, or whatever province, but that is not the case. The fact is the forest industry is a Canadian industry. It has helped to define our country. It has helped to make the towns and communities of this country. This is an industry that has been at the heart of Canadian economic growth and Canadian economic success for a century and a half.

Second, it is a myth that this is an industry of the past. It is not an industry of the past. It is only an industry of the past if we fail to encourage and allow industry to make the kinds of investments in the future that every industry, to be successful, has to make. In fact, I say to my colleagues across the way that I do not see this motion particularly as an attack on the government, or an attack on one partisan approach or another. It is, rather, an effort on the part of the whole House to say that this is an industry that requires innovation, change, and investment to be able to succeed.

We have had our partisan differences. I have had occasion for over a decade to serve as counsel to the Free Trade Lumber Council and I have spent a lot of time travelling across the country talking with every head of every company and every head of every union trying to look at how we could get a coalition together that would successfully withstand the American objections to the notion of free and fair access to the American market for competitive Canadian products.

The American resistance to our exports is from the industry, some of the producers of America, and not from the people of America, or from the consumers of America. It is based on the false notion that this industry in Canada receives subsidies and advantages that it does not receive in the United States. We do not have time today to document it, but this is simply not the case, and we can show that. What the Americans have shown is that when you have 50 Senators who represent less than 20% of the American population, they can put up a very strong protectionist wall against Canadian exports, and that is what they have done in the case of softwood lumber.

I disagreed with the government's decision to go for an agreement, because I felt that agreement simply entrenched American resistance to a competitive, open, and fair trading relationship. I believe that at that time it would have been far better for the Canadian government to have stood up and stood by the industry as it went through this difficult period of adjustment and change. The decision was made not to do that, but instead to rely on the Softwood Lumber Agreement as the framework that would take us forward. The fact remains that the ability of this industry to provide the jobs of the future will depend on its capacity to innovate, change, develop new products, and look for new markets rather than relying exclusively on the market of the United States.

I find it ironic as I travel and visit some of the mills and factories in the United States, as I am sure members opposite have done, to see that our mills are every bit as competitive and every bit as modern. We have as much new technology as they do in any other place. What we have not been able to do, in my opinion, is enough as a country to provide the industry with the kind of support it needs to reach new markets, develop new products, and to deal with some of the competitive disadvantages that we face.

The competitive disadvantages we face are not of our own making. They are made of a protectionist wall in the United States and of a very high dollar which is proving to be a tremendous challenge to us. We have to change the culture of the relationship between business, industry, and governments both federally and provincially, so that we can work more effectively in partnership to take us to a new step and a new stage in terms of this industry. That is what we need to do.

Business of Supply

I am very much in support of the motion being put forward by my colleagues of the Bloc, because I think it will allow this House to express its strong support for the industry.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy the lofty words of my colleague across the floor, and he may not remember, but we have had dealings in Thunder Bay with the old Provincial Papers and a number of other things. I do know that he understands the forestry industry, certainly in Ontario, quite well.

I would ask the member, if he were Prime Minister, what he would do with the American reluctance to stop their black liquor subsidy now. Further, what would the member do with the new super subsidy that is coming very shortly from the American government?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would say to the hon. member is that one of the difficulties with trade law is another country can subsidize all it wants and can still complain about goods that are coming into its country.

However, I would certainly be challenging what the Americans are doing at the WTO. I would be taking every step that we could do to do that. Then I would be saying to our American friends that for every subsidy they place on us we will have to do the same. We have no choice and no option but to provide a similar benefit to the companies that are having to do business with them, and to work hard to see that in taking those steps we would arrive at a negotiated result that would not put the industry at such a disadvantage.

I say to my colleague, knowing that he followed the softwood lumber debates very closely, I think the difference that existed between those who were opposed to the agreement and those who were in favour of it is that those who were opposed to the agreement were prepared to continue the fight. However we also understood that to get into that fight even further would have required further government investment and government expenditure.

I do not think we can shy away from that, because unless we are prepared to put that forward, we are not going to arrive at a healthy conclusion.

• (1725)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. Withdrawing from the deal would require further investment.

We know that on October 13, 2006 we had the decision of the Court of International Trade subject to only one final appeal. It gave every single penny back to Canada and allowed for unfettered free trade on lumber sales. Therefore we had that in hand. Unfortunately the Liberals working with the Conservatives and with the Bloc pushed the bill through on October 12. On October 12 the agreement was implemented and took away the advantage that we had through the courts.

We have the \$68 million that we had been penalized. We have a potential for \$200 million to \$300 million in the Quebec and Ontario subsidy case that is currently part of the softwood lumber appeals. Now everyone fears another billion dollars on B.C. stumpage. Therefore we are paying the cost.

Would the member not agree that we need to withdraw from the deal because the costs of continuing are much higher than the cost of re-establishing our legal position?

Hon. Bob Rae: Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the hon. member on every occasion, but I would say to him that if he followed my public and private record on the softwood lumber agreement, he would know that I had strongly advised against its adoption. I was consistently opposed to it and I remain opposed to it.

I think we all have to understand that withdrawing from it will in and of itself lead to significant challenges in the United States and with the United States for the very reason that I have given. The industry in the United States is determined to resist fair and free competition from Canada.

However, I would make the point to the member, and through him to my colleagues, to say one of the great illusions of the last five years on trade was the Prime Minister of Canada coming in and saying, "I've got peace in our time. I've got an agreement that's going to give us peace in our time". It was not true in 1938 and it is not true today. We did not get peace in our time with the softwood lumber agreement. We simply got another base, another platform from which the Americans can continue to harass and challenge every step of the way, every provincial policy and every federal policy, because the key issue for them is that they never want the Canadian industry to reach a point of competitiveness where it is able to get the products it wants and needs into the United States at their expense. For them it is a zero-sum game and that is the problem—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first of all like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

It is with great pleasure that I take the floor today, on this Bloc Québécois opposition day which is dealing with an issue of great importance for Quebec.

I would like to say to the hon. member who has just spoken that we are well aware that this is an issue that also affects all of Canada. However Quebec has been particularly affected by this crisis.

The motion tabled today criticizes the inaction of the Conservative government, as has been said in this House, in dealing with the forestry crisis. We have had some measures that are flatly inadequate to support the development of this industry and its workers, such as Bill C-50.

While the federal government has allocated the forestry industry some \$70 million, it must be said once again, the Conservatives have granted the automotive industry over \$9.7 billion. It is shameful. It is not that providing more support to the auto industry is shameful. We are not against support for the auto industry. But that support has been provided without consideration for the needs of the forestry industry in Quebec. That is our objection.

Business of Supply

Granting \$9.7 billion to the auto industry versus \$70 million to Quebec's forestry industry in a crisis situation is simply unfair and unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois. Let us not forget that the crisis in the forestry industry affects 825,000 workers, compared with 500,000 workers in the automotive sector. It would be entirely justified to support the forestry industry as much as the auto industry, but that is not what has happened.

The Conservative government had partisan electoral interests in Ontario when it tabled its latest budgets. In its choices, the Conservative government has decided to abandon the forestry industry and focus on the automotive industry, which as we know full well, also had certain needs.

However the forestry industry, the forest workers of Quebec and all the forest workers of Canada are worth more than this.

The Quebec forestry sector is made up of close to 88,000 Quebecers who work in sawmills and pulp and paper mills, representing about a third of Canadian jobs in this sector.

In Quebec, approximately 230 cities, towns and villages are primarily dependent on this economic sector, including 160 small, rural villages which are exclusively dependent on the forest. At the moment they are being devitalized and torn apart by cuts. They have not been listened to by this government.

The softwood lumber crisis, which we remember very well and which preceded the present economic crisis, did much more harm in Quebec than anywhere else in Canada. On this subject I would have liked to respond to my colleague from the Liberal Party who spoke earlier.

No fewer than 10,000 Quebec workers were directly affected, collectively losing the equivalent of 3,200 years' pay. That is not nothing.

Collectively, sales in Quebec fell four times more than the Canadian average. That was due not only to the broader economic crisis, but also to a lack of support for the forestry sector from the government.

Since April 2005, it has been worse still. The forestry industry, if we include related activities such as forestry and transportation, has lost an additional 25,000 jobs.

● (1730)

Today, the forestry industry is experiencing a major crisis that presents a serious threat to some of these communities, which are experiencing a loss of vitality and a major population exodus.

In the riding I represent, hundreds of workers have lost their jobs. Communities like Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon, Mandeville, Saint-Alexis-des-Monts and Saint-Mathieu-du-Parc, which are rural municipalities, are experiencing job losses in the forestry industry. Those industries need support from the federal government to modernize their equipment. We have talked about loan guarantees. They need help, and this government has turned a deaf ear.

To enable all of these workers to survive while they wait for this crisis to end, the Bloc Québécois is of course proposing that employment insurance be made more flexible, to provide the workers hard hit by this crisis with a decent income. As we have

seen, that is not what is done by Bill C-50, introduced in this House by the Conservative Party with the support of the New Democratic Party. That bill provides employment insurance for people who have essentially not had to claim employment insurance in the last 10 years. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are still refusing to provide support for the unemployed.

What is even worse is that the Conservatives have turned a deaf ear to what forestry workers and people losing their jobs are asking for. They are also trying, in Bill C-50, to define certain categories of unemployed workers.

Some workers or seasonal workers in the forestry and manufacturing industries have had the misfortune of having to claim employment insurance several times in recent years. Those people will not receive the same benefits as people who have not had to claim employment insurance as often in recent years. This means that those workers will be further impoverished. And that is of course why we are voting against this bill.

In short, the measures announced would have little effect in Quebec because they are not accessible to seasonal workers or forestry workers.

As well, in the riding of Berthier—Maskinongé, there is a category of workers not covered by the bill. I am talking about the entire situation of workers in the tourism industry. Here again, these are seasonal jobs. These people do not have access to any support. If the waiting period for employment insurance had been eliminated, these workers would have been penalized less; they would have been less impoverished, unlike the situation with the measures proposed by this government.

In addition, to enable the sawmills and factories that are having problems and that could employ these workers to get through the crisis, the Bloc Québécois proposed a set of measures that has been on the table for several months. Today, we continue to press ahead to help this industry, one of the most important in the economy of Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois has laid out a set of demands in its recovery plan for the forestry industry, including loan guarantees, for example. We have been calling for this for years. We asked the Liberals for them, in their day, and we have continued to ask the Conservatives for them. We are calling for loan guarantees so that more efficient production equipment can be acquired. We are calling for massive investments or tax measures to promote innovation and research and development in the industry. We are proposing that the research and development tax credit be refundable, so that even companies that are not making a profit will be able to innovate and develop new products.

It is also important to note that all these measures are consistent with the softwood lumber agreement, whatever the Conservative ministers and members might say.

● (1735)

I will conclude today by saying that the purpose of this motion is to provide support for the forestry industry and our workers in that industry. That is why we have introduced the motion in this House.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé for his excellent analysis and presentation, which truly impressed me.

I was truly astounded when he spoke of the number of workers in the auto industry compared to the number in the forestry industry. I want to be sure that his figures are correct.

Did he really say that there are 500,000 workers in the auto industry, which received \$9.7 billion from the Conservative government in financial support, and that there are 825,000 workers in the forestry sector, which received only \$70 million? Is that true or is he mistaken? That seems to be so discriminatory towards Quebec. I do not know if it is a question of incompetence, partisanship or re-election, but if those are the right figures could he provide an explanation?

• (1740)

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

These are the figures we arrived at with our research. They definitely show, as I mentioned in my speech, an unfair situation that we cannot tolerate in this House.

Not just the Bloc Québécois, but all parliamentarians who defend the citizens of Quebec and Canada cannot accept this situation. The member hit the nail on the head: they helped the auto industry—we are not against that—and I believe they did so in an attempt to gain support in Ontario with an eye to being re-elected, all to the detriment of Quebec and the other provinces of Canada, such as British Columbia, which is highly dependent on the forestry sector. That is what we are condemning.

It is high time to provide more support for the forestry sector in Quebec and to assist our workers by improving the employment insurance system.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate my colleague on his speech and say that the Bloc Québécois' position has to do not only with the past and the present, but also with the future.

A massive intervention to help the forestry industry would say that we still believe in a future for that industry. At present, the government seems to want to completely rule out any future development of the forestry industry. The industry has to be well positioned for the coming recovery. If nothing is done, that will be too bad, but when the recovery comes, there will be fewer workers and less industry in the municipalities in question.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the future of the forestry industry.

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

We have to modernize our sawmills with an eye to the future. We need measures to promote the industry more. All sorts of measures are being put forward to protect and develop this industry.

There are many forests in Quebec, and we have learned to develop this industry and run it harmoniously and sustainably. The forestry

industry can continue for many years to come if it is supported. If it is not supported and companies close, who will run our forestry sector in Quebec? We will not let just anyone run the forestry sector. This is important. There will be a recovery, and we must find ways to support our forestry companies.

If we were a sovereign state, we would have supported the forestry and manufacturing industries in Quebec more. But we are in Canada, and the federal government is boycotting and turning a deaf ear to our forestry industry and our workers.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise, as several of my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois have before me, to comment on this motion introduced this morning by our party. I will take a moment to read this motion again for your benefit, madam Speaker, and that of the people watching us. It states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should act urgently to provide the forestry industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis, with assistance which is similar to that given to the automotive industry concentrated in Ontario, and primarily through tax credits, loans and loan guarantees so that companies have immediate access to cash, and tax measures for private woodlot owners.

I am not in the habit of waving around documents published by the Conservative government, but I think this one is worth it. Copies of Canada's economic action plan have been distributed to all the members of this House. Page 127 deals with supporting industries and communities. One may try to put words in our mouths, of course, but the fact remains that this is a document that was published by the Conservative government. On page 127, we find a table entitled "Supporting Industries and Communities". It lists the 2009-2010 stimulus values, the authorities in place and the stimulus committed. The first item of support for industries concerns the automotive sector. I can understand that. The Conservative government wanted to show how large an investment it was making. Support for the auto sector is \$9,718,000,000, and the stimulus committed is \$9,718,000,000. This document was published in September. The government was basically indicating that all the money promised to the auto sector had been committed.

In terms of the forestry industry, it is worth mentioning. There is something for agriculture, mining, small business, tourism and shipbuilding. In forestry, \$70 million will be invested in 2009-2010 as stimulus measures. The figure committed is \$57 million. The government did not manage to spend the entire \$70 million. It spent only \$57 million. There lies the problem.

The forestry sector generates 825,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada, compared with the 500,000 jobs in the auto sector. My party and I have no objection to the investments in the auto sector. Our party does not object to the investments in the oil sector. What we have decried for years, for at least five years since the crisis in the forestry sector began, is why the government gave so much. Obviously, it began with the oil sector. Then it helped the auto sector. Why did it not provide the same measures to the forestry sector?

Business of Supply

It is clear that most of the production in the forestry industry occurs in Quebec. There are in Quebec over 1,000 municipalities—cities, towns and villages. There are 230 municipalities where the local economy has ties to the forestry sector. There are 160 towns and villages whose economy is based solely on the forestry sector. Those are called one-industry towns. In total, 230 of Quebec's more than 1,000 municipalities base their livelihood on this sector. It is important, because this is the life of the regions. It is always hard to hear Conservative MPs making proposals, such as the one to do with EI to establish measures to improve benefits or increase them by 20 weeks for long-tenured workers. In their view, these are the people who have not drawn EI benefits for more than 35 weeks in the past five years. That is not the case in the forestry sector. The industry has been in crisis for five years.

● (1745)

In this House, the government has tried to have us believe in all sorts of solutions. It was going to resolve the softwood lumber crisis, which was going to resolve the problems in the forestry sector. All of the businesses and the workers' representatives were telling us that settling the \$4 billion issue in the softwood lumber dispute was simply a band-aid on the recession our industry was facing.

It tried, each time, to buy tiny bits of help in an effort to say that the market situation would resolve itself. "Markets" became the buzz word. No industry was more affected by the market than the auto industry, because people were not buying cars. So the government decided to help the auto industry and cover its losses so it could continue.

This is what the forestry sector has been requesting for five years now. There is a major economic crisis in this sector, which acts as a precursor. Often what happens in construction precedes what happens in the economy. When construction goes, everything goes. Difficulties in construction indicate an approaching economic crisis. Things had been going badly in the forestry sector for five years. The economists knew it, as did the government. The problem was that it was not of political interest. The government had decided that the forestry industry was not important. It waited for the real crisis to help other sectors that landed in an economic crisis at the same time, such as the automotive sector. But it left the whole forestry sector high and dry.

Workers in the regions of Quebec are not eligible for the Conservative assistance programs—such as the program to extend EI benefits by 20 weeks—since these workers, the men and women employed in the forestry sector, have received more than 35 weeks of EI in the past five years. It is clear; it just jumps out at you, only the Conservatives do not see it. But that is their problem.

They have also come up with measures and programs to help those who change jobs. The Conservative government wants our most experienced workers—those who have devoted their lives to a particular manufacturing sector—to find jobs in other sectors. Forests and trees will keep growing. That goes without saying. Oil is not renewable. That too goes without saying. I have no problem with investing in the oil industry, but I would like to know what the Conservatives plan to do when the oil runs out. Fossil fuel energy is not renewable, but forests are. We can justify helping the forestry industry because the trees will keep growing.

I can see why workers in these regions say that they want the government to invest in measures for private woodlot owners in regions where there are both private and crown-owned woodlots. We want the trees to keep growing, and we want our industry to benefit from the experience and abilities our workers have acquired over the years. We want to continue to take advantage of that.

Of course the Bloc Québécois members, who have such deep roots in their regions, are going to rise every day in the House of Commons to tell the government that it cannot justify ignoring an entire industry that employs more workers in Canada than the auto industry, just by saying it is a market issue. Other countries have decided to invest, simply because the loans and loan guarantees they are offering are allowed by the WTO and international trade rules.

No matter how often we talk about it in the House, the Conservatives keep using opinions from their own lawyers to insist that this is not the way to help the industry recover. The government will not provide loan guarantees or working capital. As a result, companies lack liquidity and cannot pay their employees or their suppliers at the end of the month. One by one, companies are closing up shop.

If all parties in the House were to support this motion, we could, once and for all, ensure a future for an industry that has made Quebec what it is today. Without the forestry sector, Quebec would not be as prosperous as it is today, and neither would Canada.

● (1750)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the auto sector has been mentioned a number of times. Coming from an auto sector town, I would like to ask an important question when we look at the overall situation that took place.

The crisis in the financial markets was caused by mismanagement, greed and speculation and much of it has not yet ceased today. Workers in manufacturing plants across Canada have suffered dramatically, including in the auto sector. Prior to that situation, it is interesting to note what the United States had been doing with public policy.

Even under George W. Bush, the United States put aside an alternative vehicle financing facility that looked at its auto sector and provided \$25 billion in low-interest loans. In Michigan people have been taking advantage of these loans. Michigan has the new procurement strategy necessary to attract new industry and several battery plant facilities and electric vehicles will be coming online. In fact, overseas operations are reconstituting in Michigan.

Meanwhile, Canada has set up a \$50 million fund over five years for a total of \$250 million.

What does my colleague from the Bloc think about how we will build a deal with the United States, not only in terms of the auto sector but also the forestry sector, when it had massive subsidization even before this crisis took place?

Business of Supply

•(1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right to mention the fact that other countries, in matters of international trade, were not shy to help their industries. When the Bloc Québécois members introduce a measure such as the one for loans and guaranteed loans in this House, you can be sure that the Bloc Québécois always checks carefully before making a proposal.

What we are proposing and what we have been proposing to the government for five years with respect to loans and guaranteed loans is allowed under the World Trade Organization rules. It is allowed and the intention is in fact to support companies going through difficult times. That is the purpose. The Conservatives are trying to change that into what EDC—Export Development Canada—does, which, for decades, is to guarantee the accounts receivable of Canadian suppliers and exporters, in all sectors, not just in forestry. That is okay. There are manufacturers that sell part of their production to countries or companies located in countries where it might be difficult to collect the accounts receivable. It is reasonable to have a measure that helps them out.

The Conservatives are trying to say something about the guarantees that manufacturers are asking for with respect to their accounts receivable in foreign countries. It is insurance, like the kind CMHC provides for those who borrow money to buy a home. A fee has to be paid to the government to ensure that the government will reimburse the lender if they are not paid. We are told there is \$10 billion in guarantees. The government is certainly not going to lose that \$10 billion, far from it.

In times of economic crisis, there are a few more losses, but every account receivable has to be analyzed and every company has to be audited before the guarantee is provided. The manufacturer's bank has to verify the quality of the purchaser. That is business. What we are asking for is something completely outside all that, the way it was done for the automotive sector. Things are going badly. We are in a crisis. The auto industry was given a \$9.7 billion bailout in order to pay its employees and get back up and running. That is what we want for the forestry industry. We want to modernize the businesses and provide tax credits. What is more, we want loan guarantees for working capital, in order to relaunch businesses so that they can pay their employees and restart production.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of informing you that I will share my time today with the member for Okanagan—Shuswap. This member from British Columbia comes from a riding where the forestry industry is equally important. In fact, the head office of Tolko, the fifth-largest forestry company, is in his riding. This company is also found in Alberta.

Of course, the forestry industry affects all of Quebec, and also the people of Lévis—Bellechasse and Les Etchemins. I am thinking about manufacturers of sophisticated equipment for processing and handling wood, log handling, like Rotobec, about the private woodlot owners in Bellechasse and Les Etchemins, and about the sawmills in the province, the companies that help with marketing, like Kheops in Lévis, the companies in Sainte-Camille-de-Lellis, or Sainte-Rose-de-Watford. In short, the forestry industry is a pillar, an

energy, a renewable resource. Every time wood is harvested, the forest regenerates, and the forestry sector is certainly not sheltered from economic storms.

I am quite surprised that the Bloc members are talking to us today about the forestry sector. In recent weeks and months, every time we have had the opportunity to take concrete action here, in this House, they remained seated. When we introduced the economic action plan, when we introduced specific measures to help the regions hardest hit by the recession, the Bloc members remained seated. And today, on opposition day, the Bloc members rise to complain, to criticize, but when the time comes to take real action, where are they?

Fortunately, on this side of the House, that is not the case. I am thinking about the actions of my colleague, the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. He is aware of the challenges and difficulties, but he is taking concrete action. I am also thinking about the member for Jonquière—Alma, who is working hard with our partners to find solutions.

Yes, the Canadian government is helping the Quebec forestry industry. Over the past two years, some \$16.7 billion has been allocated to support the forestry sector and its exports. That is the amount for Quebec alone and, of course, these mechanisms can be found throughout the province.

Of course, there have been specific measures. Indeed, although demand from the United States is dropping, it is important to support and develop new, innovative products in the forestry sector. That is why we supported an initiative worth nearly \$40 million that will ultimately allow us to invest in what is known as the North American wood first initiative. It will help forestry companies sell innovative products in international markets. Consider, for instance, everything that can be done with composite materials.

We are also helping communities. Some \$1 billion is being invested to support the communities hardest hit by the crisis. When the time comes to rise in this House to pass these concrete measures, we, the Conservative members from Quebec, stand up—we rise—which is how we will get this assistance to the communities, while unfortunately, we see the members across the floor sitting, just sitting on their hands.

Another program exists because we care about the environment. Some \$1 billion is being invested in the pulp and paper green transformation program, which will support the sector and, while modernizing production, will allow the pulp and paper sector to reduce its environmental footprint. This is another concrete measure, another example of financial assistance. Here on this side of the House, we believe that it is important to adopt these measures. Unfortunately, we do not see this kind of support from the other side of the House.

Business of Supply

It is not enough to talk about the forestry industry alone; we must also talk about the people affected by these upheavals. Our economic action plan allocates a number of large investments in this area to support worker training, for example, and career transition, as well as to amend and extend employment insurance programs, and make them more flexible, without affecting premiums. That is in Canada's economic action plan.

• (1800)

There is one measure that companies in the forestry sector have made particular use of, and that is work sharing. There are 107 forestry companies that have taken advantage of this program, which has preserved 4,364 forestry jobs here in Canada. It is a measure that was supported on this side of the House by all the Conservative members, including the Quebec Conservative team. But the Bloc preferred to abandon these people for ideological reasons, for partisan reasons. It decided not to support these practical measures and this assistance for people who need it.

Of course, five weeks of employment insurance benefits have been added for all workers, including those in the forestry industry. And there is currently a bill before the House that would make the EI system more flexible by adding five to 20 weeks of benefits. Of course, it also applies to the people in the forestry sector.

Training is another important area, and nearly \$19 million has been earmarked for older workers in Quebec. These are people who are benefiting from programs and receiving benefits and who can consider a new career. They can develop their skills thanks to the economic action plan. These are measures supported and introduced by our government. Significant funding has also been provided for initiatives such as workforce development programs. Obviously, these programs are helping the companies and workers in Quebec that are affected by the crisis.

One thing that should be pointed out is that we have worked with the Government of Quebec to address the problems in the forestry sector with practical solutions. In April 2009, we decided to take additional steps because of the impacts of this crisis. In partnership with the Government of Quebec, we set up a Canada-Quebec task team that is coordinating efforts to support Quebec's forestry industry.

Several sectors were identified as key areas requiring intervention, areas in which measures have been taken—forest management and silviculture, for example. In addition, we have helped forestry workers, ensured access to credit, supported technology, innovation and value-added manufacturing and helped develop markets for wood products. In each of these areas, initial measures taken by both governments arose from joint efforts on the part of the various departments involved, including, at the federal level, Natural Resources Canada, the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Export Development Canada and the Business Development Bank of Canada, and at the provincial level, the ministry of natural resources and wildlife, the ministry of economic development, innovation and export, and Investissement Québec. Both governments have been submitting progress reports. Reports were released in May and July. One of the working group's concrete outcomes was investment in

silviculture to promote sustainable forest management goals and create or maintain jobs in communities that rely on forestry.

In May 2009, \$200 million in funding was announced to support silviculture activities in Quebec. When I was in my riding earlier this summer, I met with private operators, members of the Regroupement forestier de Bellechasse et des Etchemins. They told me that the federal contribution was making a difference, enabling them to plant trees and reforest logging areas. That money is getting to the regions, and people appreciate it. That money is supporting community sustainable development and the industry in crisis.

What we have not heard about today is why this crisis happened in the first place. We know that there are various factors, such as the strength of the dollar and the recession in the United States.

In conclusion, on this opposition day, the Bloc is standing up for the forestry sector. We, in contrast, have been standing up for forestry industry workers and businesses and taking action every day for the past year.

• (1805)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member who just spoke a few questions that will be easy to answer. In his speech, he mentioned that Bill C-50, which is currently being studied, would help forestry workers.

I would like him to identify these forestry workers: in which regions do they live and how many are there?

Bill C-50 actually does not benefit those forestry workers. I imagine he could reconsider what he said. I would just remind him that Bill C-50, supported by the New Democrats, will help people, but only those who have not drawn more than 35 weeks of benefits over the past five years.

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

As I was saying, our government has implemented a number of measures, not only measures introduced when Parliament resumed, but also measures that we introduced in our economic action plan, measures that he clearly opposed.

I am talking about training for workers, for example. I am talking about freezing premiums, so businesses are not forced to pay additional surcharges. I am talking about programs for older workers. I am also talking about increasing employment insurance benefits for all workers.

Several measures have been implemented and others will come. We also hope to introduce measures this fall for self-employed workers. Many forestry workers are self employed. We are committed to them. That is in our action plan. Introducing measures for self-employed workers is one of our commitments.

I therefore invite my hon. colleague to stand up in this House when the time comes, to support the measures that will help workers, to support measures introduced by our government.

Business of Supply

•(1810)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, not a single member from Quebec rose to speak out against the sellout softwood lumber deal. Not a single Conservative rose to say that it was not in the best interests of Quebec or Canada to sign this sellout deal.

Now, there is \$68 million in additional penalties. There will be \$200 million more that taxpayers and the communities that depend on softwood lumber will have to pay to defend this sellout deal. It might cost another billion dollars, since another case is coming up.

Does the member regret supporting this sellout agreement, or is he prepared to spend another \$200 million, \$300 million or even another \$1 billion to support a political deal that auctioned off our softwood lumber industry?

Mr. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I want to assure my colleague that it is essential for us to keep our access to the U.S. market. It is essential for the Canadian industry that we keep our access to the U.S. market because that is where the future and long-term growth of our forestry sector lies. I want to assure him that on this side of the House, we will not compromise the future of the forestry industry by taking measures that could have harmful consequences.

That being said, I was alarmed today to hear the official opposition say that it would have continued with the litigation and the delays and that the forestry industry would have been deprived of the courageous action taken by our government to sign a softwood lumber agreement. Indeed, I am very proud of that agreement. All the companies in my riding and across Canada are benefiting from it.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Conservative government has taken several initiatives to support the entire forestry industry.

I would like my colleague to explain exactly why it is that the Fonds de solidarité FTQ, which supports the Bloc, decided not to give money to the forestry industry including AbitibiBowater.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member has 30 seconds to respond.

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

I would like to remind him that, a while back, the Bloc Québécois considered federal investments in Quebec to be a waste of money and effort. That was in their 2000 platform.

We should not be surprised. In fact, André Boisclair told *Tout le monde en parle* that when you do not have the responsibility that goes with—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse, for sharing his time with me.

The current economic situation and its impacts upon our nation are well-known. Our government has taken a number of short-term

and long-term actions and investments to support the forestry sector through tough economic times and, more important, to help communities and workers who depend on the forestry industry.

In the short-term, we provided a total of \$2 billion to support communities facing transition and those affected by the economic downturn. The \$1 billion community development trust announced in 2007 and the \$1 billion community adjustment fund announced in the economic action plan provide support to create jobs and maintain employment in affected communities, such as the forest-dependent communities.

I had a great experience last summer where I made an announcement of the community adjustment fund in Grand Forks in the southern interior of British Columbia. That is a community that lost its mills and was more than happy to see that investment in its community.

In addition, we have taken measures to secure a more sustainable forestry industry by supporting forestry industries develop new products, processes, and take advantage of emerging opportunities in the international marketplace. Building on the \$127.5 million forestry industry long-term competitiveness initiative announced in 2007, Canada's economic action plan provides \$170 million to support the transformation of Canada's forestry sector.

However, to fully take advantage of emerging opportunities, Canadian forestry companies need to have access to credit. Through Canada's economic action plan, the government has taken bold and unprecedented measures to improve access to credit for Canadians and Canadian businesses, as we work closely together through these challenging times.

Access to credit is key for all businesses and sectors of the economy. This is especially the case in industries that are capital-intensive and export-oriented, such as the forestry and the mining sectors.

A key measure taken in the economic action plan of 2009 to address issues in credit markets was to provide Export Development Canada with more financial flexibility to support businesses during the current economic downturn. Export Development Canada has working relationships with more than 90% of the Canadian forestry industry and has new flexibility for firms in the forestry sector and across the economy to address financing gaps in the credit markets.

In 2008, EDC provided financial services with a total value of \$85.8 billion to over 8,300 Canadians businesses. Forestry industries received serviced worth \$14 billion.

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During the first eight months of this year, EDC provided an additional \$50.84 billion to businesses in Canada, more than \$9.6 billion of which went to forestry industries across Canada. Forestry industry clients have grown from being less than 7% of EDC's total portfolio, in 2008, to being nearly 20% now in 2009.

Finally, the Business Development Bank of Canada provided support, over the same period, to more than 1,100 small and medium-sized businesses in Canada operating in the forestry sector.

We have also taken a number of other measures in the economic action plan, including investments in infrastructure that will benefit the forestry industry across Canada.

For example, the economic action plan provides \$4 billion in new funding for local and regional projects; \$2 billion for urgently needed repairs to our universities and colleges; and \$1 billion for a green infrastructure fund to support projects such as sustainable energy.

This is in addition to the \$33 billion for longer-term projects our government has already committed to under the building Canada fund.

The new home renovation tax credit is also good for the forestry sector as it provides eligibility for up to \$1,300 in tax relief for Canadians undertaking home renovations. Each time Canadians undertake a home renovation project, they are helping to create jobs in construction and building supplies in their communities.

•(1815)

In fact, the economic action plan provides as much as \$7.8 billion to help build high-quality housing and to promote construction in home renovation, two areas that will directly help stimulate demand for Canadian wood products.

To provide economic opportunities to first nation communities, our plan provides \$400 million over the next two years to support on-reserve housing dedicated to new social housing projects, to remediate existing social housing stock and complement housing activities.

Given the importance of wood in construction and renovation, these actions will stimulate additional domestic demand, perhaps more than one billion board feet of lumber and hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of wood panels for Canadian wood and wood products.

Through these measures, Canada will mitigate the effects of the global economic downturn on business, workers and communities. At the same time, measures in the economic action plan lay a strong foundation for our forestry products and mining sectors, and the communities that depend on them to emerge from this period of economic turmoil more prosperous and sustainable than ever.

Despite global economic turbulence, Canada's resource industries continue to make significant contributions to our economy. Given their importance to Canada's wealth and Canadians' well-being, the economic action plan provides additional help specifically to encourage industry to upgrade and retool its equipment. Through the extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance until the year 2011, we continue to improve Canada's tax advantage in order to

help attract investments in the forestry industry, as well as other resource and manufacturing sectors.

We also intend to permanently eliminate tariffs on a range of machinery and equipment. This measure is expected to save Canadian industry, including the forestry sector, about \$440 million over the next five years.

Our government is determined to help forestry communities through difficult times while enabling the forestry sector to renew itself and lay the foundations for a more prosperous future. This is why the economic action plan provides \$8.3 billion in Canada's skills and transition strategy to help Canadian workers and their families in the forestry sector and across the economy in a variety of ways: by strengthening benefits, by enhancing the availability of training, and by keeping employment insurance rates low for 2009-10.

In conclusion, all members know that today's economic challenges are significant. Even before the global recession, Canada's forestry sector was in a difficult period of transition and our government was responding.

Many of our forestry sector initiatives began well before the current economic downturn. We can be confident that our forestry sector will be well equipped to lead as competitors as the world emerges from this recession and the measures included in Canada's economic action plan will help support and advance Canada's recovery.

•(1820)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 6:23 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and the recorded division is deemed to have been demanded and deferred until Tuesday, October 20, 2009, at the end of government orders.

[*English*]

Mr. David Sweet: Madam Speaker, I would ask that you seek the consent of the House to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved

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[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in May I rose in the House to ask the government with regard to the issue of a special envoy for Pakistan-Afghanistan.

The United States, Great Britain, France and the EU have all assigned a special envoy to the region. Given the importance of Pakistan, particularly with regard to the Taliban and the current situation in Waziristan, et cetera, it is important that we have an envoy on the ground and certainly subject to our resolution.

One of the government priorities, priority number 4, talks about the need to deal with Pakistan and Afghanistan much more effectively, and that we have a special representative who can report back, not only to government but to Parliament to enhance the relationship, to understand what is going on the ground. We want to build better institutions there with the EU and the United States. Because of the changing strategies that President Obama announced back in March, this needs to be done.

The government failed to respond, other than saying it has a high commissioner in Pakistan and an ambassador in Afghanistan. That is fine, but it does not go far enough in terms of the realities. We have 2,500 troops on the ground. We have committed those men and women to the struggle in Afghanistan, and we need to ensure that we emphasize as much on the diplomatic front as possible.

Unfortunately, the government has not seemed to do so. Even in General McChrystal's assessment recently, that was done in August for the president, he indicated very clearly the need for this type of strategy, the fact that the Taliban are in Pakistan, that there is a porous border and they go across.

I am sure that my hon. colleague across the way understands that this diplomatic push for a special envoy is in Canada's best interest, it is in Afghanistan's best interest and of course it is in Pakistan's best interest. Besides that, we need to engage India and China. China, of course, is concerned about issues in its western territory, the fact that fundamentalism, particularly linkages with al-Qaeda, is clear and evident. The government could be doing more if we had a special envoy to engage the Chinese in this regard. We should certainly engage the Indians as well.

There is no question that there is a new phase in the situation on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are linked very strongly and we need to ensure that we have all the best diplomatic efforts possible put forth, both in Islamabad and Pakistan.

The special envoy, as I say, is something others have clearly done. They recognized the need. The EU does not even have any troops, obviously, because it is a political organization, yet it found that this was necessary. Certainly the British, the French and the United States have found it necessary. We need to be there to be a major player.

In terms of this diplomatic engagement, we need to ensure that we have the best intelligence possible. We need to be able to share that. We also need to ensure that as a participant in the war on terrorism and certainly the situation in Afghanistan, that we are able to communicate directly what it is we are saying to all capitals in the

region and with the same voice. Unfortunately, at the present time, we do not have that.

The government's response in May was basically to slough it off. However, the government, I am sure, recognizes today that with the change in strategy and with General McChrystal's report to the president, this is a reality that needs to be addressed now. I would hope that when I hear from my friends on the other side, they will be more open to the need for this type of diplomatic engagement, because again, it is in our national interest to do so.

● (1825)

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House and capitalize on this opportunity to discuss the government's approach to Afghanistan.

First, allow me to review the nature of Canada's commitment to Afghanistan and our government's effective priorities, namely diplomatic, development and reconstruction.

I would like to take a moment and remind the House and the members currently present that on March 13, 2008, in this very chamber we voted on a motion of the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, which stipulated that our government's contribution to Afghanistan would:

—be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between our military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan;

Following the motion, this government carried out an extensive review, an assessment process to define Canadian priorities and programming for Afghanistan. As a result of the work of many on this side of the House, Canada's mission in Afghanistan now has a greater emphasis on reconstruction, development and diplomacy.

The government identified six key strategic priorities for Canada's engagement in Afghanistan for the 2008-2011 period, namely: first, enable the Afghan National Security Forces in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order; second, strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver basic services and promote job-oriented economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in their government; third, provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons; fourth, enhance border security through facilitation of bilateral dialogue between Afghan and Pakistan authorities; fifth, build national institutions that are central to our Kandahar priorities and support democratic processes, such as elections; and sixth, facilitate Afghan-led efforts toward political reconciliation.

Helping our government to deliver on these priorities and commitments over the last year our civilian presence in Afghanistan doubled. Today over 100 Canadian civilians are working in Afghanistan, including personnel from DFAIT, CIDA, the RCMP and Correctional Service Canada.

This coordinated effort is an excellent example of our Conservative government's whole of government approach to the mission in Afghanistan. Our civilian partners work in a very challenging environment. These individuals exemplify the ideals of the Canadian mission and our government's streamlined priorities.

On the question of envoys, the fact is different countries have different approaches and mechanisms in place. We on the government side are less concerned with the actual title our officials carry than we are with the actual work they carry out and the quality of our assistance in Afghanistan.

The key is the Canadians working for Afghanistan, both on the ground in Afghanistan and here in Canada, are among the best and the brightest the world has to offer.

The hon. member asked for leadership. Allow me to clearly state, here it is, we have it. We are delivering real results. The results are far more important than the semantics and the titles. On this side of the House, we know this. It is time for the opposition to figure it out, too.

Our government clearly indicated its commitment by putting a senior ambassador in Afghanistan. Our ambassador to Afghanistan, William Crosbie, and our High Commissioner in Pakistan, Randolph Mank, worked very closely together coordinating our government's efforts at the regional level.

The work of the government also focuses on broader issues. We see no necessity for a special envoy.

• (1830)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague very carefully.

First, I am a bit disappointed in the partisanship in his comments, given the fact that the resolution which this House adopted, and which I and my colleagues were part of, was a non-political resolution. It was for Canada's interest, not for the Conservative Party's interest.

There is an integrated strategy that is going on with Afghanistan, Pakistan, et cetera. The issue is not about semantics. The issue is not about titles. The issue about this. Are we adopting and are we adapting quickly enough to these new strategies? Are we prepared to in fact have the integrated approach that is needed in responding to what is going on across the border involving India, China, et cetera?

Clearly we can take different paths, as the member said. There seems to be a common thread here. The British who have the second largest contingent in Afghanistan, the Americans who have the largest, the French who are there and even the EU, as I pointed out, all believe this integrated strategy requires a special envoy who can get the kind of information and be able to disseminate it in a way which is very effective. Again, in his report General McChrystal praises this approach as well.

I would suggest that this issue is integrated strategy. The envoy is part of an integrated strategy. I would hope all members in the House, not just on the government side, and I mean the vice-chair of the defence committee, et cetera, can see the non-partisanship that goes on there.

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Hon. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that at the political level, I believe within the G8 we have a cabinet committee comprising senior members whose sole purpose is to focus on, guide, and provide political leadership to oversee Canada's engagement in Afghanistan.

Without any question, our government is fully engaged in this issue and is doing what needs to be done, notwithstanding the titles that the member may or may not wish to have. Titles are easy to apply. For us to get the job done is more difficult, and that is exactly what we are doing.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising on a question that I raised in May to do with the Auditor General's report from 2008 on first nations child and family services. I had asked the minister a question about when the government would live up its responsibility to consult first nations and appropriately fund the child and family services program.

To put it into context, I want to briefly refer to the Auditor General's report in which she indicates the severity of the problem, as shown by the INAC data, in that about 5% of first nations children living on-reserve are in care. This is almost eight times the number of children in care residing off-reserve. She also points out that according to a parallel audit that was done, 51% of children in care in British Columbia are aboriginal. These are pretty shocking numbers.

The Auditor General also indicates in the report that under federal and provincial policies, aboriginal children including first nations children should have equitable access to services comparable in level and quality to those provided to other children.

Subsequently the department came before the public accounts committee and reported on some of its action plan, but part of the heart of this matter is the fact that there is a differential between what the provinces pay for off-reserve children and what on-reserve children are entitled to.

In a letter that came out on August 19, 2009 the department states that

...INAC cannot commit to conducting such a comprehensive review nor can it be done for all jurisdictions by the timelines required by the Committee. INAC would be able to provide a basic comparison of jurisdictions that are currently under the Enhanced Prevention [program] and where INAC has basic information on salary rates...

and it goes on to indicate that it would have some of its preliminary work done by December 31, 2009.

However, in the Auditor General's report, she points out that the funding program that she was talking about in 2008 was designed in 1988 and has not been significantly modified since. The government participated in a couple of different reports. There were the two policy reviews, one of which was a national policy review in 2000 and then there was the Wende report in 2005, in which there was significant work done around identifying the fact that there needed to be this provincial review.

Adjournment Proceedings

In 2008 the Auditor General identified the fact that there were gaps in service. It is not just the current government's responsibility. This has been going on for a long time. Previous governments were fully aware of the fact that there was this enormous gap in funding.

Yet now we are being told to wait longer. In fact in the public accounts report, under recommendation No. 4, where there is talk about modifying directive 20-1, which concerns the funding that first nations child and family service agencies get, it is indicated that the hope and objective are that all remaining jurisdictions will be ready for transition by 2013.

Therefore there are a couple of issues that come up. Since this is a long-standing piece of information, I wonder why the government does not look at putting in place interim funding to close that 22% gap between federal and provincial services, and put in interim funding until it can get accurate and comparable data from coast to coast.

I would agree that there need to be different models across this country recognizing regional differences. However, we should not simply tell first nations that they have to wait another four, five or six years since if that report comes out in 2013 we actually will not have the new funding.

Why can the government not put in place interim funding?

• (1835)

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in response to the question from the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I would like to add that tomorrow we will be dealing in depth with this issue at the aboriginal affairs committee. The member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has done good work on this. I am sure there will be many questions asked and answered tomorrow.

Our government is moving forward with ready and willing partners. We are committed to making changes to child and family services and we want to build stronger and healthier first nation families. We do not work alone. Provinces have jurisdiction over child welfare both on and off reserve and, in some cases, the provinces have delegated this authority to first nations child welfare agencies and first nations staff.

The move of the child and family services program to a more enhanced and prevention based approach began with the Alberta framework in June 2007. This involves Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Treaty First Nations and the Province of Alberta. We are continuing to work with other provinces and first nations on frameworks that will result in better outcomes for first nations children. We have worked, created and entered into partnerships with Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and first nations agencies in those provinces.

Our commitment is clearly demonstrated by the funds allocated in Canada's economic action plan. We have provided a further \$20 million over the next two years to ensure further progress through frameworks in Prince Edward Island and Quebec and we are

working hard on these prevention based approaches that now cover five provinces and nearly half the first nation children in Canada. We are working hard to put in place similar partnerships across Canada.

We are getting the job done. Our government is committed to working together with these partners and we will not move forward without a tripartite approach. Child welfare requires the active involvement of all partners, the family and the first nation child welfare agencies on reserve, as well as the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

• (1840)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, I would agree that the government has taken some important steps. I also agree that we need all three parties at the table, the federal, provincial and first nations governments, particularly since many of the child welfare services are being delivered by first nations communities. I also agree that other work needs to be done.

However, I still wonder why we cannot look at some interim funding. We know that first nation governments across the country have been handicapped over a number of years by the 2% funding cap that was imposed in 1995. It seems that we are acknowledging that there is a funding differential.

Why would we not put interim funding in to at least alleviate some of the pressures on these communities? Many of them have poor, inadequate housing and poor water. Remote communities do not have access to the same kinds of services as more urban communities.

Again I would ask the government why it does not put interim funding in while the rest of this work unfolds.

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the member does recognize that we have made significant progress on this issue.

However, I would like to reinforce the fact that a lot of people are delivering these services and if we do not enter into a tripartite agreement we could end up not knowing where to best allocate the moneys that we are talking about.

The funding in the five jurisdictions that we are already talking about comes to \$61 million a year when fully implemented. That could probably be almost doubled when we enter into further agreements. This is a significant commitment.

We have demonstrated a new and practical approach to working with aboriginal governments, aboriginal organizations, provinces and territories to address these clear priorities throughout Canada. This is paying off and we are seeing results.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The motion to adjourn the House is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

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