



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, March 17, 2010**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

The House met at 2 p.m.

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*Prayers*

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● (1400)

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for York South—Weston.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

### LA FRANCOPHONIE

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, happy St. Patrick's Day.

We were very sad to hear that the people of Haiti, a founding member of la Francophonie, were hit hard by a terrible earthquake in January. While we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the International Organization of la Francophonie today, we must remember the need for solidarity with Haiti, a country that has endured so much.

Canada did its part by providing immediate financial and humanitarian assistance. We are calling for long-term mobilization of the international community, particularly countries that share the French bond, in order to rebuild Haiti, a friend to Canada.

The celebration of the 40th anniversary of la Francophonie must go hand in hand with a spirit of solidarity. La Francophonie is about more than just language and cultural diversity. It is about a set of values on which we base our work and our cooperation.

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[*English*]

### GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government is engaging in the inappropriate abuse of taxpayers' money as it spends hundreds of millions of dollars to fund its economic action plan partisan ads.

Government advertising should concentrate on informing members of the public about actions it can take or of program changes that directly affect them. The public has no pressing need to be reminded of the economic action plan on TV, radio and newspapers, including in ethnic media.

The Conservative government should stop promoting itself in publicly funded ads in an attempt to gain voter support. It must stop wasting taxpayers' money in advertising its economic action plan.

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[*Translation*]

### ELECTRIC CARS

**Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, today I have the pleasure of congratulating the City of Boucherville on having been selected as the host municipality for Canada's largest electric vehicle pilot project. Hydro-Québec and Mitsubishi Canada are partnering up to test the performance of the automaker's electric vehicles in Quebec winters.

The i-MiEV was presented with the Japanese Car of the Year award for Most Advanced Technology at the 2009 Tokyo International Motor Show. By 2012, there will be up to 50 of these vehicles being tested on the streets of Boucherville. The vehicle can travel 160 kilometres on a charge, can reach speeds of 130 kilometres an hour and can be recharged using a standard socket.

One of the pilot project's goals is to learn about driver habits in order to determine where cars would need to be recharged. Financed by Hydro-Québec, the pilot project will also measure the impact of electric vehicles on the power grid.

The Bloc Québécois is proud to highlight the development of green energy in Québec.

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● (1405)

[*English*]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government has refused to further extend EI benefits to those workers still suffering in this jobless recovery. Over 800,000 workers are on the verge of exhausting their benefits.

*Statements by Members*

On Sunday, I attended a rally at U.S. Steel's Lake Erie Works for 800 steelworkers locked-out for close to a year. These workers do not even qualify for EI. I also attended a rally in front of the Siemens gas turbine plant in Hamilton where 550 workers have been informed that their plant will close July 2011.

What lies ahead for many Canadian families is a gradual evaporation of their savings and a hard landing on provincial welfare rolls.

Ontarians with \$572 in liquid assets are not eligible for welfare. To qualify for welfare, they must sell their vehicle and even their tools. When the economy does improve they will still be out of work.

What financial institution will lend people money to replace these items when they are on welfare? Losing a job in Canada should not mean losing everything.

Canadians are demanding serious EI reform now.

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**ST. PATRICK'S DAY**

**Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, March 17 is the day to celebrate Irish culture. It is St. Patrick's Day.

The first Irish immigrants settled around Miramichi, the riding I proudly represent, and I wish to take this opportunity to salute Canada's national Irish capital, the Miramichi.

Thousands of people come together at Miramichi's own Irish festival each July to celebrate and take part in a variety of activities: Irish dancing and music; cultural and musical workshops; family parade and family reunions; and stories and games for the little ones.

Although I am not on the Miramichi today, I wish to take this opportunity to salute all the Irish in our country who are celebrating our culture, our Irish traditions and those who are wearing green.

I especially salute the hard-working Irish festival committee, the retired teachers group and all who are today doing their thing to enjoy and promote our Irish culture.

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[*Translation*]

**MADEIRA ISLAND**

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on February 20, the residents of Madeira Island suffered a devastating flood that caused several billion dollars in damage, injured hundreds of people and, sadly, left 42 people dead.

[*English*]

Torrential rainfall, the highest ever recorded in Portugal, caused landslides, washed away bridges and nearly destroyed entire villages.

I congratulate members of the Portuguese Canadian community as well as many other concerned Canadians who have already contributed, and I encourage the government and all Canadians to join the relief efforts by giving to one of the various funds that have been established.

[*Translation*]

We, the members of the House of Commons, pledge complete solidarity with the people of Madeira. We are absolutely committed to lending our support in any way we can, in order to help our friends cope with this disaster.

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[*English*]

**KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE 2010**

**Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the village of Lawrencetown, Nova Scotia for making it into the top 12 communities in the running for Kraft Hockeyville 2010. I would point out that it is a very difficult job to do this when St. Patrick is being so well represented by the green jackets down there.

A local organizing committee has put together an excellent bid for Lawrencetown, demonstrating its enthusiasm and love for the good old hockey game. This national competition generates great interest in our beloved game right across the country. It brings local communities together and creates a great deal of spirit and excitement.

I urge all Nova Scotians to show their strong hockey pride by supporting Lawrencetown, the only community left in the running in Nova Scotia. I ask everyone to please take the time to vote for Lawrencetown through CBC Sports online, by phone or text.

I really want to wish all communities well but I look forward to Lawrencetown becoming Hockeyville 2010.

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[*Translation*]

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec has instituted the Prix Égalité to recognize projects that promote gender equality. The award has several categories, including “models and behaviour that promote equality”, “economic equality”, “work-life balance”, “health”, “violence prevention” and “power and regions”.

I am very pleased to rise in the House today to commend and congratulate the Carrefour des femmes du grand Lachute, a community organization whose project “trip de coeur” received an award in the health category.

I would like to point out that the “trip de coeur” project is the result of cooperation between the Carrefour des femmes du grand Lachute, the Centre André-Bourbeau and the Réseau des femmes des Laurentides. Those organizations worked together to create a training manual for people who work with women who have problems with alcohol, prescription drugs and other drugs, suggesting concrete ways these women can regain control of their lives.

*Statements by Members*

● (1410)

**JUSTICE**

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Quebecers and Canadians know that our Conservative government has done many things to get tough on crime and protect our society.

That includes the Tackling Violent Crime Act, which targets dangerous offenders, impaired drivers, adult sexual predators and those who commit gun crimes.

Today, an important bill will be introduced in the Senate.

The sex offender legislation, which is designed to protect victims, will better protect our children.

Our government believes that Quebecers and Canadians have the right to feel safe in their communities.

In order for the police to have the necessary tools to do their job properly, offenders who commit heinous sex crimes have to be properly identified. Quebecers and Canadians can count on our government when it comes to protecting our children.

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*[English]***ST. PATRICK'S DAY**

**Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all Canadians of Irish descent and as chair of the Canada-Ireland parliamentary group, I want to wish every Canadian a happy St. Patrick's Day.

The patron saint of Ireland used the three-leafed shamrock to describe the Blessed Holy Trinity to the Irish peasantry and became an icon to a fiercely proud people.

We remember today the thousands of Irish who left Erin's shores due to economic decline, democratic oppression and human degradation to cross the North Atlantic and settle nearly every corner of this great country. These Irish immigrants were instrumental in creating and building a nation through their hard work and perseverance. Their morals, values and principles gained them acceptance eventually, as they continued to contribute to national achievements and reach their own dreams and goals.

Because they came in such large numbers in the decades before Confederation, Canada became a reality in 1867. Active in all aspects of Canadian social, economic and political life, we owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude on St. Patrick's Day.

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**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Conservative Party has accomplished a great deal when it comes to cracking down on crime and better protecting the most vulnerable in our society. This includes the Tackling Violent Crime Act, which targets dangerous offenders, impaired drivers, adult sexual predators and those who commit serious gun crimes.

Today, I am proud to note that we are tabling an important piece of legislation in the Senate. The protecting victims from sex offenders bill will further protect our children.

Our party believes that Canadians have the right to feel safe in their communities. Offenders who commit heinous sex crimes need to be properly identified so that police have the tools to do their job.

We call on the Liberal senators to listen to Canadians and cooperate with our efforts to protect victims and get tough on crime.

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**MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH**

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago the government presented a budget in which it claimed that maternal and child health worldwide would be a priority of Canada's G8 and G20 summit year.

However, as the government proposes to lead a global campaign to improve the health of women and children overseas, federal cash for troubled pregnancies and newborns in Canada remains in short supply.

Funding for the Canada prenatal nutrition program that serves poor, isolated and vulnerable women, many of whom are battling substance abuse, and that has resulted in fewer premature births, better birth weights and generally healthier babies, all at significant savings for health care budgets, has barely budged in a decade.

The budget for the program was \$25 million in 1999, and by 2009 it increased by just \$2.2 million. After a decade of inflation, that means an effective cut of \$4 million. It certainly does not reflect the success of the program, nor does it account for population growth.

Will the government lead by example and make maternal and child health a priority in this country too?

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**LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA**

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, many people across the country are enjoying March break this week, but one topic the Liberal leader is not taking a break from is his constant talk of multi-billion dollar reckless spending promises. The list grows daily: billions for this, billions for that.

Is there anything that is not a spending priority for the Liberal leader? If it costs a lot of money, it always seems to make the list.

These promises all share one thing in common: The Liberals never want to talk about the price tag that is attached to them. There are countless examples. Grandiose environmental promises, no price tag; more Liberal social engineering programs, no price tag; and megaproject after megaproject, and again, no price tag.

*Oral Questions*

Canadians know that unaffordable spending will hurt our economy and lead to only one thing: higher taxes. Yes, Canadians know full well that when Liberals talk about spending more, this will always lead to their being taxed more.

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● (1415)

[Translation]

**MICHEL LÉVEILLÉ**

**Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this is Red Cross month, a time when we celebrate the oldest international humanitarian aid organization. Therefore, I would like to point out the exceptional work of an individual in my riding, Michel Léveillé, general manager of the Quebec Division of the Canadian Red Cross.

Mr. Léveillé, who has been general manager since July 14, 2008, is one of the senior people in charge of fundraising in Quebec for victims of the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12.

A communications, public relations and strategic issues management specialist for more than 20 years, Michel Léveillé was the director of communications and finance for the Quebec Division of the Red Cross before being appointed general manager.

The Red Cross was able to act quickly after the earthquake hit Haiti and has worked tirelessly to support search and rescue operations. This is because of people like Michel Léveillé, who have dedicated their talents and their energy to the Red Cross.

Kudos, Michel Léveillé.

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[English]

**GLOBAL BRAIN AWARENESS WEEK**

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the brain is the most vital organ in the human body. It makes our heart pump and our lungs breathe. It is the physical structure that makes us human and allows us to experience art, love, poetry and science. If the brain does not work properly, every aspect of life may be compromised.

One in three, or 10 million Canadians, will be affected by a neurological or psychiatric disorder or injury at some point in their lives. A common thread links many brain conditions, such as ALS, MS and dementia, namely, there are no cures and no effective treatments that consistently slow or stop their course.

Brain disorders and injuries will become the leading cause of death and disability in Canada within the next 20 years.

This is Global Brain Awareness Week and we must commit to a national brain strategy for Canada, as we did, with a focus on key pillars such as awareness and education, prevention, treatment and support, caregiver support, research and income security.

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week our government is continuing to implement year two of our economic action plan.

We are continuing to protect today's jobs and to create the jobs of tomorrow, and the Liberal leader cannot stand it.

Last year he bet against the Canadian economy so he could force an unwanted and unnecessary election. Now that the economy is in recovery, he cannot be bothered with our jobs and growth budget. That is why he has set out on his tax and spend road show.

What the Liberal leader really wants to talk about are huge spending promises and higher taxes. However, Canadians know that higher taxes kill jobs, and a March break lecture will not change that.

When the Liberal leader chooses his tax and spend road show over the work of this House, he proves what we have been saying all along, that the Liberal leader is not in it for Canadians, he is just in it for himself.

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**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**TEN PERCENTERS**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday this House voted to end the practice of allowing members to send free propaganda outside their ridings. We voted to save taxpayers \$20 million by eliminating this partisan junk mail.

If the government is serious about reducing waste, it will surely leap at this opportunity to save \$20 million.

My question is for the Prime Minister. The Liberals have already stopped their participation in this program. When will the government also comply with the will of the House of Commons?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to congratulate the hon. member on his promotion through what appears to be the rapidly dwindling leadership ranks.

Mr. Speaker, as you would know, this matter is under the Board of Internal Economy which you chair. I will just say this, having viewed a few of these Liberal ten percenters, I think the cancellation of the program was a good idea.

\* \* \*

● (1420)

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, so I take it that the Prime Minister will indeed comply with the will of the House and save \$20 million. I hope that is true.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

I now have a question for the Prime Minister, from one economist to another.

As an economist, he surely knows that employment insurance premiums are a tax. As Prime Minister, he surely knows that his government will increase this tax four years in a row. Is it not obvious that he is increasing taxes for Canadians?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that employment insurance premiums are determined by an independent commission and based on the costs incurred by the program.

This party, the Liberal Party, wants to make astronomical increases to the costs of the program by suggesting a 45-day work year. That will increase the program costs. That is why this government is opposed to these changes to the employment insurance program.

[English]

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we all know that this so-called arm's-length organization is totally under the control of the Prime Minister. If those taxes go up, it is under his orders.

This tax hike will cost a two-earner family \$1,200 and will cost 200,000 jobs in this fragile economy. If there is one person from whom Canadians deserve the unvarnished truth, that person must surely be the Prime Minister.

I ask him the very simple question: Will he simply admit what is evident to all in this House, that he is raising the payroll taxes of Canadians?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, there are some programs of the government that are paid through distinct charges that are set to correspond with the cost of the program. One of those is employment insurance.

Those premiums are determined by an independent commission in line with the cost of the program. That is why on this side of the House we oppose the \$4 billion a year idea of the Liberal Party to create a 45-day work year subsidized by the employment insurance program. Those are the kinds of costs and those are the kinds of increases we do not want to see in employment insurance.

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[Translation]

**THE BUDGET**

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives falsely promised that their 2010 budget would not increase taxes.

The Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister to increase financial incentives for neurological research and to help young people find jobs. But the government did the opposite.

Why did the minister break this promise? Why did his government make life more difficult for researchers and young Canadians?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have done the

opposite. We have invested several millions of dollars to help young people.

This summer, young people will be able to take advantage of the Canada summer jobs program. There is also an internship program for students. We have improved these programs to help young people who have a hard time finding jobs because of the global recession.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Isabelle Thiffault, from McGill University, received two post-doctoral scholarships. Her research could open the door to new treatments for neurological problems.

Because of the 2010 budget, which limits eligibility for education tax credits, Isabelle will see her taxes increase by \$4,000.

Will the Minister of Finance explain to Isabelle why he increased her taxes by \$4,000?

• (1425)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is ignoring the facts. We have done a lot for students: there are many more scholarships and funding opportunities available.

We have invested in universities and colleges to help them accept students. We have also modified the repayment system to make it easier for students to study.

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**TAX HARMONIZATION**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when asked about tax harmonization yesterday, the Prime Minister said, "We will continue to work to reach an agreement similar to those reached with other provinces". But the agreement reached between the federal government and provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia clearly states that the federal government collects the GST, not the provinces.

Can the Prime Minister tell us if he agrees with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance who, in April 2009, said that an agreement with Quebec about the GST would mean that the federal government would manage this tax?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I answered this question yesterday. The Parliament of Canada passed legislation on harmonizing the GST with provincial sales taxes. It is a provincial decision. We have signed agreements in this regard, agreements that create mutual obligations between the federal and provincial governments. We want agreements that respect our obligations towards the other provinces.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Prime Minister to give us a clear answer. One of the two governments will have to manage this money. Under the 1992 agreement, Quebec manages it. In all of the other agreements between the federal government and other provinces, Ottawa manages it.

I simply want an answer. Is this why negotiations have stalled? Is the current government questioning the 1992 agreement? Is it saying that if Quebec wants to receive that \$2.2 million, then Ottawa must be allowed to manage the money?

*Oral Questions*

Will Quebec be allowed to continue managing this money, yes or no? The question could not be any clearer.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec signed a completely different agreement. We have respected that agreement. It was not an agreement about harmonizing the provincial tax with the GST. This agreement states that Quebec will collect the GST on behalf of the federal government. We are respecting this agreement.

If Quebec would like another type of agreement, we are open to that. We are currently negotiating in good faith with the province.

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**ENVIRONMENT CANADA**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government wants to control scientists by imposing its right-wing ideological agenda on them. Not content with muzzling them, now the government would like them to consider whether their publications are in line with government policies and priorities. It is outrageous. The minister refuses to see that this approach is a deliberate attempt at censorship.

When scientists are prohibited from answering journalists directly, are required to provide their answers in advance and are subject to partisan publication standards, if that is not censorship, then I wonder what is.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member knows that his allegations are false. He also knows that Environment Canada has the same media relations policy as every other department across the government.

Climate change science is valuable and important work that this government supports. We will continue to support good science.

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[*Translation*]

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since it wants to control everything and impose a regressive program, when can we expect the government to give the Minister of State for Science and Technology the green light to provide scientists with a little creationism for dummies guide that could be called "Dinosaurs in power"?

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, we support good science and science research.

The member may not be aware, but Canada is part of the Copenhagen accord. We have worked with our international partners and with our provinces. We have moved on now with a new global agreement. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Environment, we are making Canada proud. We are acting. Why will that member not support good environmental legislation?

● (1430)

[*Translation*]

**PROROGATION OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated against the Prime Minister's prorogation of their House of Commons.

Today we are debating an NDP motion to put limits on the power to prorogue.

Considering the wave of discontent over his unilateral decision, is the Prime Minister prepared to support our proposal to limit prorogation to seven days unless a vote in the House of Commons decides otherwise?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to change executive powers in the Canadian Constitution, a constitutional amendment is required. However, if the leader of the Bloc—excuse me, I meant to say the leader of the New Democratic Party, but sometimes it amounts to the same thing—wants to form his coalition with the Bloc and the Liberal Party instead of changing the Constitution, he should seek a mandate from the people of Canada.

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**INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the Conservatives want to exclude contraception from their plan to improve maternal health throughout the world because they believe that contraception does not save lives. That is unbelievable.

Can the Prime Minister explain why this very important aspect of prevention is excluded from this otherwise commendable initiative to improve maternal health in less fortunate countries?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear since our great announcement, accepted by all countries in the G8. This initiative is about saving the lives of mothers and children. As we know, 500,000 women die in pregnancy and childbirth every year and an estimated 75% of maternal deaths occur within 48 hours after delivery. This hard fact is something we can do something about, and that is what we intend to do, at the G8, along with our colleagues.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, more than half a million women and girls die from pregnancy-related causes every year, and more than 15 million to 20 million have maternal morbidity. And the foreign affairs minister is going around saying that contraception does not save lives. How can a program aimed at reducing maternal mortality not allow for any contraception as a part of the program?

I ask the Prime Minister, is Canada's signature initiative at the G8 going to be the no condoms for Africa strategy?



*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just said, 75% of mothers are dying within 48 hours after delivery. In fact, 17% of those maternal deaths happen during childbirth and 71% happen in the postpartum period. Out of the 75%, 45% of those deaths happen within 24 hours of giving birth.

Far too many lives are being sacrificed when we can do something about it. This is the time we should act.

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[Translation]

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Conservative ministers falsely maintained, on a number of occasions, that they were not interested in building prisons in Afghanistan. We have just learned that, in February 2009, they were privately telling Afghan representatives the exact opposite.

Why did the government say one thing to Canadians and quite another, in private, to the Afghan authorities?

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the proposal to build a Kabul-based NDS detention centre in 2007 was a U.K.-led initiative, which ultimately did not come to pass. Under the new transfer agreement, the Government of Afghanistan has agreed to hold detainees in a limited number of Afghan facilities: first, in the NDS facility, as well as in the Sarposa prison, which is run by the Afghan minister of justice.

●(1435)

[Translation]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, since no prisons were built, the Conservatives agreed to give Afghan authorities a heads-up before inspecting their prisons. Recently, the U.S. State Department reported that torture was commonplace in these same prisons.

Why does the government give advance notice to those responsible for Afghan prisons, thus giving them time to hide evidence of torture?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, had my honourable colleague made just the slightest effort to read the agreement, he would have quickly discovered that we do not give advance notice. That is exactly what was negotiated. More than 210 inspections have been carried out without advance notice. One took place recently, just 10 days ago. Not only did we negotiate that agreement, but we have also enhanced it.

[English]

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has come to light that the government made a secret deal with the British and Dutch officials to build a new Afghan prison. Despite its written promise over a year ago to Afghan officials, there is nothing to show. The government must have known about the risk of torture when it agreed with our NATO allies to build a new prison.

Instead of addressing our international obligations, our government is now apologizing for this empty promise. What exactly did the government know and why is this letter surfacing now, if the government has nothing to hide?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, we have never been briefed on that. I can confirm that the 2007 transfer agreement is in full force and in effect. As I reminded his colleague, the 2007 agreement that this government negotiated grants us full and unrestricted access to detention facilities where detainees are transferred by Canadian Forces. To date, there have been over 210 visits made by Canadian officials to these facilities.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on numerous occasions in public and in the House, the Conservative ministers have repeatedly said that Canada has no interest in building prisons in Afghanistan. Yet this letter from the general director of the NDS proves otherwise. The government must have known that torture is a serious issue in Afghan prisons.

The government was telling Canadians one thing while telling Afghan officials the complete opposite. Canadians do not know what to believe from a government that keeps hiding the truth and gets caught hiding the truth. Why does it not stop the charade and call a public inquiry?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me remind the colleague here and my colleagues in the House that Canada is not in the business of building or running Afghan prisons. Let us be clear on that. We are in Afghanistan to help the Afghan government build its independent capacity to manage its own affairs.

One of Canada's six priorities is helping the Afghan government promote law and order, which includes its corrections systems. Canada has mentored Afghan prison staff and invested \$5.5 million to improve that infrastructure.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY**

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has signed international treaties meant to protect child soldiers. But the Conservative government is disregarding those treaties by claiming that Omar Khadr is not a child soldier. Yet the Minister of Foreign Affairs maintains that Rights & Democracy “—has to respect the obligations under the international treaties to which the Government of Canada has adhered” and the resulting policies.

What should Rights & Democracy do in Omar Khadr's case? Condemn the government's failure to respect international commitments or defend its twisted interpretation?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the part about Rights & Democracy. I invite my colleague to carefully read the legislation governing Rights & Democracy, particularly subsection 13(3).

*Oral Questions*

●(1440)

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's obsession with controlling everything knows no bounds. By appointing Gérard Latulippe and infiltrating Rights & Democracy, the government manipulated the situation in order to subjugate this organization, which is supposed to be independent of any government.

Why will the government not admit that it took control of Rights & Democracy and that it now expects that organization to sing the praises of the Conservative government?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to answer these questions when I appeared before the parliamentary committee. On October 29, 2009, the people of Rights & Democracy had the opportunity to appear before the committee, which was satisfied with the responses it heard.

Yesterday, I invited my colleagues to show some openness and invite people from Rights & Democracy, who are willing to meet with them to discuss the issues that concern and interest them.

\* \* \*

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the new Conservative member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—

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

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

**Mr. Claude Guimond:** Mr. Speaker, the new Conservative member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup confirmed on a local radio station that the transitional employment insurance measures in eastern Quebec would not be extended.

He bragged about being generous, but now he is telling unemployed workers to find a third part-time job. He promised to stand up to the Prime Minister, and now he will not even dare ask that the transitional measures be extended.

How can the Conservative government claim to be helping the unemployed, when it is adding more weeks without income?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are currently examining the issue of transitional measures. We know that some regions in Quebec are experiencing more difficult employment insurance conditions and could benefit from some additional weeks.

We are examining the situation. The decision has not yet been made. But I remind members that this measure has been extended five times since 2000. Let the government examine it.

**Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, instead of proposing solutions to help the unemployed, the Prime Minister's token Quebecker in Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup went after seasonal workers by criticizing the fact that these workers regularly collect employment insurance at the expense of people who work 12 months a year.

Since the problem that was identified in 2000 is still an issue, why eliminate the transitional measures for workers in eastern Quebec?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in recent months, we implemented six or seven different measures to support regions and workers while our country was in the midst of a recession. We implemented at least six or seven measures to help them. Each time, the Bloc voted against those measures.

The government has implemented measures to support the economy, and they have worked: 21,000 new jobs were created in February, and the unemployment rate in Canada decreased from 8.3% to 8.2%. We are heading in the right direction.

\* \* \*

[English]

**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has confirmed what we have feared all along: the government's commitment to maternal health ends when it comes to reproductive health. Unbelievably, the minister suggested that birth control has nothing to do with saving lives. Perhaps the minister is ignorant of the fact that according to the United Nations population fund, lack of adequate contraceptive services is responsible for 1.5 million deaths in developing countries every year.

Why does the government not care about saving the lives of these women and these children?

●(1445)

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we should be clear that this government does care about women and does care about the health of women. We have chosen to focus the world's lens on saving the lives of mothers and children. We know what we can do by providing clean water, vaccinations and better nutrition. As well the most effective way is the training of health care workers and improving access for those women. That is what we are going to do.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is wilfully ignoring the research which shows that over 215 million women who would like to have access to contraception cannot get it. Providing access to contraception to those who want it would avert over one-third of the maternal deaths in the developing world.

Has the minister informed our G8 partners that Canada's so-called signature priority is doomed for failure because Conservative Party ideology does not think that birth control has anything to do with saving lives of women and their children?

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SAFETY****Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I have talked to my colleagues in all the G8 countries and they have applauded the initiative that we are putting forward. Every one of these enlightened countries, the donor countries which are making a difference in developing countries, knows that there are actions we can take that will actually make a significant difference in the number of mothers who are dying in childbirth and in their postpartum terms. We are also addressing the lives of those children under the age of—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

\* \* \*

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the ineffectiveness of the Minister of State for the Status of Women is astounding. In 2008 she told us she was developing an action plan for Canadian women. Last May she said the plan would be completed soon. We have been waiting; we have been watching. Now we learn that her three identified priorities, or pillars as she calls them, are her action plan.

Those are just empty words. Where is her real action plan?

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. We completely restructured Status of Women Canada. We introduced three pillars of focus: economic security, ending violence against women, and women in leadership and democracy.

We continue to engage with Canadian women in grassroots organizations across the country to develop partnerships with the newly created partnership fund in line with and in support of our three pillars. In addition, we did introduce Canada's economic action plan. Within it are a number of benefits for Canadian women, including the changes to EI benefits for self-employed of which the majority are women. Would the member not agree that is significant?

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I invite the minister to read the Liberal pink book. It has a real action plan for all Canadian women developed after a consultation process. It is not three pillars unilaterally thought up over lunch.

The Minister of State for the Status of Women deflects questions on child care, pay equity, the court challenges program, maternal health, and housing. Is she responsible really for anything, or is her job to sit in the screen shot during question period?

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I can say to the member is that we on this side of the House, we Conservative women, were not relegated to the pink back room with a pink pad of paper and asked to write down for the third time a list of pink broken promises made by the previous Liberal government.

What we have done is we have increased the availability of those grassroots organizations across the country which are able to deliver to the most vulnerable women in Canadian society.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that this Conservative government is committed to fighting crime and protecting Canadians so that our communities are safe places for people to live and to raise their families.

Since coming to office, our government has accomplished a great deal when it comes to cracking down on crime and better protecting Canadians. Thankfully, the Liberal senators are no longer able to abuse their majority in the Senate to delay and obstruct important law and order bills.

Could the Minister of Public Safety update this House on another important measure that this government has taken to further protect Canadians?

● (1450)

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his support and hard work on this important file.

I am very pleased to announce that today in the Senate, we have introduced a bill regarding protecting victims from sex offenders. This bill will strengthen the national sex offender registry and the national DNA data bank. It also includes important measures to ensure that sex offenders are properly identified so that police have the tools to do their job.

Our Conservative government has listened to the concerns raised by law enforcement and victims' groups, and we have taken action. When last in the House, the opposition decided to support this bill. We are calling on Liberals in the Senate to do the same.

**The Speaker:** Order. I know it is Wednesday, but the Chair is having difficulty hearing the questions and answers. I encourage hon. members to show some restraint, despite their enthusiasm for helping one another with questions and answers.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina now has the floor.

\* \* \*

**CHILD CARE**

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last night on YouTube, the Prime Minister was reminded that his failed Conservative child care policy is “an insult to any family that actually relies on it”.

The government's failure is so noticeable that international organizations such as the OECD and UNICEF rank Canada dead last in the provision of early learning and child care.

When will the government stop insulting working parents with bogus talking points and actually create new child care services for families?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should keep up to date. That report was actually written not about this government, but the study period ended in 2005 under the previous government.

*Oral Questions*

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what our government has done. We have created and introduced the universal child care benefit. It offers \$100 a month for each child under the age of six, so that parents can get their choice in child care. On top of that, we delivered \$250 million to the provinces to help them create spaces, and they have announced over 85,000 of those so far.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, actually there is a new OECD report.

The fact is that parents have not been given any choice because there were no new child care spaces in this budget, not one.

Every dollar invested in child care puts \$2.30 back into the economy. That is over 10 times more than the Conservatives' tax breaks to their buddies in the big oil companies.

No more talking points. Does the minister have the courage to admit her family policies are failing hard-working families and their children?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in fact it is not the federal government's responsibility to create child care spaces. We are not allowed to do that. What we have done is we have provided \$250 million a year to the provinces and territories, and they have announced over 85,000 new spaces in the last couple of years.

The other thing we have done is with our universal child care benefit and that alone has lifted 22,000 families, including some 57,000 children, above the poverty line.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, a Quebec woman suffering from cancer is trying to bring her half-sister from Haiti to Canada.

The immigration minister turned down her visa application twice because the woman does not own any real property. As a result of the earthquake, the only real property she has to offer is a block of cement.

According to the Conservative member for Beauport—Limoilou, the matter is in the hands of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Now that the minister is able to speak publicly about this case and is involved in the matter, will he take action?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, although not exactly new to this place, the member may not know that public servants, not the minister, make decisions about visa applications. They make more than 800,000 such decisions every year.

I am confident that our public servants and our visa officers do a good job. In this case, it was not at all clear whether or not the applicant intended to work in Canada, and the form was not filled out properly.

● (1455)

**HAITI**

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on March 31, in New York, the UN will hold a major conference about reconstruction in Haiti. A couple of weeks ago, Quebec's forestry industry proposed to the Prime Minister that 2,000 wood houses be built for Haiti. A number of partners have already offered their support.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs plan to promote this proposal while at the meeting in New York?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased about the initiatives undertaken to help Haiti. I am very pleased about the initiatives that the Government of Canada and Canadians have created to help Haitians.

Another meeting will take place at the end of the month in New York to help us align the needs identified by the Haitian government and other institutions with the real needs of the people. We will also find out more about financing.

My colleague, the Minister of—

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

\* \* \*

**ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY**

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with budget 2010, the Conservative government has shown that it hopes to eliminate economic development agencies, including ACOA.

Under the previous Liberal government, two programs were created: an innovation fund and a communities fund.

Last year, \$113 million was available for those two separate programs. Today it was announced that only \$19 million would be available.

Now that the Conservatives have announced a \$94 million funding cut for this year, can the minister explain to us why he has abandoned the people of Atlantic Canada?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure why the member would think that we have let down any part of this country. We do support all regions of this country.

We put in place year two of Canada's economic action plan, which reaches across all parts of this country equally and equitably. We had a little trouble getting it passed through this House but we managed. Now that it has passed, let us support it and make sure that all Canadians benefit from it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question was for the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

The two ACOA programs were for a five-year period ending March 31, 2010, with a total investment of over \$475 million. Now those funds have run out, and the Conservatives are offering a mere \$19 million a year to replace them.

The Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency should do as his colleague, the Minister of Industry, did: apologize for the cuts and restore the programs with 2009-level funding.

When will the minister take action for the people of Atlantic Canada?

[English]

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite actually read the budget, he would realize it is a \$19 million a year ongoing budget, a base budget. It is an improvement over what was there before and certainly not part of the five year programming.

Also, there is \$11 million per year for the community futures program, another addition to the ACOA funding.

I am very proud to represent ACOA. Believe me, there are no cuts in our budgets.

\* \* \*

#### AFGHANISTAN

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have yet another revelation today that Afghan officials asked the government to build a prison where detainees could be held without the risk of torture. In response, the government made repeated false promises to the Afghans that a prison was coming while the government told this House that a new prison was a bad idea.

By failing to work with our NATO allies to ensure proper treatment of detainees, the government has ignored our legal obligation to protect human rights and has tainted Canada's international reputation.

Will the Prime Minister finally call a public inquiry?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about events that happened a number of years ago. It is interesting to note that in fact the issue around NATO prisons circulated years ago, but in November 2007 General Ray Henault, a Canadian, then the chair of NATO's military committee, publicly ruled out the creation of NATO prisons.

We are there not to build prisons for Afghans; we are there to help them build capacity to do these things for themselves. We will continue to do so.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated, we have invested in Afghan prisons. We continue to monitor prisoners transferred by our forces. We will continue to work to build that capacity.

• (1500)

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, day after day there are new stories about the government's mishandling of the transfer of Afghan detainees.

Included in today's revelations was the fact that last year when the National Directorate of Security complained about detainee inspec-

#### Oral Questions

tions creating problems, the Conservative government agreed to limit them to once a month at the most and to give plenty of advance notice. The government has abandoned our legal obligation to uphold human rights, this time to appease the dreaded NDS.

How many more of these stories need to be published before we get a public inquiry?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would take the time to read the new transfer agreement, he would see that there have been over 210 visits by Canadian officials to Afghan detention facilities since the transfer agreement was signed.

The most recent unannounced visit by Canadian officials to Afghan detention facilities occurred within the last 10 days. These occur, have occurred and continue to occur on a regular basis. This is the nature of the transfer agreement that we put in place.

\* \* \*

#### TAXATION

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, opposition members have never met a tax they did not like. Given the chance, they would raise the GST and introduce a job-killing carbon tax.

Yesterday the NDP introduced a bill to tax MP3s and iPods. Both the Bloc and the Liberals support their coalition partners on this tax on Canadian consumers.

Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House our government's position regarding this new tax on Canadians?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois have proposed legislation that would impose a massive new tax on Canadians.

The last time an iPod tax was put forward it was up to \$75 per iPod, a massive tax on consumers. What is worse is the way the legislation is written. This new tax would apply to iPods, MP3 players, PVRs, DVRs, iPhones, cellphones, BlackBerrys, anything with a hard drive.

The Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP think this is what consumers need, a massive new tax. This Conservative government will fight this new iPhone tax every step of the way.

*Routine Proceedings***TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, despite the Minister of Industry's flip-flop about funding community access programs, all he has done is rob Peter to pay Paul.

He claims the funding will now come from rural broadband programs, which will then leave that program short of the promised funding. Also, the minister has only said that the funding will continue this year. He has said nothing about 2011 and beyond.

Could the minister promise rural Canadians that they will get all the funding needed for broadband and CAP sites for this year, next year and beyond?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I said inside and outside this place was that this program had been funded and was funded in the 2010 budget. That is the issue of the day.

There has been a change in the funding envelope, but the people are not concerned about that. They are concerned about ensuring that rural Canadians and remote Canadians have access to the Internet.

When it comes to the rural broadband program, this government is acting. After 13 years of neglect from the other side, we are actually funding access for broadband for rural and remote Canadians, and we are proud of that. It is good for Canada.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, during this international week of la Francophonie, the federal government, as an employer, has nothing to celebrate. The percentage of unilingual officials hired in bilingual positions continues to increase, going from 14% in 2005 to 19% last year. Francophones working in the public service therefore cannot work in French since unilingual managers continue to be hired.

Do these data not confirm that we were right to mistrust this government's ideological hostility toward francophones?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government supports the guidelines, the laws and the rights of people across the country when it comes to the official languages, and it will continue to do so.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

• (1505)

[*English*]

**SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 50(3) I would like to designate tomorrow as the second day for the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a report entitled "Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan—Quarterly Report to Parliament for the Period of October 1 to December 31, 2009".

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**INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have three reports from interparliamentary delegations to present today.

First, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation to the subcommittee of Transatlantic Defense and Security Cooperation, held in Ottawa, Kingston, Trenton and Toronto, from September 7 to 11, 2009.

Second, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the visit to New York and New Orleans of the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security, held in New York, New Orleans, United States of America, from October 1 to 4, 2009.

Finally, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the visit to Helsinki of the Political Committee Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations, held in Helsinki, Finland, from September 21 to 24, 2009.

**Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following three reports of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group respecting its participation in: first, the Council of State Governments annual conference, held in La Quinta, California, from November 12 to 15, 2009; second, the Council of State Governments-WEST 62nd annual meeting, held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, from October 5 to 8, 2009; and third, the 33rd conference of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, NEG/ECP, held in Saint John, New Brunswick, from September 14 to 15, 2009.

## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

### JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, March 3, your committee has considered Bill C-464, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (justification for detention in custody), and agreed on Tuesday, March 16, to report it with amendment.

● (1510)

### CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to the amendments to the Copyright Act.

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## PETITIONS

### EGYPT

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I have the pleasure to table a petition signed by people in my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville and in other parts of the greater Toronto area who are concerned about the ongoing discrimination against Egypt's Christian citizens. They seek systematic change in justice and equality within Egypt.

Those who have attached their names wish to call our attention to the evening of January 6, the Orthodox Christmas celebration in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, which ended in violence, with six murdered and fifteen injured. This is only the most recent example of religiously-motivated attacks. Sadly, this type of violence and persecution has become a common occurrence in Egypt over the last 30 years. Those who are victims feel unheard by their government, which they feel fails to dissuade this violence and take the necessary steps that are needed to be taken to reach sustainable change.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to demand justice and equality within Egypt. They also call upon the government to intervene and pressure the Egyptian government to ensure tolerance, freedom and safety for its Christian population.

### CANADA POST CORPORATION

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I would like to present a petition signed by 147 residents of the historic town of Stirling, in southern Alberta, in my riding. The petitioners are concerned about rural post office service.

They call upon the Government of Canada to maintain the moratorium on post office closures and withdraw the legislation to legalize remailers. They also call upon the Government of Canada to instruct Canada Post to maintain, expand and improve postal services.

### ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by Canadians from right across Canada.

## Routine Proceedings

The petitioners ask the Government of Canada to leave a true legacy of action to residential school survivors and support the process of healing, through an extension of funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, of which there is one outlet in Thunder Bay, run by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

### FISHING INDUSTRY

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of a number of people in my riding involved in the fishing industry, who are having great difficulty, not only with the price they receive at the wharf but the catches in certain areas that have declined.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to direct the Government of Canada to introduce a publicly-funded fisheries rationalization or licence retirement program, along with an older worker retirement and retraining program for fishers and fish plant workers.

[*Translation*]

### ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting petitions that have been signed by numerous Canadians who oppose the cut in funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Yes, the government has formally apologized to aboriginals and their families who were victims of aboriginal residential schools, but it seems as though the government believes that simple statements are all that is needed to make up for past wrongs.

[*English*]

The actions of the current government do not speak true to commitment or reconciliation for first nation people.

The petitioners call for an extension of funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, for the government to continue to encourage and support the aboriginal people by making the healing process sustainable by addressing the physical and sexual abuse that has plagued those who have gone through the residential school system. It also points out the trauma caused to the survivors of the residential school system, which has caused undue hardships that have been passed on for generations. It also states that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has made great strides in reconciling these issues in its brief 10-year history, but notes that 10 years is not enough time to make up decades of grave injustice.

● (1515)

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition on behalf of Canadians in support of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This foundation has promoted reconciliation and healing for aboriginal survivors in the aftermath of the Indian residential school system.

Funding for that foundation is set to expire at the end of March, meaning that 139 key projects will be closing across Canada. These projects include things such as Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Gull Bay First Nation, from Lake Superior to Hudson Bay. Cancellation of these projects is not in the spirit of the Prime Minister's apology nor the government's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

*Business of Supply*

The petitioners ask the government commit to an extension of funding.

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**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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**MOTIONS FOR PAPERS**

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*English*]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY****OPPOSITION MOTION—PROROGATION**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister shall not advise the Governor General to prorogue any session of any Parliament for longer than seven calendar days without a specific resolution of this House of Commons to support such a prorogation.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Hamilton Centre.

The government, after promising Canadians a new day in Ottawa, has been less accountable to Parliament than any other in memory. It has ignored motions of Parliament, restricted access to information like never before, and even denied legal parliamentary orders from the House to share documents with members of Parliament that are important to the public interest. Enough is enough.

[*Translation*]

We must clearly re-establish the basic principles of our democratic system. The principal of ministerial accountability is critical. This means that the Prime Minister must be accountable to Parliament. And being accountable starts with ensuring that the Prime Minister cannot abuse his powers: first and foremost, the power to lock the doors of Parliament and halt the work of those who were elected by the people to represent them and speak for them.

That is the purpose of our motion.

[*English*]

In our democracy the people are in charge. Our Prime Minister appears to have forgotten about that. Their elected Parliament

answers to Canadians and the Prime Minister answers to Parliament. It is not the other way around.

Two months ago, thousands of Canadians gathered on the lawn just outside of this place to condemn the latest prorogation. At that rally, we heard from Arlene Plante. She had worked for Nortel for many years. She stands to lose most of her long-term disability income. She said she was going to be destitute, even as these Nortel bosses were giving themselves huge bonuses. We could have done something about that right here in the House of Commons, except the doors were locked by our Prime Minister.

Proroguing Parliament meant that members could not even consider our legislation to protect workers like Arlene who were losing so much in these employer bankruptcies.

Proroguing Parliament meant that we could not hold the government accountable to hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were exhausting their EI benefits and were falling into deep poverty and the welfare trap. We could not hold it accountable to the young people all across Canada who wanted to see Canada play a real leadership role on climate change. They were disappointed with the actions, or non-actions, of our government.

We must ensure that this kind of thing simply cannot happen again. That is what our motion ensures.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

Are there times when the power of prorogation can be used appropriately? Of course.

Traditionally, a government that has come to the end of its legislative agenda can use prorogation to set a new agenda. What about the two prorogations requested by and granted to the Prime Minister in the space of one year? Do they stand up to scrutiny? Were they in line with the principles of our democratic system? Most certainly not. Quite the opposite.

[*English*]

These last two prorogations were an abuse of power by the Prime Minister of Canada. These last two prorogations were pursued for narrow partisan interests, specifically to avoid accountability to the representatives who had been elected by a majority of Canadians. That is wrong.

Fifteen months ago, the government faced imminent defeat for failing to respond to the economic crisis, so it prorogued Parliament. Three months ago, the government faced tough questions over a cover-up of possible government involvement in rendering prisoners to torture.

Both prorogations had nothing to do with exhausting the legislative agenda. In fact, dozens of bills remained on the docket that members of Parliament were working on very hard.

Both prorogations had everything to do with the Prime Minister running from his accountability to this place.

Both defied the will of the elected members and denied members the opportunity to express that will in a vote, confidence or otherwise.



Kings have been inclined, in past centuries, to exercise such absolute power, to abuse power in exactly that way, and that is precisely why elected legislatures have insisted upon their rights to hold prime ministers, their cabinets and their executives to account. It is fundamental to our democratic system.

Our Prime Minister is not a king and it is time he understood that. It would appear that he does not get it. He has abused his powers and it must not happen again. That is what our motion ensures.

[*Translation*]

Our motion states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister shall not advise the Governor General to prorogue any session of any Parliament for longer than seven calendar days without a specific resolution of this House of Commons to support such a prorogation.

This is a concrete, reasonable and constructive proposal. We believe that this proposal takes into consideration the opinions of the members of the three opposition parties. I would like to thank the other two parties for their help. I look forward to hearing their contributions to this debate.

Our motion would allow the Prime Minister to recalibrate the legislative agenda, but it would also prevent him from using this power to shirk his responsibilities to the people's elected representatives.

It is a concrete, constructive and reasonable proposal that reflects what hundreds of thousands of protesters called for a few weeks ago, which is that Parliament's doors remain open.

[*English*]

Here is what Mark Walters of Queen's law faculty argues about the convention of prorogation:

—the links between the prime minister, the supremacy of the House of Commons, and in turn the sovereignty of the people, can't be forgotten...There is good reason to think that a prime minister who uses the convention to undermine rather than uphold the supremacy of elected members of Parliament has violated the convention.

The Prime Minister has said as much himself when he was in opposition. He said that any prime minister had the moral obligation to respect the will of the majority in the House of Commons. Either he did not mean it then or he has completely forgotten about it now, or having power has so influenced his perception that he has decided to abandon any sense of responsibility to the democratic process. I fear that it is the latter and that is why we have to bring forward such a motion.

Passing today's motion will inform governors general that the people, through this House, now intend to express their will on significant prorogations through a clear vote.

Passing today's motion will honour the call of hundreds of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast who gathered in person or online, at rallies and in our neighbourhoods, and who continue to write to us every week.

Passing today's motion will make Parliament work for the people.

• (1525)

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be addressing this motion

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shortly, so I will not belabour many of the points that I will be raising at that time.

I would ask the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party one very simple question. He knows full well that prorogation is used in every legislature across the land. Although thankfully, and I mean that very sincerely, we have never been faced with a New Democratic government at the federal level, there have been a number of NDP governments at the provincial level across Canada at different times.

The documentation of this is very clear. NDP governments have used prorogation at the provincial level much more often than it has been used at the federal level. In fact, there are some legislatures where there were New Democratic governments in office that used them five or six times in one legislature, the equivalent of one Parliament, not once or twice as is often the case at the federal level.

I would ask my learned colleague from the NDP whether he is also suggesting that that somehow is an affront to democracy when his colleagues in British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario also use prorogation much more often than has been used at the federal level?

**Hon. Jack Layton:** Mr. Speaker, what we are speaking about here is the abuse of the power of prorogation.

I appreciate the government House leader's comment. However, I did note that he did not particularly suggest that there had been any abuse in the circumstances that he raised.

I submit that there is very clear abuse by his government of the power of prorogation. It was very specifically used, in both cases, to avoid accountability.

In one case, it was to avoid a motion of non-confidence that the Prime Minister had told Canadians would take place on a certain date, and then sure enough he headed off to the Governor General in order to avoid that fundamental definition of accountability.

Second and most recently, there were questions about these allegations of transfer of prisoners into situations where they could face torture. These questions were going to be coming up again when the House came back, and the Prime Minister simply did not want to face them. So he shut down Parliament.

That is wrong. It is an abuse of power. What we are proposing is something very simple. That the abuse of power be constricted, restrained, so that prorogations could not take place for more than seven days without coming to the place that is being prorogued and ask whether members want to have the locks put on their doors or whether they want to continue to do their work.

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I would agree that frequency of use of prorogation is the issue here.

I would ask the leader of the New Democratic Party, is not the real issue the reason for the prorogation, given that Parliament's purpose is to hold the government to account and given that our Constitution takes this so seriously that it even has a provision that says Parliament must be called at least once in a year?

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This is very important to the people of Canada. Would the member not agree that it is the purpose of the prorogation, and in this case the purpose of the prorogation seemed to be so conspicuously for the purpose of shutting down Parliament and avoiding that accountability?

• (1530)

**Hon. Jack Layton:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River for his question and for the very important point that he is making. In fact, the motion that we have constructed here would not affect frequency of prorogations at all. Those who are raising this particular dimension of it missed the point.

The point is precisely the one that the hon. member has just made in his intervention, and I thank him for it. The real reason that we are bringing this forward has to do entirely with accountability. It is fundamental that there be accountability between the executive and those who have been elected into our Parliament.

What our Prime Minister has been doing is escaping that fundamental accountability mechanism by putting a lock on the door. That may be something that was appropriate for kings, but it is not appropriate for prime ministers when it comes to our democratic institutions. It is time the Prime Minister understood that.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to our motion.

The most pivotal word in the motion is “abuse”. We are not talking about denying a prime minister the right to prorogue. As my leader has pointed out, we accept that it is an important part of parliamentary democracy and it is used quite often in appropriate ways. In fact, in my own home province of Ontario there recently was a prorogation. I suspect there was a plan for a little longer one earlier and it was changed but I am no longer in the Ontario legislature and I do not want to inject myself into its politics. However, my point is that it was a four day prorogation, which is consistent with what we are talking about.

I did not hear a single constituent or anyone else where I went complaining about what happened at Queen's Park. There were the usual gripes. People were mad at the government for doing this, that and the other, but there was not a peep about it being unfair, undemocratic or unacceptable.

As to other governments, I was part of one too that prorogued for an awfully long time. However, under our change here, there should at the very least have been a motion on the floor. We should not kid ourselves. A majority government will win a vote 10 times out of 10. It would really be a pro forma matter in terms of informing the public through bringing it to the House by a majority government.

More important, at a time like this, when the Prime Minister has a minority government and has considerably less than 40% of the support of Canadian people, he feels that he is entitled to wield 100% of the power 100% of the time. That is not on.

We would not have prevented the Prime Minister from exercising his prerogative under the Constitution. I would liken this to an idea the government itself has been floating around for some time in terms of the Senate. I am not saying that this plan would work but it is what the government has been looking at and talking about. Rather

than changing the Constitution, which we know would be all but impossible, the attempt was to change the rules underneath, what happens prior to the Prime Minister going to the Governor General.

Right now the Prime Minister can consult with whomever he wants or no one. He is not required to consult with anyone. The Prime Minister gives his Senate suggestions to the Governor General and asks for them to be considered in the polite fashion that we do around here. What the Prime Minister wants the Prime Minister gets.

We are talking about the same thing when it comes to prorogation. Prior to the prime minister of the day going to the Governor General, if it is going to be more than seven calendar days, we in this House who run our own House on behalf of the people, the supreme House with supreme power, would have an opportunity to deliberate. In a minority, a government might win but in a majority it would always win.

This does not affect the Constitution because the Constitution kicks in when we talk about the prime minister's prerogative to visit the Governor General and give whatever advice he or she wishes. What happens before then is pretty much silent. We are saying that we must build the silence because we have an abusive situation. If anyone doubts whether it was abusive or what the purpose was, we should remember what Mr. Tom Flanagan, a close confidant to the Prime Minister, said:

I think his problem is that the government's talking points really don't have much credibility. Everybody knows that Parliament was prorogued in order to shut down the Afghan inquiry and the trouble is that the government doesn't want to explain why that was necessary.

To be fair to Mr. Flanagan, he did go on to say that he thought it was defensible, but publicly he said that the reason for the prorogation was “to shut down the Afghan inquiry”. That is exactly the allegation that our leader has made from day one when prorogation was announced, which is that the government was hiding from Parliament and hiding from the Canadian people. Did the people respond?

• (1535)

We held a rally in Gore Park in my hometown of Hamilton and it was packed. What was really instructional was the number of young people who got this in one. They were not going to accept that this was some kind of parliamentary nicety or that they should mind their business and not worry because the Prime Minister and his folks would take care of everything. No, the young people understood that the government was running away and that it was abusing power, particularly in a minority situation.

All we are saying, which is totally non-radical, is that a prorogation should be no longer than seven calendar days. If it were, as Premier McGuinty did, a legitimate prorogation to shut down the House for a few days to provide a gap between the original session and the new one and to tee things up for a throne speech, that would make perfect sense. Nothing would encumber the prime minister of the day from continuing to do exactly that. The only difference would be that if it were to be more than seven days, it would need to be brought to the House, and, as my leader has pointed out, the House would decide whether that door gets padlocked, not one person unilaterally who does not even have a majority mandate.

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We have not heard from the other opposition parties in terms of their positions. I know they had some other thinking about flipping it around and saying that the prime minister must come to the House under certain circumstances. However, that gets awfully convoluted and detailed and sets itself up for further loopholes and abuse down the road, which is why we have gone about it this way.

We are not trying to take away the prime minister's power or to change the Constitution through the back door. All we are trying to do is to ensure this House gets its rightful role in a decision that is so imperative, because, quite frankly, if the House is not sitting, then the people's representatives are not doing the job that they were elected to do, which is to meet as a House of Commons to consider the people's business.

When we know, as we do from Mr. Flanagan and others, that the government was just running and hiding, then we need to do something. We need to put in place a rule that makes it very clear that if it is more than one calendar week, it needs to come back to the House. We must remember that the government played games with this around a year ago.

Under our system, the people do not directly elect the prime minister or the government. They elect their representative in their riding. When we all meet, we decide by a confidence vote who the prime minister will be and, once that person has achieved the confidence of the House, then he or she can act as the prime minister. However, that authority did not directly come from the ballot box. The authority to set up house at 24 Sussex is decided by the MPs in the House.

The reason we do not see that so often is that when we are in a majority, it is a given who will win every vote, so there is no big buildup to the confidence question. It looks as if there was a direct election of the executive council but there was not.

This House is supreme and we are asking all members, but particularly our opposition colleagues, to join with us in making a significant but relatively simple change that would bring democracy to this place that the Canadian people demand. That is why we have this motion here and hopefully it will carry.

● (1540)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's histrionics and rants but I have a couple of comments.

First, I would point out that in his home province, a former NDP premier prorogued three times in three years. In fact, on the NDP side of the ledger, the NDP premiers, since the early 1970s, have prorogued close to eight years worth of parliamentary time in their own province.

However, my one question is—

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** For how long?

**An hon. member:** Months.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order, please. The hon. member.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Madam Speaker, my question is simple. The member talks about an affront to democracy. What I consider to be a true affront to democracy is the attempt by the NDP, the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois in December 2008 to form a coalition government, an unholy alliance, when the voters quite clearly stated that they did not want to see an NDP government in power at any time.

They voted overwhelmingly and over 80% of Canadians rejected the NDP in the 2008 election and yet it was the initiative of that party and that party's leader who tried to do a backroom deal to form a coalition government. Let that member describe that as a democratic process in this country.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Madam Speaker, I am very surprised that member would want to talk about histrionics and things that are over the top given his own personal track record.

Having said that, let us tackle this head on. I made the comment in my remarks that it is the House that decides who the prime minister will be. What happened a year ago and what happened in every election before then is entirely consistent with the democratic procedures and the history of all democracies across the Commonwealth.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, we often hear that Canadians are somewhat politically apathetic. In fact, they have tuned out because the politics of the House have almost become a blood sport. When the Prime Minister muzzled his cabinet, Canadians did not pay heed. Conservative backbenchers have been heard to refer to the PMO as the Kremlin, but Canadians did not pay attention.

When the Prime Minister beat down public commissioners, Canadians in general did not pay a lot of attention. However, the member referenced something very important. This abuse of the parliamentary procedure of prorogation that the Prime Minister engaged in finally seemed to have engaged Canadians and young Canadians especially—

**Mr. Joe Preston:** How many ten percenters did you send out?

**Mr. Ed Fast:** What about Jean Chrétien? What about Trudeau?

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order, please. This is not going to be a shouting match. The hon. member will complete his question and the member will answer it.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Madam Speaker, it seems that Canadians woke up and realized what was at stake. It was not someone else's democratic rights that were being taken away. It was their House of Commons that was being padlocked.

Would the hon. member now agree that this has now provided us with an opportunity to put checks and balances in place to ensure this sort of abuse never takes place again and that the vast majority of Canadians and young Canadians would support such a measure?

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**Mr. David Christopherson:** Madam Speaker, I would agree very much that Canadians are looking for this. We do not get very many opposition days and that is why we used up one of our precious opposition days on this issue. I agree with the member and made the comment in my remarks about the young people and how they were particularly angered. That is the word that comes to mind, but they were a lot more than that. They viscerally felt how wrong, unfair and undemocratic it was to unilaterally shut down their Parliament for the sole purpose of running away from answering questions. Our role as the opposition is to check and balance. Our system is that we ask the government questions every day and hold the ministers accountable every day. They do not do that in the congressional system in the United States. They do it very differently. They have their own checks and balances.

What we are saying is that at this point in time in Canada we need to tweak the rules just a bit around prorogation because we have clear evidence of abuse. We have things that we can do to change it and it is up to us to utilize our power as the majority in the House to change those rules on behalf of the Canadians who saw their House shut down.

• (1545)

**Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Madam Speaker, at the outset, I would like to inform the Chair that I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

It is with mixed thoughts that I rise to address the motion proposed by the NDP. Certainly, I am disappointed that the opposition would exhaust precious time in the House of Commons on something that it is perfectly aware has always been a standard and routine process, rather than choosing to debate the real challenges facing our nation, such as the economy and jobs.

However, I also view this as an opportunity to reiterate that there is nothing unusual about this Parliament, in terms of how it has conducted itself. Contrary to the opposition's allegations, prorogation is in fact a normal part of the parliamentary process. It has played an important role in supporting a healthy democratic system since Confederation. It is a routine, constitutionally legitimate process that has occurred some 105 occasions in the 143 years of our nation's history.

It is also well established by constitutional convention that the Governor General prorogues Parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister, and there are practical reasons for this.

Prorogation plays an important role in the effective functioning of our parliamentary and democratic systems. When circumstances change, as has been the case with the serious economic situation we have encountered, it is perfectly normal that the government would want to pause to take stock and to consult Canadians. The prorogation of Parliament provides that necessary time, because the business of government does not end when Parliament is not sitting. In this case, the government used the time available to look carefully at our agenda and plan the next stages of our economic recovery.

In the past year, our government has introduced and implemented an important economic action plan, including a series of stimulus measures, to address the extraordinary economic circumstances

brought on by the worldwide recession. As a result of these measures, 2010 is shaping up to be a more optimistic year for Canadians. We are beginning to see a fragile recovery taking place.

But our economy is not yet out of the woods, and that is where the prorogation period played a key role. We now have a plan in place to complete implementation of our economic action plan, to return to balanced budgets once the economy has fully recovered, and to build the economy of the future.

I would point out that on average since Confederation, there have been three or four throne speeches launching a new session per Parliament. Some Parliaments have heard as many as six or seven throne speeches.

Prorogation is a measure used by governments of all political stripes, both at the federal and provincial level. In both the 28th and the 30th Parliaments, former Prime Minister Trudeau prorogued Parliament three times.

At the provincial level, two provinces, Alberta and Ontario, have prorogued their legislative assemblies already this year.

The opposition alleges that the second session of the 40th Parliament was ended prematurely. However, it was consistent with typical sessions, which have lasted roughly one year on average.

Outside of sessions that include an election call, the average number of sitting days per session is 109 days. By contrast, there were 128 sitting days in the second session of this 40th Parliament.

Another myth the opposition has invented is that prorogation has resulted in a great deal of lost time in the House. On the contrary, in Parliaments where prorogation has occurred since the 33rd Parliament, days lost per Parliament have averaged about 20 days. The number of sitting days lost during this most recent prorogation was 22 days, which is only slightly higher. By contrast, when former Prime Minister Chrétien prorogued Parliament for the second time in the 37th Parliament, the number of sitting days lost was 25 days.

The final myth the opposition has attempted to spread is that this government has avoided its responsibility to be accountable to the House of Commons and, through the House, to the people of Canada.

Clearly, nothing could be further from the truth. We have put our agenda before Parliament in the Speech from the Throne. There is nothing stopping the opposition from voicing its confidence or its lack of confidence in our government.

With all the issues and problems facing Canadians, what keeps the NDP leader up at night? Is it the economy? Is it jobs? No, it is prorogation. In fact, the first thing the leader of the NDP did when Parliament opened was ask for emergency debate on prorogation.

• (1550)

The Speaker politely and somehow with a straight face refused to grant such a debate because it did not meet the criteria for an emergency. Today is the NDP's first supply day, the only supply day it gets in this supply period, the NDP's only opportunity to set the debate in this House, and what did it choose? The NDP chose to debate prorogation.

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It is not just the NDP that is obsessing over prorogation. The Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Bloc are also fixated on it. This NDP motion accomplishes nothing. A resolution of the House would have no effect on the powers of the Governor General or the Prime Minister. Likewise the Leader of the Opposition is proposing to change the Standing Orders to implement a similar measure, yet as with this motion, a change to the Standing Orders would also have no effect on the powers of the Governor General or the Prime Minister.

What is much more unsettling about this issue is that the opposition parties have resurrected their coalition in order to address it. Their ambitions have turned from taking power to diminishing power and once again they want to do this without an election. They want to use their majority to change the constitutional powers of the government.

For a moment, just imagine a majority government proposing to limit the constitutional powers of the opposition because it did not like how members conducted themselves. Imagine the reaction. The Leader of the Opposition keeps ducking his constitutional responsibilities, some would argue, by avoiding confidence motions, but we are not proposing to take that ability away from him. He is free to exercise that prerogative when he sees fit. The same holds true for the Prime Minister's prerogatives. Both opposition and government have specific responsibilities, and they have the prerogatives to carry them out.

I want to wrap up by highlighting the rampant hypocrisy of the Liberal-Bloc-NDP coalition of the prorogation outrage. They cannot even live up to their own standard. They are reacting to a mechanism they have all used and supported as standard procedure in legislatures across Canada. It is a longstanding normal practice to end and begin sessions. As I noted earlier, we know that on average at the federal level sessions have lasted a year. Both Liberal and Conservative governments have prorogued a session less than a year into that session.

There are no NDP and Bloc prorogation statistics at the federal level, thankfully, but there are provincial records. When René Lévesque was leader of the Parti Québécois, sister party of the Bloc, and premier of Quebec in the 31st legislature, he prorogued, get this, five times, and he prorogued four times in the 32nd legislature. The average length of a session under René Lévesque was 10 months.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre, who is now a Liberal, was recently crowned the king of proroguing in the press. When he was NDP premier of Ontario, he used prorogation three times to end sessions of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and he prorogued for much longer periods of time than this Parliament's recent prorogation.

The current NDP government in Manitoba has been in power for six legislatures and prorogued 23 times. Its 35th legislature had six sessions in it, and a number had five. The average duration of a session of the NDP government in Manitoba was 9.7 months.

We have all three members of the coalition who do not meet their own standard for prorogation, and the hypocrisy does not end there. The Leader of the Opposition made such a fuss about the prorogation of the second session. He put on a big show in front of the cameras.

He held press conferences outside an empty chamber and had his members conducting phony committee hearings. In the *National Post* yesterday, Don Martin noted that just eight sitting days after declaring Parliament too pivotal to prorogue, the Liberal leader embarked on a week-long national tour, and one-third of his caucus did not even bother to show up for work. They made such a big fuss about showing up when the House was not sitting, but they disappeared shortly after the House started.

This government will not be distracted by the opposition's fixation with partisan games, their attempts to gain political favour with Canadians by circulating myths about a longstanding parliamentary procedure—

• (1555)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order. On a point of order, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

**Mr. Derek Lee:** Madam Speaker, I am not apologizing for the point of order. I am quite sure I heard the hon. House leader refer to the presence or absence of another member in the House and I think that is out of order. He should recognize that. He should know it.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Yes, I do advise the hon. government House leader that it is inadvisable to refer to the presence or the absence of a sitting member of Parliament.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Madam Speaker, I did not mention that he was not here today. I will just finish my remarks.

Canadians want their members of Parliament and their government to focus on issues that matter, real policies that support our economy, create jobs—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Order. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I will give the hon. member the opportunity to correct what I consider an incorrect statement made in his speech on the motion.

He stated that the business of government does not end on prorogation. In fact parliamentary hearings and the parliamentary committees are shut down, as were two critical hearings in my committee, about which the public was very upset. The government bills die.

Either this suggests a lack of sincerity in the government on the role of Parliament or on its own legislative agenda. Which is it?

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona, clearly she does not understand the difference between Parliament and government.

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What I said during my remarks was the business of government does not end when Parliament is not in session. By her logic, that would mean that when we go into winter recess, when we have a constituency break week and MPs return to their ridings to work diligently in their offices in their constituencies across the land, and during the long summer recess, the government ceases to function. Of course everyone understands that is not the case. That is what I was pointing out.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the hon. House leader mentioned at the start of his speech that the time in the House is “precious time”. I could not agree more.

In fact the House of Commons belongs to the people, and the debate here in this House is the oxygen of our democracy, although not always as clean as oxygen. It is precious time.

There is a logical disconnect. If he considers it such precious time and of such importance, why would the Prime Minister shut down Parliament and shut down the precious time we have for debate?

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Madam Speaker, I do believe that the time the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada are in session is precious time. I believe that all members of Parliament have a responsibility to try to use that time to the best of their abilities on the issues of great importance to Canadians.

As I laid out in my remarks, I believe those paramount issues right now to be the security of jobs, the security of Canadians, safety, the security of our men and women in our armed forces as they toil overseas, and we could go down a long list of all the important issues.

I do not believe for a second that Canadians are seized with the issue of prorogation. I laid that out in my remarks.

What really annoys me the most about the fact that we are debating, wasting Canadians' and Parliament's time today, wasting this time on a motion like this, what really annoys me about the issue of the hypocrisy of each one of those parties as they have laid out their support for trying to impose a change on the government about prorogation is that we have heard nothing in the past of all the instances of their own parties.

One of the most flagrant uses of prorogation was when former prime minister Jean Chrétien shut down Parliament when he was going to turn over the leadership to his successor, Paul Martin. He shut down Parliament to avoid the Auditor General's incoming report about the sponsorship scandal. Everybody remembers that.

Did we hear one word from any one of those parties about the abuse of Parliament in its being shut down to avoid the personal responsibility of the sitting prime minister over the sponsorship scandal? We heard not one word, and yet we put up with this nonsense here today.

• (1600)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the government House leader, for his remarks preceding mine.

Again, some of my remarks will underscore those made by my colleague, but I do want to set the stage by once again stating that

prorogation is not an uncommon phenomenon. It is something that is constitutionally available to all prime ministers and, in fact, to premiers and territorial leaders as well.

In fact, over the course of our parliamentary history throughout our federation, over 105 prorogations have taken place and, I would point out, by all political parties of all political stripes, whether they be federal or provincial.

In my home province of Saskatchewan, former premiers Romanow, Calvert and even before that, Woodrow Lloyd, prorogued the provincial legislature on a regular basis. We have even seen in the province of Quebec that the Parti Québécois, from René Lévesque onward, and from Daniel Johnson to Bourassa, the legislature was prorogued on a regular basis. Hence, this is something that is quite common and done routinely. I stress the word “routinely”.

To make the kind of furor, to use kinds of examples the opposition parties are trying to exhibit here today to argue this is somehow an abuse of Parliament, is quite simply not factual.

I would point out also that the argument the opposition parties are trying to advance is that for some reason, this party, this government and this Prime Minister prorogued Parliament to avoid difficult questions. The example they have used is that our Prime Minister prorogued Parliament to try to avoid difficult questions on the Afghan detainee situation.

I would point out not only to my colleagues in the House but also to all Canadians who may be watching, that is absolutely factually incorrect. It was this government that formed the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan to fully examine the role of the military and all of the details concerning the Afghan mission. It was our government that set up that committee.

If we had wanted to avoid questions, if we had wanted to avoid scrutiny of the Afghan detainee situation, all we had to do following prorogation was to fail to reconstitute that committee. That was within our purview. Did we do that? No. As a matter of fact, the first day after we returned, we set out a course to reconstitute all committees, and particularly the special committee on Afghanistan. That committee has now been reconstituted. All examinations of the events, our military and our government, and of all papers now legally available will be carried out, not only by the committee but also by special councils being set up to examine claims of abuse and of documents being hidden from the opposition.

We are far from avoiding scrutiny on Afghanistan. We are encouraging a fulsome discussion on that to demonstrate to Canadians that our military is not made up of war criminals. Quite frankly, that is what the opposition is contending. They are suggesting quite strongly, day after day, that our military, our brave men and women who are protecting not only the people of Afghanistan but also our own democracy, are somehow complicit in war crimes. The opposition is suggesting quite strongly that our brave men and women are knowingly complicit in war crimes because they are turning over Afghan detainees to sure and immediate torture. That is what the opposition is contending. I find that disgraceful.

*Business of Supply*

We are not avoiding those questions. We want that examination. We want to defend our men and women in the military, and for that reason we have reconstituted the special committee on Afghanistan, where all of those questions can be answered.

In the few moments I have left, let me get into the real reason for the NDP motion today. It is not because they want to talk about prorogation. It is not because they think there has been an abuse of Parliament. Far from it. What the NDP is trying to do is to set the stage to allow it to form a coalition government with its coalition partners.

Let me be quite clear about this. If the provisions of the motion presented today by the NDP had in fact been allowed in December 2008, there would be a coalition government today. It was only because the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament that a coalition government did not take over, a coalition government that the vast majority of Canadians from coast to coast to coast absolutely rejected, overwhelmingly rejected, but that is the true motivation behind this motion today.

• (1605)

We all know the results of the 2008 election. The NDP received approximately 18% of the vote nationally. That means 82% of Canadians did not want to see it heading up a government. The Liberal Party received approximately 23%, meaning that approximately 77% of Canadians said they did not want to see a Liberal led government. The Bloc Québécois obviously can never form government because it only represents the province of Quebec and only runs candidates in the province of Quebec. Canadians would not want to see it head up a government, but that is exactly what the coalition partners tried to do.

We know this to be factually correct. This is not simply an allegation that I am standing here and saying to the House. We know this to be factually correct. Let us go back and revisit that dark time in Canadian political history just for a moment, to confirm what I am saying.

We know, because there was a taped conversation between the leader of the New Democratic Party and his own caucus, that the leader of the NDP confirmed he had been speaking with the Bloc Québécois months before the 2008 election. That was also confirmed by Mr. Brian Topp, the former campaign director of the NDP during the 2008 election, in his book, where he said that this deal had been in the works for many, many months.

Even during the election, when all of the leaders from the opposition side were asked if they would agree to a coalition government, they all said no; but in fact we know that was not being honest, because there was a deal in the works before the election was even called.

Canadians spoke loudly and clearly on what they thought about a coalition government. They rejected it. Thus I again point out to the House and to all Canadians that if the provisions of the motion before us today were in effect in December of 2008, there would be a coalition government in this country today. The leader of that coalition government would be the leader of the Liberal Party, who received 23% support in the 2008 election, the lowest percentage of

Liberal support in generations. Yet that person would be our prime minister, thanks to the schemes outlined and designed by the NDP.

Prorogation has its place in the Constitution. It has executive powers that give the prime minister of the day the perfect right to prorogue Parliament for legitimate purposes; and I would contend that in December of 2008, it was done for very legitimate purposes, as it was most recently.

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his presentation, as much as I disagree with it.

The whole scenario today reminds me of the book *Animal Farm*. We have come full circle here. That party self-destructed a number of years ago, with only two of its members being elected in 1993, and the Reform Party thereafter became the ascendant group. How things have changed. We have watched these members now become the government and, quite honestly, they look and act exactly like the Liberals they replaced.

They talked about corruption and the lack of democracy, and they were going to engage in direct democracy, and all of this has just gone now. Power obviously corrupts.

They talk about provincial parties using prorogation. The fact of the matter is that provincial party leaders actually talk to one another. The premier talks with the opposition leader. Hence, the opposition leader at the provincial level knows what is going on and knows that when the legislative agenda is finished, the legislature will be prorogued. They do it more or less by agreement, even though the premier can simply do it on its own.

However, what this government is doing and what is different about it is that it is proroguing when it finds the opposition gaining steam on an issue. When the opposition is making hay on an issue, then the government decides to prorogue. What was the result? It lost 10 percentage points after prorogation. I do not think the government will do it again.

• (1610)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Madam Speaker, I again totally reject the premise of my hon. colleague's question.

Let me point out a couple of things.

Number one, when he talks about prorogation being within the purview of provincial governments and the premiers therein, he is quite correct. However, to say that is done entirely in consultation is quite incorrect. In fact, my colleague, the hon. government House leader, pointed out the most egregious use of prorogation, which occurred back in a former Liberal administration when then Prime Minister Chrétien prorogued Parliament to avoid answering questions on the sponsorship scandal, a scandal that occurred under his watch.

We also have found, on a provincial basis, that when the current member for Toronto Centre was premier of Ontario, he prorogued three times in three years to avoid the difficult questions facing his government, a one-term government, by the way.

*Business of Supply*

There is absolutely no veracity to the statements made by my hon. colleague. What I would point out is simply this. If the opposition had any credibility behind its claims that we prorogued to avoid questions, why then did we reconstitute the special committee on Afghanistan? Why then did we offer to have Justice Frank Iacobucci examine all documents? The opposition's credibility on that issue is gone.

Canadians are not seized with this issue. They are seized with the economy, and that is what we are seized with. It is shameful that the opposition does not share our vision for the economy and the future of this country.

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, there is a lot of stuff I just heard that seems to be, let us just say, made up.

His colleague, the government House leader, says that government does not stop during a prorogation. That is probably true. However, Parliament sure as heck does. The current government shut it down dead. There are still committees of this House that are not up and running yet. We were shut down between December 30, 2009, and March 3, 2010, and that is the truth.

His colleague said there are prerogatives of the Prime Minister. Does he think the Prime Minister is king? What are those prerogatives? Tell us now what the prerogatives of the Prime Minister are.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** The hon. parliamentary secretary has less than a minute to respond.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will not take a full minute.

It is unfortunate. The member opposite is posing a question to my colleague who finished making—

**Mr. Derek Lee:** Tell us what the prerogatives are.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Madam Speaker, it always seems that when the opposition members start squealing in their seats it is because we touched a nerve and they are embarrassed by it.

I will try to answer if I can do so without interruption.

He speaks of the fact that committees are yet to get up and running. Upon returning to this House, we immediately set out a course of action to reconstitute all committees immediately. Committees were called. Organizing committees have already been concluded. Committees are going up and will be returning to action as soon as possible. Hence, the impression that the member is trying to give that we have not reconstituted committees or have not fulfilled our duty to reconstitute them is absolutely incorrect.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the motion put forward by our NDP colleagues.

I am happy to say that the Liberals will be supporting the NDP motion.

[*English*]

We will be supporting this motion because we Liberals agree that steps must be taken to prevent repeated abuses of the powers of the

prime minister. Canadians have demanded swift action so that the current Prime Minister and future prime ministers, regardless of the party they may represent, can never again shut down Parliament in order to dodge legitimate questions of accountability from the opposition. That is the first thing.

Second, we believe that Parliament is the people's House and that Parliament is supreme. In this day and age, it is unconscionable for a prime minister to twice now dodge being accountable to Parliament through the abuse of prorogation.

The government House leader talked about how prorogation is a normal procedure. He is correct. Prorogation is a procedure that allows a prime minister, through the Governor General who has the power, to close Parliament, both the House of Commons and the Senate, without dissolving Parliament, which would require an election. In fact, under our Constitution, the constitutional power to prorogue is vested in the Governor General. A prime minister's role is to provide advice and to request prorogation of the Governor General who has the constitutional authority to refuse that request.

Traditionally, since Canada was first formed as a confederation, prorogation was used in what we call, and even the government House leader called, traditional circumstances. It was conventionally used in traditional circumstances as a legitimate tool for bringing one session of Parliament to an end after the bulk of the government's work that had been laid out in its throne speech for that session had been completed. It allows Parliament to begin again with a new throne speech and a new government agenda.

In this latest prorogation, the government did not achieve or complete the bulk of the work it had announced in its throne speech after the 2008 election. It had not. Nor had it achieved the bulk of the work it had announced in the throne speech that led to the parliamentary session that the Prime Minister prorogued in December 2009.

Previous prime ministers have not abused that conventional authority. We would have to go all the way back to 1873 when Sir John A. Macdonald, then prime minister, tried to stop Parliament from probing his railway scandal. That is when we can find another example of that kind of abuse.

The government House leader talked about the average days. Let us talk about that. The current Prime Minister's most recent parliamentary shutdown lasted 63 days after a session that was 128 days in length. Since 1964 prorogations have lasted 12 days on average, while parliamentary sessions have lasted 187 days.

Madam Speaker, I forgot to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

We will be supporting the NDP motion, but we believe that it does not go far enough. We will vote in favour of it. However, we believe that there are other measures that can also be taken. We presented a motion in the House, on which we did not get unanimous consent. We think there should be changes to the Standing Orders.



*Business of Supply*

●(1615)

The motion that we presented, which I also presented to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, would require first, that the Prime Minister, before making a request for prorogation, provide written notice of his intention to do so at least 10 days in advance, together with his specific reasons for seeking prorogation.

Second, it would require the Prime Minister to bring the issue of prorogation and his reasons for seeking it before the House of Commons immediately for a full debate.

Third, unless the House otherwise consents, the Standing Orders, as we would like to see them changed, would prohibit a request for prorogation within the first 12 months of any session. Unless the House otherwise consents, it would prohibit a request for prorogation when a vote of confidence had been scheduled in the House.

Finally, it would allow the committees of the House of Commons to continue to function during the period of time that Parliament was prorogued.

It is quite interesting to note that the Conservative House leader and the deputy House leader or deputy whip, I am not sure of his position, have gone on about how the current Prime Minister has done nothing wrong, has not abused his authority in shutting down Parliament twice.

On March 2, I held the third forum on governance. I had a number of noted experts on Canadian constitutional Parliament, our parliamentary democracy. Most notable academics actually agreed with the proposal that I just described.

I also would like to mention Professor Weinstock, professor of philosophy at l'Université de Montréal. There is nobody on the face of this earth who would call Professor Weinstock a friend of the Liberals. Unlike the Conservatives, we Liberals are not afraid to have open discussion and debate with Canadians, including people who do not agree with us.

Professor Weinstock, at the March 2 forum on the state of Canada's parliamentary democracy, noted the importance of having clear constitutional conventions. He made an analogy to Sean Avery, an NHL hockey player. He said that while Mr. Avery did not technically violate the rules of hockey by intentionally trying to distract another player, his actions did violate the spirit of hockey as a sport. He made that analogy clearly and directly with the actions of the Prime Minister, who prorogued Parliament twice, an abuse of his authority: the first time to avoid a confidence vote; and the second time, most recently, December 30, 2009, in order to try and stifle questions about the torture scandal in which the Conservative government, not our military, is involved.

The Prime Minister in so doing violated the spirit of our parliamentary democracy. Shame on him and shame on every member of his caucus sitting in this House who have a duty and a responsibility to protect our parliamentary democracy, not to diminish it, not to erode it. That is exactly what the Prime Minister and the Conservative government has done. Some 225,000 Canadians joined a Facebook group to protest the abuse and the

attack on our parliamentary democracy and on the supremacy of our Parliament by the Prime Minister.

The people's Parliament is not insignificant. It is a preoccupation for Canadians. It is a preoccupation for our young Canadians, our middle-aged Canadians and our senior Canadians. For any member of the Conservative government to say that it is not is a fabrication of the purest and clearest kind.

Liberals will support the NDP motion, and we will continue to push on our own motion.

●(1620)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague, but I would first like to make a few comments.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said there are other issues we should be debating here, in particular the economy and jobs. The government leader gave the opposition three opposition days this week, because the government had nothing important it wanted the House to pass. Otherwise it would have separated the opposition days.

In response to a question from the NDP leader, the Prime Minister said the Constitution would have to be amended to change the rules on prorogation. I do not believe that is the case, but I wonder what the hon. member thinks. Would the Constitution have to be amended?

●(1625)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for his question.

Parliament resumed on March 3 with the Speech from the Throne. The government's budget was presented on March 4. Since that time—today is March 17, St. Patrick's Day—the government has introduced only two bills. One has to do with the free trade agreement with Colombia and is exactly the same as the previous version. Not a single comma had been changed. That was not work. The second bill has to do with young offenders.

In answer to his question, no, a constitutional amendment is not needed to limit the Prime Minister's powers. A simple change to the Standing Orders would suffice. Now if we wanted to change the Governor General's authority or powers, that would be different. That would require a constitutional amendment.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Madam Speaker, in fact there was another bill that was introduced, Bill C-3 on the McIvor decision from the B.C. Supreme Court. That bill still has not been brought forward for debate in the House despite the fact that there is a deadline of April 6 for implementation of that very important decision for first nations across this country.

*Business of Supply*

When the Conservative House leader was speaking, he characterized what was happening today as a waste of time. I would like the member to comment on the fact that the Conservatives seem to characterize having a debate about the fundamentals around our democratic process as a waste of time. What we have heard from thousands and thousands of Canadians is their concern around what they see as a unilateral abuse of power.

I wonder if the member could talk about the fact that contrary to this being a waste of time, this is an important debate about how this House should function in a democratic process.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Madam Speaker, I truly and sincerely thank my hon. colleague from the NDP for that question because the point she is making is very important.

For any parliamentarian to call a debate on the supremacy of Parliament, the people's Parliament, on our parliamentary democracy a waste of time is completely unacceptable. It demonstrates a lack of belief in democracy itself.

Democracy is so precious that debate on democracy and on the instruments that protect, ensure and enhance democracy are important. They are crucial. That is one of the ways that practitioners, those who are the elected officials, better develop their understanding of their own democracy and it better educates the Canadian population.

I am scandalized that a government House leader speaking on behalf of the government would say that a debate on parliamentary democracy is a waste of time. If we wish to attack, if we wish to address issues of unemployment, women's rights, reproductive rights, family planning or climate change and do it in a proper fashion, we need our parliamentary democracy. We need it strengthened, not eroded, not attacked as the Prime Minister has done.

• (1630)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to start this debate by reading the NDP motion. So far I have heard some of the comments primarily from the government side. It has been a collection of four months of mixed metaphors, mixed messages as to why this prorogation existed in the first place. Let me get to the motion first, which I support. The thrust of the motion is exactly what the House needs in order to attain the supremacy of the House, in which I firmly believe. I think all members do unless placed under a cone of silence:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Prime Minister shall not advise the Governor General to prorogue any session of any Parliament for longer than seven calendar days without a specific resolution of this House of Commons to support such a prorogation.

Therein lies the thrust of this. I fully support that the House of Commons should support such a prorogation.

Let us put the clock back for a moment and paint a picture of what we have heard. Today I have heard three different responses as to why this recalibration was to take place. At Christmas, I heard the reasoning of many individuals. This is my favourite and it is the one that really made me laugh at them, not with them.

My hon. colleague from the Conservative Party said that we needed to wait so we could put our attention on the Olympics. I have

no doubt that our two-man bobsleigh team was very excited and thrilled to have those members of Parliament rooting for them at home, with their feet up drinking a nice hot cup of coffee. As a matter of fact, poor Pierre Lueders never even stood a chance. He never got to the point where he wanted to, and the government is to blame. How absurd is that? However, to basically say that we needed to shut down the House so we could focus on the Olympics had to be at the pinnacle of why we would shut down a functioning House such as this in such a democracy. It was absolutely ridiculous at the time.

Then the answer had shifted in many directions. I called it the prorogation that ran madly off in all directions. We had one answer about the Olympics. We had another answer about the economic action plan. However, what I do not understand, and I will not even condemn the Conservatives on this one but I do have a lot of questions about, is this. They said that they needed to implement the second phase of their economic action plan so they had to shut down the House. What changed? Nothing really. The money rolled out as they said it did under the way they said it would. There was nothing in the way of taking money from one area and putting it in another area. The deadline was January for major projects in my riding. Everything was proceeding as they said, as normal, or maybe it was not.

The only thing that really changed was the fact the Conservatives did not renew the tax credit for home renovations. They do not need to sit around for over 30 days to realize they will not do something. Where was the vision? I expected a modicum of vision to come away from the prorogation. Instead I was told I had to leave, go home and watch the Olympics. However, I did not get to watch much of the Olympics because I was working in my riding, like many other MPs.

However, can we not walk and chew gum at the same time? Can we not elevate ourselves to be smart enough, to be talented enough to do two things at once? On this side, maybe. That was a catty remark and I apologize to my hon. colleagues. I say this because there is a whole heap of scorn being thrown upon us for what happened. It is not the time nor the venue to do this.

• (1635)

Let us have a look at prorogation. What exactly is it? One of the definitions is that we have to close down the House because the bulk of the work has been done. Professor Errol Mendes, University of Ottawa, said:

A proper democratic use of the prerogative power is a legitimate power to end one session of Parliament after a substantial part of the legislative agenda has been fulfilled leading to a new speech from the throne.

I see the nodding heads, therefore we all agree. Here is what else he had to say:

The use of the prerogative power by the [Prime Minister] in Dec. 2008 and again in Dec. 2009 has been used instead to avoid democratic accountability and transparency...

This is the best part. Remember I talked about the Olympics? Remember I talked about the fact that the Conservatives had to recalibrate the economic action plan? If the economic action plan had to be recalibrated, rejigged, then it really was not much of a plan to begin with, but we could go on about that for quite some time.

Every time we asked why Parliament was shut down, we were told that it was normal because this party had done it when in government. Shame on the Conservatives. Congratulations, the Conservative government has now become everything it said it would never be. That is the crux of it. Every time the Conservatives are in trouble, they always turn the spin this way.

In Atlantic Canada there is a fish called a flounder. It is flat fish. It has two eyes on one side. It swims along and whenever it sees trouble, it flips, rolls over and goes back in the other direction.

We have the government floundering its way through excuse after excuse. At times it becomes absolutely comical. It is like an episode of *Yes Minister* from BBC. It is absolutely ridiculous. What I call a bit of a charade continues. The Conservatives talked about the fact that they recalibrated. They came back to the House and what did they want to do? Change the national anthem. That is the best they could do, change the national anthem and only 48 hours later, like the flounder, went in the other direction.

The issue then becomes this. Where is the vision? Does the Conservative Party not have the vision by which it can see beyond this point? Did the Conservatives not know that Canadians would be upset if they changed the national anthem? Did they not know that they would be upset by shutting down Internet sites under the CAP program? Then 48 hours later, we remember the fish, back the other way. That says they lack vision. Five year programs relegated to one year funding. This is the recalibration.

To top it all off, at the end of the day, what does the world think of what we are doing here? The Conservatives keep talking about this, that and the OECD. Let us hear what Ned Franks of the *Economist* has to say:

Far from completing its work, Parliament was still considering important measures, including bills that are part of [the Prime Minister's] crackdown on crime, as well as ratification of free-trade agreements with Colombia and Jordan. All must now be reintroduced.

The *Economist* asked, why shut down Parliament? It did not make sense to it. A lot of people around the world thought the same thing. It was rather bizarre. The British Columbia legislature stayed open during the Olympics. Members of legislature did not feel it was necessary to focus on the Olympics by being off work. For some odd reason, the Conservatives did. They did not have to recalibrate. They kept pursuing their agenda.

• (1640)

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Before we move on to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Citizenship and Immigration.

[English]

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I loved the speech of my hon. colleague. I want to make a comment and then ask him a question.

### *Business of Supply*

In December the government said that it needed to prorogue the House because it had to recalibrate, that it had to listen to Canadians, so it padlocked the doors to this chamber. In the meantime, a whole lot of other places were being padlocked too, workplaces in Ontario and indeed right across the country, such as U.S. Steel in Nanticoke, for example, where it padlocked the doors and locked the workers out. Workers were profoundly worried about their jobs, their pensions and their wages. That happened from coast to coast to coast.

Did the government listen? No. A short time after saying that it had to prorogue to recalibrate and to listen, the finance minister was in the Toronto *Star* saying, “We know what we have to do. We have to stay the course”. Staying the course means that we have 1.5 million unemployed Canadians. We have 810,000 Canadians who are about to run out of EI. We lost valuable House time for us to be debating those issues and to be bringing solutions to our constituents in our ridings.

One of the things that was so heartening in my hometown of Hamilton about the prorogation rally was that people got it. They knew it was not about us and our right to speak. It was about the right of their voices to be heard in this chamber.

Could the member comment on what the rallies were like in Newfoundland and whether the response by Canadians, particularly young Canadians, was as positive and as vehement as it was in my hometown of Hamilton?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Madam Speaker, we did have rallies in our province and they were well attended, rightly so, but I was fascinated by how engaged people were in this issue, as was she.

What warms my heart is that we know deep down in some back room, there are strategists who seldom get out to the seniors' dinner in Lewisporte or to many communities in my riding. They are strategists. They do not come to terms with what is happening on the ground. They do not talk to the 100,000 people who are unemployed. They do not talk to the 700 people who were laid off because the mill shut down in my hometown.

Somewhere in that back room, they had to say they were going shut down Parliament. Somebody in that room had to say that maybe people would be upset. Somebody else must have said not to worry, that they would not remember. Shame on them.

Guess what? People remember, like those people who are unemployed, and that is what so enlightening about this exercise.

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I found it very interesting to hear my hon. colleague express his outrage. I do have a few questions for him.

Why did his leader took more than a week to come back from his Caribbean vacation to express outrage on the issue, if this was of such crucial importance to democracy? It seems that a week in the Caribbean relative to democracy might be somewhat important.

*Business of Supply*

The second question is this. If I remember correctly, both the member and I were in the House in the fall of 2007 when Parliament was prorogued, one of the 105 times in parliamentary history. I do not remember any outrage from any of the political parties about the prorogation then. Why is the member upset this time, whereas the previous time, he thought it was acceptable?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Madam Speaker, I remember reading over the break about one individual talking about a Conservative MP who was in California. The media called me and asked me how I felt about a Conservative guy being in California while we were prorogued. I said what were we going to do. The guy went on vacation and it was one of those things.

• (1645)

**Mr. Brad Trost:** He was not down there. Was he in the Caribbean?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Obviously the member is concerned about the Caribbean. Maybe its legislature, in many cases, sits more than we do, which is a shame.

Let me remind the member of a particular quote, and maybe he can jump ahead and ask his leader about this. In 2005 I remember his leader sitting at the table talking about his concern for Parliament. He was sitting next to the leader of the Bloc and the leader of the NDP, and we never talk about that. He said, "When a government starts trying to cancel dissent or avoid dissent...is when it's rapidly losing its moral authority to govern". The Conservatives have now become everything they never wanted to be.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I will start by saying that the Bloc Québécois will support the New Democratic Party motion concerning restrictions on prorogation.

We must admit that this motion is wishful thinking. Nevertheless, it is what most members of the House as well as the Canadian and Quebec people want. Obviously, the Conservative government and the Prime Minister have used prorogation to evade their responsibilities too often in a short period of time.

We agree with what we are hearing in this regard. For example, the Liberal Party talked about the possibility of setting up a special committee to study this issue.

It is not easy finding a way to restrict the authority of the Prime Minister to ask the Governor General to prorogue Parliament.

Some solutions are constitutional in nature, whereas others require legislation or amendments to the Standing Orders.

But that is a technicality. What is important at this point is that we express our political will that the government not repeatedly use its power to ask the Governor General to prorogue the session in order to evade its responsibilities, as the Conservative government and the Prime Minister have done.

The prorogation, which began on December 30, 2009, lasted two months; the new session did not begin until March 3. We were told that the purpose of the prorogation was to recalibrate the government's agenda. When the Speech from the Throne and the budget speech were read, it was obvious that two months to rewrite the same nonsense found in the previous throne speech and budget

was far too long. One week would have been enough and it would not have been such a waste of time.

It is very clear that on December 30, when the Prime Minister asked the Governor General to prorogue the session, it was to avoid having the opposition, the Bloc Québécois and the people of Quebec and Canada ask the questions to which they wanted answers. They are still waiting for those answers.

The Prime Minister bet that after two months, the people of Quebec and Canada would forget the questions they were asking when we adjourned on December 10. That is why the government needed time. It was not to recalibrate its policies or write its throne speech or budget speech.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister lost his bet. He lost it in the first couple of hours after Parliament resumed, when a great many Quebeckers and Canadians quickly understood that the Prime Minister and his government used this tactic simply to avoid answering the opposition's questions. These were and still are very valid questions.

Let us go back to what was on the order of the day at the end of the last session in December.

First, there was the economic crisis. The Bloc Québécois was asking questions almost daily through its industry critic, the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, about the government's inaction with regard to the forestry and manufacturing crisis, which is far from over. In February, in Quebec alone, 11,000 jobs were lost in the manufacturing sector.

For government members who like to wear rose-coloured glasses, the Minister of Finance in particular, it is time to take off those glasses and see that the crisis is far from over in a number of regions and sectors in Quebec and Canada.

What was the government's response to the legitimate concerns of Quebeckers, the Bloc Québécois and Quebec's National Assembly?

The response appears on page 259 of the budget plan, pompously entitled, "Canada's Economic Action Plan: Year 2". Support for the auto sector is on the order of \$9.7 billion. I will say it again: we are all in favour of the support that has been given to the auto sector. It is an essential sector for southern Ontario and for sub-contractors; there are some in Quebec as well. That is not the issue.

I was saying that the stimulus value of \$9.7 billion was completely committed in 2009-10.

• (1650)

In the 2009-10 budget, the Minister of Finance announced an investment of \$170 million over two years for the forestry sector across Canada. When we look at the two figures, it is clear that they are not even comparable. This is the kind of unfairness that the Bloc Québécois and all Quebeckers have been criticizing since the last budget. I am not talking about the budget tabled at the beginning of March 2010, but the one tabled in 2009. The forestry sector was treated unfairly compared to the automotive sector. But the forestry sector creates more jobs across Canada than the automotive sector. This sector has also had more job losses than the automotive sector.

*Business of Supply*

This \$170 million was a real slap in the face to the regions of Quebec, to Quebec as a whole and to all of the workers who are experiencing this crisis. How was this amount spent in 2009-10? Across Canada, \$62 million was spent on stimulus measures.

What was announced this year? There is \$108 million in stimulus measures; \$108 million committed. Once again, the government is using its crystal ball here. The amount is so little that it does not take much to commit \$108 million in a crisis as big as this one.

I know that the government is not very good at math. That became clear with the invoices made public last week for \$2,000 potted plants, \$1,000 doorbells, and so on. However, if we add up the \$108 million announced in the budget and the \$62 million announced last year, we have \$170 million. The same \$170 million that was announced last year was announced again in this year's budget. The government did not need to prorogue Parliament for two months for this. The figure they gave us in 2009 is the same one they are giving us in 2010, and they would have us believe that it is the second phase of a stimulus plan.

Therefore, they have not addressed this major issue, and the Bloc will continue to ask questions about the forestry sector as well as the manufacturing sector in general. The aerospace sector is going through tough times, could use a cash infusion and needs help. The government is stubbornly turning a deaf ear. And yet, we know what is needed: a refundable tax credit for research and development.

If an aerospace company were to undertake research and development, it could still get a refund for the amounts committed to this research even if it did not turn a profit. We know how crucial it is for this sector to remain on the cutting edge of technology, in this case, in order to benefit from the economic recovery, whenever it happens.

There are things that can be done. Unfortunately, in this very lengthy, but very empty budget—a truly empty shell—there was nothing more than what was criticized throughout 2009.

The government tried to make us lose sight of this major issue, the economic crisis and the forestry crisis, by proroguing for two months. Unfortunately, it did not succeed, as reported in the papers every day across Quebec. The problems have not gone away, and people have very high expectations of the federal government.

Recently, Guy Chevrette, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Quebec Forest Industry Council, was at a meeting of the Joliette Chamber of Commerce. He condemned the government's inaction and asked what is the point of abolishing customs duties on certain machinery that is needed if there is no money to buy it.

Once again, the Conservative government is being criticized for implementing measures in 2009—as well as in the 2010-11 budget—that provide assistance to those that do not need it: the oil companies, the banks and corporations that are doing well. First of all, they will benefit from tax breaks announced previously, breaks that will apply again this year, because they are turning a profit. Other companies are not profitable and will not be paying taxes. Second, they will benefit from the elimination of customs duties on machinery, a measure we agree with. But this will not help those who do not have the cash to purchase machinery and to invest in new technologies.

Once again, we are condemning the Conservative government for implementing measures in 2009, as well as in the 2010-11 budget, that help those that do not need help rather than helping the forestry and manufacturing sectors.

The second reason the government and the Prime Minister prorogued the session was the pitiful performance—and that is being extremely gentle—and the unacceptable behaviour of the Canadian government at the Copenhagen conference, where it won seven consecutive fossil awards. That is practically the fossil of the year award. As members know, this prize was handed out by 300 or 400 non-governmental organizations that focus on climate change issues.

• (1655)

Canada won the depressing fossil award every day of the conference. If we had resumed sitting at the end of January, as we were supposed to, we would have been able to question the government right away about its actions in Copenhagen that bordered on sabotage and about the fact that it was an environmental laughingstock on the international stage.

Once again, I believe that the Prime Minister acted in a partisan and anti-democratic way when he decided to prorogue the session, wait two months and not come back until March, using the Olympics as an excuse. He believed that by the time the games ended, Quebecers and Canadians would have forgotten that we were the environmental laughingstock of the international community.

But that did not happen. The public's memory has not faded and we are being told every day that it makes no sense that Canada is acting the way it is, with its stance being more in line with that of Saudi Arabia as opposed to European countries, and that it has shown the world that we have become an oil state, like some Middle Eastern countries. That is far from being a force for change on the international stage.

Not only were the Conservative government's actions in Copenhagen unacceptable and a real embarrassment on the world stage, but Canada was the only country in Copenhagen to announce that it would lower its greenhouse gas reduction targets after the conference. The only country in Copenhagen to do so. What nerve.

Before going to Copenhagen, the Minister of the Environment talked about a 20% emissions reduction by 2025, in terms of intensity targets, if my memory serves me correctly. There was no question of absolute reduction targets. After the conference, it was announced that these intensity targets would be lowered to 17%. Imagine. Not only did Canada win seven fossil awards in Copenhagen, but it was the only country to lower its greenhouse gas reduction targets. Again, I am talking about intensity targets, not absolute targets.

*Business of Supply*

The government also announced that it was using 2005 as the reference year, while the international community and Quebec are asking that 1990 be used as the reference year for calculating greenhouse gas reductions. They want absolute reductions of greenhouse gases. This is not coming from me or the Bloc Québécois; it is coming from the international community, the National Assembly of Quebec and the Government of Quebec. With absolute reduction targets, carbon credits could be sold at a carbon exchange here in Montreal. There are calls to use 1990 as the reference year, with regulations like the ones used in Europe.

However, with the Conservative position, the oil lobby position, we can just forget about the significant efforts Quebec has been making since 1990. Over the past 20 years, Quebec has cut its dependence on oil in half. That has had an impact on the production of greenhouse gases and CO<sub>2</sub>, but that will not be taken into account because the Conservatives are going to use 2005 as the reference year.

Quebec's manufacturing industry has invested significantly in new technology, which allowed it to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by over 20% between 1990 and 2005. These reductions and efforts will not be taken into account in the Conservative government's regulations, when we see them.

This means that Quebec businesses are going to be asked to make efforts similar to those being made in western Canada, for example. They will have to work twice as hard, since the first reductions are the easiest to make. Indeed, the further along in the process you go, the more difficult and costly reductions become. In addition, this will penalize Quebec and diminish its capacity to earn carbon credits, which would have brought in some cash, particularly in the manufacturing sector, which really needs cash.

The government's environmental and economic strategies go completely against the interests of Quebec. What is interesting is that more and more Quebecers are realizing this.

So these are some of the questions we would have been asking in January, although we have asked them since and we will continue to ask them in the weeks ahead.

• (1700)

The third issue the Prime Minister, the Conservative Party and the government thought they would be rid of after two months of prorogation is the issue of torture in Afghan prisons. Unfortunately, the government and the Prime Minister seriously miscalculated, because this issue is far from dead. Quite the opposite is true; it is heating up. Every week we receive new information suggesting that NATO has been aware of allegations of torture in Afghan prisons since 2005.

First we heard the testimony of diplomat Richard Colvin, who repeatedly sent memos—seven, if my memory serves—to his superiors concerning these allegations. The second in command at the Canadian embassy in Kabul testified that since 2005, she had informed Canadian authorities about allegations of torture. They tried to evade the issue, but all this evidence is piling up.

The government has been backed so far into a corner that last weekend, it came up with a mandate for former Justice Iacobucci

that would turn his inquiry into a red herring. He has been given a very restricted list of documents to review.

The Prime Minister was rather mean—which is fair to say—when he said that Mr. Iacobucci could have access to all the documents from 2001 to 2005. That is when the Liberals were in power. But we have learned that by the end of the Liberals' term, information had been passed on regarding allegations of torture.

No one is fooled. This is a ploy to buy time and avoid complying with the orders of the House, which adopted a very clear motion on December 10, 2009, regarding the documents the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan needed to do its job.

Prorogation was another attempt by the Prime Minister and the government to avoid answering these questions.

If it were the first time, we could pass it off as a mistake, we could assume that the Prime Minister has the wrong people around him. We know his Quebec henchman, Mr. Soudas; I think that he has the wrong people around him. They probably told him that this would pass without a hitch. Plus, it was the holiday season, the Olympics were coming, and there was an orgy of excitement and patriotism.

Unfortunately for the Prime Minister and fortunately for us, the public was much smarter than the Prime Minister's entourage thought. All the questions that were being asked in December are still being asked now. We want answers. The government must guarantee that it will truly listen to the people of Quebec and Canada regarding the forestry and manufacturing crisis, the government's actions in Copenhagen and the preparations for the conference to be held in Mexico; it must guarantee that it will refocus.

It does not take two months; it takes political will, which, unfortunately, we cannot seem to see. And I am very afraid that we never will. The Bloc Québécois has already permanently withdrawn its confidence in the government. Until the government changes its direction, this will not change.

If this was due to poor advice from the Prime Minister's entourage, then maybe we could say that it was just a bad decision. A slap on that wrist, and it would end there. But that is not the case; it has become a habit.

At the end of 2008, the government used the same strategy to avoid a vote of confidence in the House. It uses any means necessary. It even triggered an election in October 2008 in order to avoid answering questions. The government and the Prime Minister broke their promise about keeping fixed election dates.

I feel that this government is completely out of ideas. We have to find a way to keep it from repeatedly shirking its responsibilities. One way of doing this would be to limit the Prime Minister's power to ask the Governor General to prorogue.

We are open to all potential technical solutions. We are ready to work with the parties that want to experience a more democratic political life here in the House.

*Business of Supply*

• (1705)

[English]

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my friend from the Bloc has given a very comprehensive speech, talking about recalibration or the suggestion that recalibration was necessary for the government.

One would think that, if the government went away and recalibrated, it might have come back with something to help 266,000 seniors living in poverty to get out of poverty. One would think it would have come back and acted upon the situation with the retirees at Nortel, AbitibiBowater and Fraser Papers because they are very concerned about how much of a pension, if any, they are going to have going forward.

While I was in Hamilton working with my constituents, I would stop at a Tim Hortons from time to time. One of the things being said there was that children's birthday parties often had a clown who would throw candy in the air to distract people as the clown prepared another trick. It strikes me that the recalibration is like that candy thrown in the air. I would like the member's comments.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

What he said is true: the government acted like those clowns who toss out candy to distract children while preparing another trick.

The problem in this case is that the public was not fooled. The children kept watching for the Prime Minister's trick. They are well aware that someone was trying to dupe them into believing that the prorogation was being used to recalibrate the government's agenda.

A lot of people were left out. The same people have been left out who were left out in the 2009 budget—seniors, pensioners and retirees, for example.

I will give but one example: the guaranteed income supplement, which is given to the poorest senior citizens, should have been improved and indexed. Everyone is asking for it. The FADOQ network has a campaign in Quebec about it. But it was not even mentioned. It does not exist for the backward-thinking Conservative government.

[English]

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have two questions for the member. The first one is on prorogation, the subject of the debate today. The member criticized this government for proroguing the House. At the same time, René Lévesque prorogued the legislature in Quebec more frequently than we have. I heard no criticism at all from this member ever on the number of times René Lévesque prorogued the legislature in Quebec. Why the double standard?

Second, during much of his speech he spent bashing my province, Alberta, and the oil sands. This is at the same time that his province, Quebec, has invested more money in the oil sands and in companies operating in the oil sands than anywhere else in Canada. I would like to have him square those two seemingly opposing positions.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, the prorogation we are talking about took place less than a year after the last prorogation. I think this procedure is truly being abused, although it is completely legal from a constitutional standpoint. No one is questioning that.

What should be used by the government to recharge its batteries at the end of a political agenda, the Conservative government used simply to stall for two months, only to come back with the same old story, the same old unpalatable measures.

And they had better not suggest that they are talking about the same kind of thing done in Quebec under the René Lévesque government. That was not at all the same as what this Prime Minister is doing in Ottawa.

Regarding Alberta, we are not bashing that province, unlike many people here who like to bash Quebec. We do not have a problem with the oil sands, as long as there are regulations that comply with environmental standards similar to those that other businesses in Canada and Quebec have to meet.

I know some Quebeckers who are very worried about the fact that the oil being extracted from the oil sands is not regulated. I am convinced that if the oil sands development in Alberta were regulated, we would see greater foreign investment than we do now. Let me be clear; we never said to shut it down. We do not want to encourage it. We do not want those developers to benefit from tax shelters, but it has to be regulated. They are killing the cash cow, the goose that lays the golden egg.

• (1710)

[English]

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I certainly uphold some of the comments from my NDP colleague as well. We are talking about pension security and the many people whose pensions are in trouble right now. They are low in their value, in essence, as bankrupt companies go under. This could be a major problem for the smallest of communities. I was hoping that a recalibration would deal with that because I know that my province of Newfoundland and Labrador and his province of Quebec have been the only two provinces provincially that have been engaged in the forestry issue, particularly for newsprint, such as the mills like AbitibiBowater.

He mentioned some of the ideas that he would like to see put forward. I was wondering about the reconstituting of committees, allowing parliamentary committees to continue to function during the period when Parliament is prorogued until the start of the new session. I was wondering if that is one of the ideas that his party, or even just he, would agree with.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, we are prepared to examine all proposals that might be brought forward by the parties. I know that the Liberals were thinking of a special committee. It might be a very good idea to have committees continue their work. Naturally, that will require changes. Something else that has been mentioned is the possibility of having the House vote on a prorogation that would last longer than seven days.

*Business of Supply*

We are open to all ideas. We know that some may be easier than others, but we have to get to work. I believe it all starts with the adoption of the New Democratic Party's motion.

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Joliette on his clear presentation.

Does the reaction of the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party to this motion not represent the rejection of parliamentary democracy? According to the motion, the government would have the right to prorogue for seven days. If it wanted a longer period, it would be up to Parliament to decide. The Conservatives are against Parliament.

I would like my honourable colleague to comment on the degree to which the Conservatives reject parliamentary democracy.

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi for his very good question.

This prorogation has been described as an anti-democratic and partisan move on the part of the government and the Prime Minister.

Let us talk about the way this government treats the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, simply because he is like a guard dog and keeps parliamentarians abreast of the government's financial situation. The government is just being vengeful and trying to silence this voice by cutting funding to the parliamentary officer. There was also the intimidation of witnesses. I am referring to Mr. Colvin, who was clearly intimidated by this government. How many senior officials were threatened? They also select which journalists will be granted an interview. Let us also talk about the Access to Information Act. When the Minister of Natural Resources was the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, he tried to prevent the disclosure of information, which is against the law. This attitude is pervasive.

I will close by saying that personally, I get the feeling that after four years, this government is tired and has run out of steam. It only governs by making authoritarian and anti-democratic moves, such as the prorogation on December 30.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question. When the Conservatives came to power, they promised honesty, openness and accountability. Canadians have been disappointed. Would he like to comment on the secrecy of the government?

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Madam Speaker, I will be brief.

The Conservative government said that with Bill C-2, things would change in Ottawa. We see that things have changed: contempt in the House has reached new heights.

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** It being 5:15 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie):** Call in the members.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 6*)

## YEAS

## Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Beaudin
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brison	Brunelle
Byrne	Cannis
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Crombie	Crowder
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dhalwal
Dion	Donnelly
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Garneau
Gaudet	Godin
Gravelle	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Hyer
Jennings	Karygiannis
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lavallée
Layton	LeBlanc



*Private Members' Business*

Lee  
 Leslie  
 Lévesque  
 Malhi  
 Maloway  
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)  
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)  
 Mathysen  
 McGuinty  
 McTeague  
 Mendes  
 Mulcair  
 Murphy (Charlottetown)  
 Neville  
 Ouellet  
 Paillé (Hochelaga)  
 Paquette  
 Plamondon  
 Proulx  
 Rafferty  
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 Siksay  
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Lemay  
 Lessard  
 MacAulay  
 Malo  
 Marston  
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)  
 Masse  
 McCallum  
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
 Ménard  
 Mourani  
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)  
 Nadeau  
 Oliphant  
 Pacetti  
 Paillé (Louis-Hébert)  
 Patry  
 Pomerleau  
 Rae  
 Regan  
 Russell  
 Scarpaleggia  
 Silva  
 Simson  
 Stoffer  
 Thibeault  
 Valeriotte  
 Volpe  
 Wilfert

Rajotte  
 Reid  
 Richardson  
 Ritz  
 Scheer  
 Shea  
 Smith  
 Stanton  
 Strahl  
 Thompson  
 Toews  
 Tweed  
 Van Kesteren  
 Verner  
 Warawa  
 Watson  
 Sky Country)  
 Weston (Saint John)  
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Rathgeber  
 Richards  
 Rickford  
 Saxton  
 Schellenberger  
 Shory  
 Sorenson  
 Storseth  
 Sweet  
 Tilton  
 Trost  
 Uppal  
 Vellacott  
 Wallace  
 Warkentin  
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to  
 Wong  
 Yelich

**PAIRED**

Members

Demers  
 Lunn  
 Thi Lac  
 Flaherty  
 Roy  
 Van Loan — 6

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

It being 5:42 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

**SEEDS REGULATIONS ACT**

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP)** moved that Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and an honour to stand here today before my colleagues to talk about Bill C-474. It is not every day one has a chance in the House of Commons to bring a piece of legislation forward for debate and a vote.

My bill proposes to amend the seeds regulations to require that analysis of potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted.

It is well known that our farmers are having a difficult time as it is, without more obstacles being thrown at them. The scenario goes something like this: if GE alfalfa or wheat is introduced into the environment, at some point in time, sooner or later, it will contaminate non-GM varieties. Once this happens, our international customers who are buying non-GM alfalfa and wheat will refuse to do so. This will hurt farmers. That is why we need to have a mechanism in place to assess potential harm to our export markets before this happens.

**NAYS**

Members

Abbott  
 Aglukkaq  
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)  
 Ambrose  
 Anderson  
 Ashfield  
 Benoit  
 Bezan  
 Blaney  
 Boucher  
 Braid  
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
 Brown (Barrie)  
 Cadman  
 Calkins  
 Cannon (Pontiac)  
 Casson  
 Clarke  
 Davidson  
 Dechert  
 Dreeshen  
 Dykstra  
 Finley  
 Galipeau  
 Généreux  
 Goodyear  
 Grewal  
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)  
 Hiebert  
 Hoback  
 Holder  
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
 Kerr  
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
 Lauzon  
 Lemieux  
 Lukiwski  
 MacKay (Central Nova)  
 Mark  
 McColeman  
 Menzies  
 Miller  
 Moore (Fundy Royal)  
 Norlock  
 O'Neill-Gordon  
 Oda  
 Payne  
 Preston

Ablonczy  
 Albrecht  
 Allison  
 Anders  
 Armstrong  
 Baird  
 Bernier  
 Blackburn  
 Block  
 Boughen  
 Breitreuz  
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)  
 Bruinooge  
 Calandra  
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)  
 Carrie  
 Chong  
 Clement  
 Day  
 Del Mastro  
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)  
 Fast  
 Fletcher  
 Gallant  
 Goldring  
 Gourde  
 Guergis  
 Hawn  
 Hill  
 Hoepfner  
 Jean  
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
 Kent  
 Komarnicki  
 Lake  
 Lebel  
 Lobb  
 Lunney  
 MacKenzie  
 Mayes  
 McLeod  
 Merrifield  
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
 Nicholson  
 O'Connor  
 Obhrai  
 Paradis  
 Petit  
 Raitt

*Private Members' Business*

● (1745)

[Translation]

As everyone knows, our farmers were hit hard when they learned that an illegal genetically modified flax seed had contaminated Canadian flax exports. Europeans then started pulling certain products and varieties of products off their shelves, and entire shipments of Canadian flax destined for Europe were quarantined.

At the end of 2009, 35 countries indicated that they had received contaminated flax from Canada, causing our export markets to be shut down. Now, prices have dropped, uncertainty has seized the markets, and farmers must absorb the costs of tests and cleanup measures.

[English]

As we saw in the *Western Producer* on March 4 of this year, a testing protocol for flax established by Canada and the European Union is proving too onerous for Canadian exporters and shipping companies. Flax destined for Europe must now be tested for GE evidence at three stages: delivery to country elevators, loading onto rail cars and at the transfer of the contents onto ocean-bound vessels. Due to logistical pressures, tight shipping schedules and test result delays, this protocol is unworkable.

Already, the federal government has committed up to \$1.9 million to help the flax industry with testing and to build back good trading relations with Europe. This is a small indication of the costs of unexpected GE contamination that can affect trade. This \$1.9 million did not compensate farmers for the added testing costs or loss of market.

What does contamination really mean? Contamination so far has meant economic trouble for farmers and government. In its submissions to the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, as well as the National Farmers Union of Canada, expressed their strong opposition to the APHIS decision to grant non-regulated status to two GE alfalfa lines produced by Monsanto and Forage Genetics International.

This decision has no built-in protection for farmers to guard against contamination. We must also remember that contamination does not respect international borders. Basically, if APHIS deregulates the production of GE alfalfa in the U.S., the likelihood of contamination is a virtual certainty.

What are the consequences? The ability of farmers to produce organic or conventionally grown alfalfa will steadily deteriorate. Markets for organic alfalfa will be lost, as will those for any organic production where alfalfa is used either as a natural fertilizer or feed stock. It is one of the most widely planted crops by area in Canada since it is used for a variety of functions in farm systems.

Alfalfa is the most important forage crop in Canada used in the beef and dairy industry. The Canadian alfalfa processing industry, also known as the dehydration industry, ranks in the world's top five largest exporters of alfalfa pellets and alfalfa cubes. Alfalfa is deeply integrated into the entire organic food and farming system in Canada.

The Manitoba Forage Council has already passed a resolution saying that it will hold Ottawa directly responsible for any economic loss experienced as a result of trade injury incurred due to the loss of export markets of alfalfa seed and other legume and grass seed crops related to the introduction of Roundup Ready alfalfa in Canada. To date, Canada has four GE crops: corn, soy, canola and white sugar beet. Bill C-474 should not affect them since any further introduction of GE varieties would probably not close down their markets.

We need to have a very close, objective look at what the market reality is for Canadian farmers. The reality in the world today is an unending controversy over GE that is impacting our export markets. For example, every year new questions are raised about the robustness of the agronomic benefits of GE crops. Every year there are new contamination incidents with unapproved GE events. For example, Liberty Link rice resulted in economic damage of over \$1 billion, a cost that was borne by American exporters.

Every year there are multiple new reports from credible sources that project contradictory ideas and findings to those put out by proponents of biotechnology. Every year we are seeing more associations of scientists and medical professionals, farm organizations and NGOs, who work with farmers on other food issues, rising up to protest against GE.

All of these feed the global controversy that affects our export markets. Monsanto has just reported, from evidence from one state in India, that Bt cotton is no longer working and is failing to resist the pests it was designed for. Just this February, we witnessed opposition that was so strong and loud from the people of India that their government was forced to halt the approval of Monsanto's GE eggplant.

● (1750)

We also see popular and widely watched films, such as *The World According to Monsanto* in which documented evidence is presented that paints us a not very reassuring picture about the behaviour of a corporation to which a great deal of power over the ownership and production of seeds has been granted by many governments, including our own.

Here are just a few other indications that the controversy is far from over. Currently, six EU member states, Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary and Luxembourg, have imposed bans on growing GM corn even though it has been approved by the European Commission.

On March 8, the Swiss parliament extended its national moratorium on the cultivation of GM plants by three years to 2013. Enacted in 2005, the moratorium was established after a national referendum.

Last year, GM cultivation in the European Union actually decreased by 11%.

Last year, Scotland's environment minister, Roseanna Cunningham, strongly reaffirmed the Scottish government's anti-GM stance, saying:

We are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with other nations who are opposed to GM and fight for what our people want.

Flax farmers have long understood the market reality very clearly. They knew that contamination of Canadian flax with a GE flax would close their European market which represents 60% to 70% of our flax exports.

In 2001, the GE flax that has now been found in Canadian flax exports was de-registered because of their efforts. The GE flax seed was made illegal to sell in Canada to prevent this exact scenario of market chaos.

We must now follow the example of flax farmers who have had the foresight to know the economic risks that GE flax posed to their export markets. The flax farmers took concrete steps within their power to prevent this but we let them down.

In the *Toronto Star*, January 9, 2001, Don Westfall, bio-tech industry consultant and vice-president of Promar International, was quoted as saying:

The hope of the industry is that over time the market is so flooded [with genetically modified organisms] that there's nothing you can do about it. [You just sort of surrender.]

What if the European Union does not surrender any time soon? Are our wheat farmers to surrender their export markets instead, or our alfalfa processors? After all this time there is no sign of surrender and no amount of wishful thinking on the part of the industry will change that fact. The market may be flooded but resistance in our export markets is relentless and growing.

In spite of the rising tide of concern over GE crops, there are those who feel that the answer lies in introducing more and more GE crops in the world. Although there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary, they still see this as the only way to double the world's food production.

What we must do today is ensure that, because of today's reality, alfalfa and wheat farmers never ever suffer from severe economic hardship through a rejection of our exports as a result of unwanted GE contamination.

The Government of Argentina understands this and has already set the precedent. Argentina has historically been unwilling to authorize GM crops prior to European approval. The likely impact of the GM crop on exports is actually a consideration in its approvals process.

In addition to the environmental and food safety assessment, the Government of Argentina includes an assessment of the absence of negative impacts on their exports. It describes:

A key part of the GMO regulatory process consists of verifying that the commercial approval will not have a negative impact on our foreign trade.

### *Private Members' Business*

Argentina is the third largest GM crop growing area after the U.S. and Brazil, with India as fourth and Canada as fifth. GM soy, corn and cotton are grown in Argentina which translates into 21.3 million hectares of GM crop area. So Argentina has not suffered from this policy but has thrived. Argentina is not a marginal player when it comes to GM globally, but is the third biggest grower of GM crops.

Surely Canada can implement something similar to protect our trade in agricultural commodities?

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Our regulations are not harmonized with those of any of our trading partners, aside from the United States. They likely will not be in the near future, given the enormous pressure that voters have put on politicians in other countries to maintain a zero-tolerance approach to genetically modified contamination, and to implement strict policies regarding genetically modified crops.

The purpose of Bill C-474 is to add a mechanism to the regulations that would protect farmers from the economic uncertainty caused by the marketing of genetically modified seeds or the contamination of their crops by these seeds, given the market's widespread opposition to these seeds.

[*English*]

We need to get Bill C-474 before committee where we can start looking at the details that will enable us to offer some degree of protection for farmers.

I would just like to emphasize, as I mentioned in my press conference yesterday, that it is about the pocketbook. People say that it is political or that it is emotional. It is very possible that the decisions in Europe are political and are emotional but that is its business. If its decision is to shut down markets, we need to be able to react by protecting our farmers. Our decision needs to be based not only on science but also on the economic reality to farmers.

I am counting on the support of my colleagues in the House to make this happen.

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very disturbed to be here today and to hear this attempt to mislead farmers and Canadians.

This is not about farmers. This is about the NDP's opposition to GMOs, and everybody needs to understand that right off the bat. A perfect example of this is the fact that the member opposite is using the Triffid example of flax, which would not be impacted at all by this bill. I think he is doing that in order to scare the farm community. He should own up to that and admit that what is going on here because that example does not apply to his legislation.

*Private Members' Business*

I read the seed regulations and they are focused on seed characteristics and on science. To bring this bill into play would bring all of our seed regulations in a completely different direction. It would no longer be based on science and farmers need to be very wary of that.

Second, this bill is very vague, which I think was done deliberately, because legal challenges to this would be totally undefined. In the past, we have seen a real desire by some groups to take these kinds of things to court. This bill leaves that so wide open that anybody would be able to go to court on any issue. The member needs to explain a little more about the consequences from that.

Third, it is onerous and would require an entire new bureaucracy to be built.

Fourth, it is anti-farmer.

I would like the member to explain to me what would have happened in the canola industry and the soybean industry if this had been in place. Those opportunities and those billions of dollars of income in western Canada would have been taken away from western Canadian farmers.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, the reality today is that our flax farmers are in danger of losing money because exports were blocked to Europe. The reality is that we have developed a canola industry with further genetic modification. This bill should not affect them.

The reality is that another producer of GM organisms, such as Argentina, has a mechanism in place.

The reality is that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which represents something like 200,000 farmers, said in its press release:

“The varying levels of acceptance of GM-crops by key export markets is a reality Canadian farmers face”, said Laurent Pellerin, President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. “Ensuring that these markets are not closed to us because of the technology we adapt should be a government priority as they are work to develop more export opportunities for Canadian farmers.”

The point is that regardless of the scare tactics that the member uses, such as the fact that it is vague, of course the bill needs to be worked through committee and fine-tuned. We can build on the model that Argentina has. I would urge the member to at least help us get it to committee so we can—

• (1800)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his bill in the House. A lot of it piqued my interest in some respects. He will have to forgive me, because I am not as up on the subject as he is, but I do have one question in regard to assessments.

The assessments, as I understand it, follow the production and then, of course, just before sales. So the assessment is made on the GM seed. Would that not then stifle research and development for many of the people to look at ways of creating products that could be of service around the world when it comes to GMOs?

I understand there is talk about the negativity around genetically modifying anything but in this particular case I am wondering if this

bill would stifle the research and development that creates a positive aspect of a genetically modified seed.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. We have to decide whom we want to help: the biotech industry or farmers. We have shown that we have canola and it has worked.

What if GE alfalfa is introduced into the environment and non-GE alfalfa becomes contaminated? What will happen to our export wheat markets if contamination is found in a good quality wheat that we export to other countries? That is the assessment that we have to do. If we do not do it, we are not doing any service to our farmers whatsoever.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Bill C-474 raises a complex and important issue that affects farmers and the agricultural sector.

Let me start by saying that the Government of Canada considers issues of safety to be the highest priority for all agricultural production. Canada's regulatory system requires that new agricultural products undergo science-based safety assessments before they can be cultivated by a grower, used in livestock feed, or made available to consumers. Safety comes first with all foods, including those derived through biotechnology.

Canada's science-based approval process would not permit any genetically engineered seed to pose a threat to health or the environment to be grown in Canada. Canada has one of the most stringent and rigorous regulatory systems in the world.

[Translation]

This system applies to genetically modified crops and foods, all of which must undergo a rigorous scientific approval process administered by Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Canada's regulatory system for agricultural biotech products ensures that all of the possible precautions are taken.

[English]

The safety of new products is carefully and cautiously assessed before these products can be cultivated by a grower, be used in livestock feed, or be made available to the consumer.

The subject matter of this bill certainly raises questions concerning how best to manage the market impacts of genetically engineered products. However, our government, along with the vast majority of farmers and industry leaders, supports a safety approval process based solely on sound science. For example, in an article in *The Western Producer*, dated January 21, 2010, Rick White, general manager of the Canadian Canola Growers Association, said he feared that this bill would make Canada's regularly approval system for genetically modified crops look more like Europe's. He said:

We strongly encourage Canada to stick to our guns on science based regulatory processes. Keep the politics out of it.

Mr. White added that growers could lose the agronomic and economic benefits GM crops have delivered to the canola industries if Canada moves from a science-based system to one based on an assessment of potential economic harm. He said that crop developers would be wary of spending money and time on developing new crops.

To remind hon. members, Bill C-474 states:

The Governor in Council shall, within 60 days after this Act comes into force, amend the Seeds Regulations to require that an analysis of potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted.

Contrary to what is stated in the bill, Parliament cannot instruct the governor-in-council to make a regulation.

Furthermore, a regulation to include the analysis of potential market harm cannot be made unless section 4.1 of the Seeds Act is revised to authorize the establishment of such a regulation.

In addition to the technical flaws of the bill, I believe the member for British Columbia Southern Interior has ignored a number of matters if Canada were to go to a market based system. For instance, there are implications for Canada's international trade position. We have to be wary that we do not undermine Canada's credibility internationally as we seek to keep markets open for our Canadian agricultural products.

Sound science is the foundation of Canada's position regarding trade disputes. Sound science must be the starting point of any discussion. Science-based arguments have been very effective for Canada in past cases that we have brought before the World Trade Organization, including cases won against the European Union.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

In fact, science is the foundation of our argument in our current dispute with Korea at the WTO. Korea has been banning Canadian beef imports for six years because of mad cow disease.

We are putting pressure on our trading partners in order to gain full access to their markets in accordance with OIE standards.

We are making the same argument to other countries that have banned our beef or beef products.

If all of a sudden we start to apply different criteria from those that we are asking other countries to apply, we will most definitely weaken our case.

[*English*]

Science-based standards and policies put Canada on par with international trading partners.

It is highly probable that introducing socio-economic considerations into the discussion could give comfort to those who would block Canadian products with no valid scientific justification.

We also need to examine what kind of issues a market impact analysis would explore. For instance, the potential advantages to farmers of the new technology, such as yield increases and input cost reductions, would need to be weighed against potential market

### *Private Members' Business*

acceptance issues and their impact on sales. None of these can be predicted with certainty.

Bill C-474 would also add to the regulatory burden, discouraging innovation in the sector as well as crucial research and development investments.

If we introduce non-safety, non-science subjective elements into our system, we risk losing R and D investments to our competitors.

Furthermore, we would risk losing competitiveness to the United States, where decisions on GM plants are based on a scientific assessment of its risk to the environment.

From the beginning, this government has listened to and responded to farmers' needs. That is why we believe that industry is best positioned to understand and respond to market risks and opportunities of genetically engineered products.

In the past, industry has taken the lead on assessing market risks and opportunities of GM products. Decisions have been made on a crop by crop basis, with producers and processors charting the best path forward, depending on market conditions. Let me give the House a few examples of this.

The Canadian canola industry dealt with the potential market impacts caused by exporting GM canola to key export markets by choosing to segregate GM canola. The segregation process was developed by the industry and involved all members of the value chain, product developers, seed suppliers, grain handlers, processors and end-users.

The Canola Council of Canada and grower organizations had a strong relationship with customers in Japan and the European Union, which increased their confidence in the segregation system. When Japan approved the GM varieties in 1997, the segregation system was discontinued.

Today, the canola industry has adopted a voluntary policy not to commercialize new GM varieties unless they are also accepted in major export markets.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Following the lead of the canola industry, the soy industry responded to market signals and put into place an advanced identity-preservation system for non-genetically modified food-quality soy.

Canada's potato industry was able to expertly manage the commercial implications of consumer disinterest in genetically modified potatoes.

The control of the supply chain allowed the industry to quickly and easily remove genetically modified potatoes from the market.

[*English*]

Members of this House need to realize that this bill would compromise Canada's export markets, place a chill on innovation and put our producers at a competitive disadvantage.

*Private Members' Business*

If Bill C-474 passes, it will threaten the flexibility and market access that benefit our farmers.

We on the government side have given serious consideration to this bill. Bill C-474 is not in the best interests of our farmers. I repeat that Canada has one of the most stringent and vigorous regulatory systems in the world and it is based on sound science. This bill would undermine all that we have accomplished.

We do not support this bill.

**Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations. The intent of the bill is to amend the seeds regulations in order to "require that an analysis of potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted".

The wording in the bill is very simple. In reality however, its content and potential ramifications are tremendously complex. If enacted as it is currently worded, the bill risks wide-ranging, unintended and undesirable consequences. The member who tabled the bill stated that it is required in order to prevent potential damage to Canadian export markets by genetically modified organisms. He stated in the House and elsewhere that he developed the bill largely as a reaction to an incident that occurred last year concerning Canada's flax exports to the European Union and to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

Specifically, the member referred to a case in Europe that arose in July 2009 when it was discovered that Canadian flax exports were unintentionally comingled with the GM flax known as triffid. The presence of triffid flax was found first in Germany in cereal and bakery products, and its subsequent tracing to Canadian shipments resulted in severe consequences for our flax producers. The EU, the market accounting for approximately 70% of Canada's flax exports, has a zero tolerance policy toward non-approved GM products and closed its borders to Canadian flax in September and October 2009.

The first question arises directly from the incident this bill is attempting to address and that is, if the bill had been the law at the time and a study of the potential harm to export markets by triffid flax seed had been conducted, as is suggested by this bill, for future GM seeds in Canada, would the knowledge gained from that study have prohibited triffid's exportation to the European Union and hence prevented the resulting market disruptions for flax producers in Canada?

The triffid flax that was found recently in Canadian flax shipments to the European Union was never approved for sale in Canada though developed a decade before the incident, and as such, any export market harm study as recommended in the bill, regardless of outcome, would not have prevented the comingling of triffid GM flax with non-GM flax seed.

This is a critical flaw in the bill that must be considered by the House, that it would not have prevented the very incident it wishes to address. Perhaps the real question is how to properly keep non-approved GMOs from entering the food system in the first place.

The bill does not question the legitimacy of GMOs as an agricultural tool. I am aware that for some, GMO use is an all or nothing issue, but let us be clear that the debate on this bill is neither about support for nor opposition to the use or manufacture of GM

agricultural products. Those issues are not addressed in the bill. It must be noted that the bill, as it is currently worded, may actually present serious barriers to this burgeoning Canadian industry and potentially risks our competitive advantage in this cutting edge field of research and development.

Canada is the fifth largest producer of GM crops in the world. Canola, for example, from which is derived commonly used canola oil, is one major Canadian success story. Ninety per cent of the crop is genetically modified with a majority of our production going to export markets. Soybeans are another example. Seventy per cent of soybeans are genetically modified with the rest grown conventionally.

Further, there is compelling evidence that the smart, safe, secure application of GM food science will play an important role in the international community's continuing attempt to address the crisis of world hunger and malnutrition.

The United Nations predicts the world population will peak at 9.1 billion by 2050. That means the world will require a 70% increase in food production to meet the rise in demand. We must be ready and able to employ every resource at our disposal to assist in meeting this challenge, including building agricultural capacity in developing countries. That effort will likely hinge on how willing the developed world is to enhance and apply cutting edge food and agricultural technology, including in part, GMOs.

The next question that arises when considering the bill is what the potential consequences are for Canada's existing regulatory framework and agricultural industry, whether intended or unintended, should it become law.

● (1815)

It must be noted that the bill, as currently worded, actually holds the potential for a drastic departure from our current regulatory regime. The Canadian regulatory system that protects our health, safety and environment is one of the best, most comprehensive and respected systems in the world.

It is important to point out that its regulations are based on sound science, not the more subjective and fluid economic factors the bill proposes. In fact, the vast majority of developed or exporting countries' regulatory regimes do not include an economic analysis of genetically modified organisms' effect on local and international trade.

Canada's reputation and success as a trading nation has always depended on the consistent application of science-based decision making, and our substantial international credibility is due to the fact we have always relied on a science-based approach to health, safety and environmental issues.

*Private Members' Business*

During the BSE crisis, for example, Canada aggressively and successfully lobbied countries to make decisions on opening international borders for Canadian beef based on science, not unfounded fears. We did not stop beef production or sale because certain countries rejected our meat.

In addition, the wording of the bill does not define the scope or meaning of the words “market” or “harm”. One potential scenario is that a majority of importing countries may accept a GMO product, and a small minority may reject it. Hence, an entire world market could potentially be lost to our producers because of the theoretical risk of a GMO product being exported to the non-accepting market.

We look forward to having this issue clarified through debate in the House and, possibly, pending the outcome of that debate, a potential examination of it at committee.

Further, the prohibition measures the bill would put in place in the Seeds Act would only prevent a genetically engineered seed from being cultivated in Canada by our own agricultural industry. That very same genetically engineered crop could still be imported into Canada for processing or be used in feed, since these uses are regulated under different acts that only consider the health and safety aspects.

Australian states have implemented bans on planting genetically engineered crops, but are still allowing these crops to be imported for use in food or feed. It is possible, therefore, that should the House choose to adopt Bill C-474, we would only be restricting the competitiveness of Canadian farmers by the bill, and our markets would remain open to foreign GM seed imports.

Before I conclude, it must be said there is a clear consensus that strengthening our export markets is absolutely critical to the health of the Canadian agricultural industry. From seed developers to growers, to processors and shippers and, indeed, to all the hon. members of the House, everyone agrees that preserving our export markets is essential to the overall success of Canadian agriculture.

Nevertheless, the huge success of our export markets today is due in part to two relevant facts: that our agricultural production is generally accepted across the globe as safe and high quality; and that self-imposed barriers to industry have traditionally been avoided in Canada, unless absolutely necessary for the health, safety or true protection of market access.

It may be true there is not a one-size-fits-all approach, which is what the bill seems to advocate. The obligation upon any government, of course, is to err on the side of caution and to base these decisions upon a most rigorous scientific scrutiny.

The issue the member attempts to address with Bill C-474 is vitally important and deserving of attention and discussion. Our reading of the bill as currently worded is that though it is well intended, it has the potential to create far more difficulties than the problems it attempts to resolve.

We will support sending the bill to committee so there is the opportunity to more fully scrutinize the issues and make a well-informed decision on whether or not the bill should go any further and report back to the House with recommendations.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this debate on Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm), introduced by the hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior from the NDP. I sit on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food—a number of members of the committee have been there for more than five years now—with the hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior. He is very conscientious and has introduced a bill on which he has worked very hard.

I am surprised at the reaction of the Liberal members a few moments ago who, despite their reservations about this bill, decided to refer it to committee. I think that is what is needed in order to look at this bill from all angles. We are referring this bill to committee in order to hear witnesses and perhaps even remove certain irritants from it to make it suit the agricultural community, in Quebec in my case, and in Canada for other members of the committee.

However, the Conservatives are closed-minded. They immediately rejected the bill and did not want to hear any arguments in committee. I deplore that way of doing things.

That is why the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill and wants to study it in committee.

We think it is important to consider all aspects of approving a new product, including its commercial consequences on foreign markets, before introducing it in the range of products already offered to producers in Canada and Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois believes that the bill is pertinent and constitutes the first step in regulating transgenic seeds, or GMOs.

We believe that the federal government must adhere to the precautionary principle so as not to deny our producers access to good markets.

Our agricultural producers already lack support from the federal government. We have to ensure they do not come up against more obstacles.

This bill requires the Governor in Council to amend the Seeds Regulations in order to require an analysis of potential harm for export markets to be done before allowing the sale of any new transgenic seeds.

In other words, the purpose of the bill is to require the government to assess the sale and use of new transgenic seeds for Canada from an economic perspective as well.

At present, the analyses required prior to the certification and sale of a new seed only address the safety of seeds with respect to health and the environment. This bill will add another component. It will allow another consideration to be taken into account: the impact of the entry of a new seed into Canada on international agricultural trade, particularly with the European Union, which, as we know, refuses imports of genetically modified foods.

*Private Members' Business*

It is important to consider export markets. Given Canada's dominant global position in the production of GMOs—we heard this from all parties who commented on the bill—it is very important to consider the development and evolution of the international GMO market. Canada is currently the fifth largest producer of genetically modified crops in the world, after the United States, Brazil, Argentina and India. We must maintain a market in order to sell these crops.

I just mentioned Argentina, which is one of the largest producers of genetically modified crops. I do not know whether the member for British Columbia Southern Interior looked at what is happening in Argentina. It has legislation that, oddly enough, closely resembles what the member is proposing. The release of GMOs requires an assessment of the biosecurity of the environment as well as a favourable assessment of the safety of the foods in their raw state and an assessment confirming that our exports will not be negatively impacted. I say “our exports” because I am quoting the Argentinian legislation. They established a national biosecurity framework in 2004.

The assessment is conducted by the Argentinian national bureau of agri-food markets. It involves an analysis of the current regulatory systems and the degree of acceptance by the public in countries that purchase their exports. The situation of commercial competitors, potential markets, the proportion of the crops in their trade with each country and the proportion of their imports in their total purchases are also taken into consideration in this Argentinian legislation which, as I mentioned, dates from 2004.

• (1825)

Before a GMO is approved for marketing, the Chilean secretariat for agriculture, livestock, fisheries and food must have the following technical advice: the impact of the mass culture on a commercial scale of the transgenic product in question on the agri-food ecosystem, as well as the safety of the food or livestock feed. It also requires an assessment of whether the market would accept the GMO.

Including analysis of the impact on exports in the GMO approval process is not extraneous, considering the important role of agri-food exports within Argentina's economy. It helps avoid unpleasant surprises.

We heard earlier about what happened in Ontario recently regarding flax, which was criticized. The committee must take a closer look at exactly what happened and consider whether this bill could help with that kind of problem. In any case, this is how it has been done in Argentina for six years now, and this has not stopped that country from being one of the largest GMO producers.

Here is an example of what can happen when GMOs pose a problem. China recently closed its market to Canadian pork because of the H1N1 flu virus, even though we know that people do not get the flu from eating pork. Fortunately, things are beginning to turn around, but we face this kind of problem every time a country decides to close its market. We do not have a key to open those doors; only the country in question does.

GM crop producers face these problems. In 2001, Chinese importers announced that they were refusing all canola, rapeseed and

soy from North America. Of course Canada is part of North America. It was an economic disaster for American soy producers, because 70% of their crops are genetically modified, and China is the largest market for American soy. Countries that do not produce GMOs, including European exporters, took advantage of the situation.

The Europeans have been refusing to import GMOs for some time now, and they have convinced food processors to do the same. That is the case with McCain, a well-known company that, in December 1999, announced that as of spring 2000, it would refuse to purchase genetically modified potatoes. Producers in New Brunswick, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island who supplied McCain at the time and who farmed Colorado potato beetle resistant potatoes had to adjust. When that announcement was made, it was estimated that about 5% of the potatoes farmed in Quebec were genetically modified potatoes.

There is also the issue of genetically modified flax. Would my colleague's bill fix this situation? I am not sure, but we must not turn a blind eye to the problems facing our agricultural economy.

Since the start of September 2009, at least eight warnings have been issued in Europe regarding the presence of a variety of genetically modified flax in the food chain. European legislation has prohibited the use of these types of genes since 2004. Triffid, this species of flax, has been approved for consumption in Canada and the United States.

The European traceability system quickly determined the origin of the product and Canadian authorities were contacted to block entry of that product. The situation could be catastrophic since 68% of Canadian flax production was, until now, bound for Europe.

Some have expressed to us their support for Bill C-474, namely the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which recognizes how important it is to improve market assessments among current and potential trade partners. Laurent Pellerin said:

Avoiding the closure of these markets because of the technology we use should be a priority for the government when it is trying to increase export opportunities for Canadian producers.

• (1830)

As the agriculture and agri-food critic for the Bloc Québécois, I cannot see myself denying Bill C-474 the chance to be studied in committee.

This would allow us to get to know the ins and outs of this bill and make an informed decision on what to do next when the bill is passed or amended. It could be interesting to discuss this in committee.

[English]

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-474, sponsored by my colleague, the member for British Columbia Southern Interior. I really have a lot of respect for his tenacity in dealing with this issue. It takes a lot of work, as members know if they have ever developed a private member's bill. I know the member has done a lot of work on this file. He has consulted far and wide on this bill.



*Private Members' Business*

Contrary to the shrill comments that we have received from the government member across the floor, the fact of the matter is that it is very likely that we will be able to pass this bill, given that the Bloc member who just spoke made a very excellent speech regarding his approach to the bill, and the fact that he will be supporting its progress to committee. In fact, the Liberal critic before him, who spoke to the bill, was a little more negative toward the bill, but he, too, indicated that the Liberal Party would be supporting to get the bill to committee.

Once again the government is sort of on the short end of the stick here because we have three parties with the majority of the votes that can send this to committee. I hope that is in fact what happens.

The member has indicated in his introductory speech that he is open to amendments and further consideration at committee. That is the way we should be approaching subjects in this Parliament.

The bill calls for an amendment to the Seeds Regulations Act which would require an analysis of potential harm to export markets to be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted. That seems to me to be almost a no-brainer.

Why would people invest in their plant, equipment and farm, and embark on a career to produce a product that potentially would not have a market? I would think they would want to investigate that before they took a chance on perhaps losing everything.

The member, as well as the member for the Bloc, pointed out that Argentina is a success story in this regard in that it takes this into consideration before it makes these approvals.

We see this over and over again with the government. It does not necessarily look at what works before it reacts. We see it with the crime bills. There is ample evidence that mandatory minimums have not worked in the United States for the last 25 years, so what does it do, it keeps trying to do the same thing.

We know that corporate income tax cuts have not actually had the desired effect of increasing investment in plants and equipment. What does the government do, it keeps reducing the corporate income tax.

Once again, the member from the Bloc pointed out that Argentina has the proper approach. It is not too late. It is never too late to learn new ideas. Perhaps when we do get this bill to committee, the members of the government will open their minds a bit and perhaps take a second look at this, and perhaps look at what in fact is going on in Argentina.

Perhaps there will be some meeting of the minds. After all, that is what a minority Parliament, in fact even a majority Parliament, should be able to accomplish. Particularly in a minority Parliament, there is something to be said for the process of listening to the other person's arguments before drawing conclusions.

I am aware that the majority of the European Union remains opposed to this. We are quite aware of the European Union being concerned. That is a risk that we have to deal with all of the time in agriculture. The issue is, why would we take a chance alienating a major part of the market?

● (1835)

I know that in the last several years, even though I represent an urban constituency, I was put on the agriculture committee of the Midwestern Legislative Conference. Members from the government side from Saskatchewan will know what the Midwestern Legislative Conference is all about. In fact, Saskatchewan was a member longer than us. We joined five or six years ago and we meet every year in conference.

Sitting on that agriculture committee for the last five years before I got elected to the federal House, I must admit that I got quite a crash course on agriculture issues. I learned that the discussion and process around the U.S. farm bill is a process that we would never want to replicate in this country. It is hardly a great example of how legislation should be put together. I think the member from Saskatchewan probably knows that when the U.S. farm bill is brought together over a five-year process, it is all glued and taped together with interest groups and other interests.

I do not have enough time to get into all of the different issues that have been put into the farm bill. The last farm bill, which I believe ran out just recently, had some provisions for big tax breaks for people who were not really even farmers. They were basically investors and they were getting all of these subsidies from Washington.

That is what we are dealing with here, in a way, because we are a smaller country. We have to deal with the Americans on the other side of the border. As a result, we do a lot of things in a policy sense that do not necessarily reflect where a lot of our people are at or that make sense globally. We tend to bow our heads to agribusiness and corporate farms, which we in the NDP have always been reluctant to do.

Look at the people who support this bill. The member indicated that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers Union have indicated support for this bill. I know that members will probably say that that is not a surprise because the National Farmers Union does tend to support many of the things that NDP members support. The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network and the organic food and farm community are also in support.

If all of these organizations are in support of this bill, who is against it? As usual, we do not have to look too far to find out that the agribusiness people, the big money people, and the corporate farm people are pulling the strings behind the scenes. Members know that. The Conservatives know what is really going on behind the scenes here, but they are basically tied. I guess it is easier for them to take their marching orders from agribusiness and think that everything is going to be okay.

The world has developed that way, but there is a strong resistance against that approach. We are seeing that in the markets. We are seeing that in Europe. We are seeing people in European markets resisting and I predict it is going to happen in other markets as well. We are going to find more and more people. Maybe they want to go back to the past. Maybe we all want to think back favourably on the old family farm that many of us visited and many of us grew up on.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

People say that we cannot go back there, that it is the past, and that we have to keep moving forward. They say that the trend is moving toward these huge multi-million dollar businesses, agribusinesses, use of pesticides and so on, and that we are basically polluting ourselves. That is not necessarily going to be the final answer here. We have to look at other alternatives. I think the member is giving us a good direction to move in.

• (1840)

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-474 on St. Patrick's Day today. I know that I only have a few minutes, but I can finish it another day.

As others have argued here tonight, we need to proceed with caution on Bill C-474. Canada's farmers, as we know, depend upon trade for their livelihoods. Canadians depend upon that same trade for jobs and prosperity. Canada's agrifood and seafood exports are more than \$42 billion and contribute over \$13 billion to Canada's trade surplus. In total, Canada's agriculture and food industry drives over 8% of our GDP, and one in eight of our jobs.

Our government is committed to the continued success of Canadian agriculture. We put farmers first in every decision we make on agriculture. It has to be that way. Our formula is simple and it works. We listen to farmers. We work with farmers and we deliver the bankable, practical results farmers need. Farmers need markets and that is why the minister, on behalf of this government, has been taking an aggressive approach, opening up international markets for our farmers.

Canada believes successful trade must be based on sound science and fair rules, and those are the key words in this bill. It has to be based on sound science, so we need to be very cautious of any move to introduce a subjective, non-scientific element to the discussion. I am referring to socio-economic considerations such as consumers' attitudes in other countries to genetically engineered foods. These matters are very important, but they are best resolved by the industry and the marketplace, not governments. We have seen, for instance, how the marketplace has responded to changing attitudes, vis-à-vis GE foods in a number of European markets. Our message as a trading nation must be consistent.

I will close in just saying that there is a lot more to be said on this, but we must base this on science. Genetically modified seeds have been around for 50 years and they are very important to agriculture.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member will have approximately eight minutes left to conclude his remarks the next time this bill is before the House.

---

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on March 5, I asked the government when would it deliver on its long overdue and limited foreign credentials promise to new Canadians. Instead of fully answering my question, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism only mentioned half measures, thus displaying the Conservative government's inadequate level of dedication to helping newcomers succeed in Canada.

In a time when the lack of foreign credentials recognition is costing our country over \$2.6 billion per year in lost productivity alone, the federal government's recent announcement for the expansion of existing overseas orientation services constitutes an insufficient commitment to addressing the needs of both new Canadians and our economy as a whole.

The federal agency responsible for the assessment and recognition of credentials does not receive the funding required to effectively meet the purpose for which it was initially envisioned and has been downgraded to a referral office that does little more than direct new Canadians to provincial offices, where the real work of foreign credentials recognition is undertaken.

As a legacy of the Liberal Party's commitment to new Canadians, our country continues to be the destination of choice for important talent from around the world. However, a recent Statistics Canada report highlights that, under the Conservative government, Canadians who received their education and training overseas are overrepresented in the poverty, unemployment and underemployment rates of our country.

Additionally, the *Globe and Mail* reported last week that "Canadian immigrants, even those highly skilled and educated, suffer from an income gap that is unacceptably wide and slow to close" and that more needs to be done in the area of foreign credentials definition.

There are numerous examples of significant inefficiencies in the system. A family that moved as permanent residents from India to the city of Brampton, in Ontario, includes the father who used to be an IT specialist and is now a dishwasher in a restaurant, as well as a son who used to work as a doctor and now delivers pizza as he cannot afford the large fees associated with upgrading his degree and cannot find other work.

The Liberal Party's round table discussions with citizens, during the Conservatives' parliament prorogation, suggest that now is the time to move beyond the government's piecemeal and lengthy approach with respect to foreign credentials recognition. Now is the time to work Canadian and overseas educational institutions, provinces and territories and the appropriate regulatory bodies to develop bridging courses in those target countries where we have opened up offices and allocated resources so upgrading can begin before new Canadians arrive here. Now is the time to expand retraining, upgrading and language programs for new Canadians who are already in Canada.

Why is the government not ensuring that the foreign credentials barriers for all new Canadians are removed in a more comprehensive manner sooner rather than later?

• (1845)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton has raised questions regarding the important question of the assessment of foreign credentials for newcomers. It is worth considering, though, why the member apparently did not notice this issue when he sat in government for 13 years as part of a government that actually ignored the foreign credential issue.

Within the next few years, all of Canada's labour force growth will come from immigration. Attracting and retraining the best international talent to address existing and future labour market challenges is critical to Canada's long-term economic success.

The Government of Canada understands the challenges faced by immigrants in getting their credentials recognized and we are taking action.

After a decade of Liberal inaction, our government established the Foreign Credentials Referral Office in 2007 to provide immigrants with information, pathfinding and referral services in Canada and overseas to help them succeed in the Canadian labour market.

The office works with federal, provincial and territorial partners and foreign credential assessment and recognition bodies to strengthen foreign credentials recognition processes across the country. It does so through improved coordination of FCR issues, policies, programs and its services, as well as through information sharing and exchange of best practices.

Unlike the previous Liberal government which ignored this issue completely, our government started working with provinces and territories immediately after becoming government.

As a result of our hard work, on January 16, 2009, first ministers agreed to take concerted action to provide for the timely assessment and recognition of foreign credentials.

Following on this, Canada's 2009 economic action plan committed \$50 million over two years to support the development and the implementation of the pan-Canadian framework for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. We did this because our government believes that qualified immigrants working in the field of their expertise is good for the economy and good for our country.

Through the framework, the Foreign Credentials Referral Office will work with provinces and territories and stakeholders to address barriers to foreign qualification recognition in our country.

Last November, we launched the framework, which articulates a new joint vision, guiding principles and desired outcomes for improving the assessment and recognition of newcomers' qualifications.

As noted in budget 2010, this direction will continue. Through the framework, by December 2010, foreign trained workers in select fields who submit a full application to be licensed or registered to

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

work in their field will be informed within 12 months on whether their qualifications will be recognized.

As part of its commitment to FCR services, the government also recently allocated \$15 million over three years to the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. This organization will expand its pre-arrival FCR orientation services in India, China and the Philippines, and a new office will open in London, U.K. in the fall of 2011.

In addition, the second federal progress report on foreign credential recognition will be released by the Foreign Credential Recognition Office. It provides an update on federal initiatives, such as the FCRO, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's foreign credential recognition program, Health Canada's internationally educated health professionals initiative, and Service Canada's toll-free telephone and in-person services to immigrants and Canadian citizens who have earned their professional credentials abroad.

• (1850)

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi:** Mr. Speaker, I urge the government to listen to the citizens of our country and make the commitments necessary so that new Canadians have the chance to perform in positions that reflect their skills and qualifications.

Important inefficiencies exist in the system, as recently reported by CBC television on March 5. Foreign trained doctors and other health care workers, such as the U.K.-origin pharmacist featured on the CBC show, who have passed their exams but cannot find work in Canada, are leaving our country in search of work opportunities that reflect their capabilities. This brain drain is unacceptable.

The Conservative government must start taking the foreign credential issue more seriously as our country cannot achieve its full potential while, at the same time, leaving new Canadians behind.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, no government has taken this issue more seriously in the last two decades than the one that sits on this side of the House today.

The Government of Canada understands the challenges faced by immigrants in getting their credentials recognized, and we are taking action, as I outlined.

When we came into government in 2006, Canada had an immense amount of catching up to do. This issue had been ignored and neglected by the party of the hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton and, by extension, the hon. member himself.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We established the foreign credentials referral office in 2007 to provide immigrants with information, pathfinding and referral services in Canada and overseas, to help them succeed in the Canadian labour market. The FCRO works with federal, provincial and territorial partners and foreign credential assessment and recognition bodies to strengthen foreign credential recognition processes across our country.

Canada's 2009 economic action plan, as I stated, committed \$50 million over two years to support the development and implementa-

tion of the pan-Canadian framework for the assessment and recognition of—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:54 p.m.)

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