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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 24, 2010

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Halifax.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the volunteers who will make this weekend's Elmira Maple Syrup Festival another huge success.

Since 1965, this small community has hosted visitors from around the world to celebrate one of our most Canadian symbols, maple syrup.

Over the years, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival has grown to become the world's largest one-day maple syrup festival. Over 40,000 people will crowd this town of only 12,000 this Saturday.

One of the highlights of the festival is its pancake flipping contest. This year I will be entering a team comprised entirely of hon. members of the House. The members from Kitchener Centre, Kitchener—Waterloo, Okanagan—Shuswap and the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism will all join in the fun.

I look forward to welcoming my teammates to the best riding in Canada and, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I extend my gratitude to the festival's organizers and volunteers. I also extend a heartfelt invitation to all Canadians to attend the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival on Saturday.

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ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate University of Guelph students for an extraordinary campaign to raise awareness about organ and tissue donation.

With support from the Trillium Gift of Life, University of Guelph students are partnering with staff and faculty and with high school students in the broader community to ask 1,000 people to show their support tomorrow for this important cause.

Each supporter has signed a pledge that they will speak to 10 people about organ and tissue donation and direct them to join the movement on the website, recycleme.org.

Because of efforts like those, last year in Ontario almost 700 lives were saved because of 218 organ donations, an increase of 17% from 2008, and yet there are still 1,600 people in Ontario who are waiting for a transplant.

I hope the House will join me in congratulating those in the community of Guelph who have dedicated their time and energy to this very worthy cause. I ask other members to raise awareness of this pressing issue in their own communities.

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[Translation]

CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the cement factory in Joliette has once again taken on the Défi Climat challenge this year. The 209 employees of Holcim who are voluntarily participating in the challenge this year are taking practical steps to reduce their environmental footprint.

This year's theme is "every action counts", and over the span of just over a month, these employees will have the opportunity to help protect the environment, for example, by changing to more eco-responsible modes of transportation, managing their waste at home and at work in an environmentally friendly manner, and buying local.

Holcim is not the only company in my region to be participating in the Défi Climat, which is being held from March 10 to April 30. The employees of Bridgestone will also participate, as will the CEGEP and the City of Joliette.

To set an example, the staff of my constituency office in Joliette and I will participate in the challenge this year, focusing on active leisure.

I wish everyone well during the Défi Climat, because every action does count.

*Statements by Members**[English]***AGNES MACPHAIL**

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 120th anniversary of the birth of Agnes Macphail.

Agnes was the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons in the very first election in which women had the right to vote. She later became one of the first two women elected to the Ontario legislature and the first to be seated.

Agnes Macphail was recognized for her commitment and advocacy for women's rights, fairness to seniors, prison reform, peace and disarmament, housing, health care and education. One of her major achievements occurred in 1951 when she championed pay equity in Ontario.

In honour of her life-long contributions, Ontario honoured Agnes by proclaiming March 24 Agnes Macphail Day. No such honour has followed at the federal level.

At first that surprised me, but on reading the damning report to the UN about the record of successive Liberal and Conservative governments on women's issues, it was clearly too hypocritical to contemplate. So it falls to New Democrats to honour Agnes Macphail by continuing her fight for equality.

We share her belief that Canadian women deserve fairness, affordability, opportunity, equal pay for work of equal value, a decent standard of living and the freedom to live without fear. For us, every day is Agnes Macphail Day.

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CHILDREN'S EVENTS

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently I had the wonderful opportunity of participating in a number of children's events throughout my riding.

Oscar Peterson Public School, in my home town of Stouffville, raised over \$5,000 for Haiti earthquake relief through their "Helping Hands" initiative. Then, the York Region Catholic School Board students raised over \$170,000 for Haitian earthquake relief.

Brother André Catholic High School, which put on a band-aid fundraising event for the Markham Stouffville Hospital's campaign for expansion, raised over \$5,000 in one night.

The fourth annual Biennale Portrait Competition, which is a worldwide children's art exhibition held in Greece, had over 141,000 children from over 141 countries participating. I would like to commend Nobleton Junior Public School students, Ashley Keown and Sam Walker, for their first place finish, and, not to be outdone, Nathan Cameron, Tyler Cameron and Carly Panneton, who won second place in this competition, which is another reason that I am so proud to represent the good people of Oak Ridges—Markham.

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● (1410)

WORLD TB DAY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World TB Day, an international call to action, to mobilize political

commitment to reduce the burden of tuberculosis. Yet, today, TB is Canada's forgotten disease.

Aboriginal people in Canada face a third world risk of the disease. The tuberculosis rate among status Indians is 31 times higher than that of non-aboriginal Canadians. The rate among Inuit is 186 times that of Canadian born non-aboriginals, equivalent to the rate in sub-Saharan Africa.

This information from the Public Health Agency of Canada comes as the Prime Minister is preparing to make child and maternal health in the developing world a priority at the G8 summit this year.

The rate of tuberculosis among Canada's aboriginal peoples is an embarrassment that demands a real government strategy, the what, by when and how and resources.

We call upon the Prime Minister to take immediate action on this 100% preventable disease.

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STUDENT ARTISTS

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I welcome to Parliament Hill six exceptional student artists from Ottawa—Orléans.

[Translation]

I am constantly trying to support the arts in Ottawa—Orléans, and I am following your example, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

I distribute to every household an annual calendar with pen and ink drawings of local landmarks and hidden treasures. The 2010 calendar features the work of six wonderful artists, so I acknowledge the talent and creativity of Bethany Angel, Erika Lévesque, Amy Gabrielli, Hamza Hassan and Lindsay Rees, all of Gloucester High School, and Melissa Wong of St. Peter Catholic High School.

Also, I salute the dedication of Mrs. Linda Kennedy, a passionate educator at Gloucester High who organized her students' participation.

[Translation]

Without their hard work, this project would never have happened.

[English]

I thank them and I look forward to continuing to work with them to support the arts in Ottawa and in every corner of Canada.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals became Conservative accomplices by shooting themselves in the foot when it came time to have their motion passed. The motion would have forced the government to recognize the importance of contraception in improving maternal health in developing countries.

The Liberals were not even able to ensure that their own motion passed. This is definitely not a step forward for women and maternal health.

We certainly could not count on the Conservatives, who, with their misogyny and Reform ideologies on women's rights, deny that contraception can save lives.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of a maternal and child health initiative that includes, for women in developing countries, every family planning option, including contraception and abortion as a last resort. We will keep repeating this until it is included in the policy that the government intends to defend at the next G8 summit.

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[English]

WORLD TB DAY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate World Tuberculosis Day. We have a government-wide approach to this issue. From a health perspective, we recently passed Bill C-32, a bill that would curb smoking, particularly with our youth.

Healthy eating is an area that is vital to the prevention of this disease. Our initiative regarding healthy foods will encourage better eating habits, particularly in northern communities. This will keep tuberculosis at lower levels.

Our government has invested almost \$10 million already this year in aboriginal communities. Housing, poverty and clean water are priorities for our government. We are continuing to enhance clean drinking water monitoring in first nations communities while monitoring waterborne illness threats on reserve.

I would like to commend the doctors, nurses, researchers and community workers in Canada and abroad who are involved in the global fight against tuberculosis.

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● (1415)

WORLD SCHOOLS DEBATING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, for the first time in 22 years, Canada's national high school debating team won the world championships.

This was a true team Canada with members from across the country: from Halifax, Lyle Dobbin, Andrew Morrison and Vinayak Mishra; from Winnipeg, Sarah Levy; from Calgary, Veenu Goswami and Keenan MacNeal; and from Vancouver, Iqbal Kassam, Jonathan Carson and Sophie Bird.

In fact, I recently was a judge at the provincial championship debates where Iqbal and Jonathan did an incredible and outstanding job. The national team, despite being separated by thousands of kilometres, prepared over Skype and email before arriving in Doha, Qatar for the World Schools Debating Championships, the Olympics of debating. They bested the best debaters from 57 countries before beating team England on an 8 to 3 decision in the championship round.

I congratulate every member of the team and Coach Tracey Lee. They have done Canada proud.

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[Translation]

LEADER OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc leader sank to new hypocritical lows when he proudly laid out his investment strategy in last Saturday's *La Presse*.

According to BRANCHEZ-VOUS.com, his investments in Helios include investments in the oil sands. The leader of the resistance did not deny this fact yesterday.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with investing in a company involved in the oil industry, but when one is the leader of a political party that never misses an opportunity to criticize oil sands exploitation, such activity is disgustingly hypocritical, particularly since, as recently as last year, this particular leader said that "Supporting oil sands exploitation is contrary to Quebec's interests".

Does that mean that the Bloc leader's interests are contrary to those of Quebec? How can the Bloc leader justify benefiting from an industry that he has so roundly criticized? Clearly, when it comes to his own financial interests, the Bloc leader is somewhat less scrupulous.

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[English]

BRIAN MCINNIS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to commemorate the life of a very special Canadian, Brian McInnis, who passed away a couple of days ago while with his family in my riding.

He was a great contributor to this country. In fact, he worked for my father when he was chairman of the Progressive Conservative caucus. He worked in the research office of the Conservative Party here, serving his country, trying to build it and make it strong.

In my riding, he chose to work in the community, and work with me and our riding. Brian was the sort of fellow who never sought out praise. In fact, he always reached out to others to see how he could encourage them to develop and contribute to making the country that we have so wonderful. He is a real loss.

On behalf of my dad, with whom Brian is now communing I have no doubt, and all the residents and, if I may say, the members of the House, we are passing our condolences to his wife Minerva and family, and thank them for Brian's life.

*Oral Questions***LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA**

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank those Liberal members who voted for the estimates last night. For a moment, it looked like they had come to understand what Canadians already know, that our economic action plan is protecting the jobs of today while creating the jobs of tomorrow.

Alas, that moment faded when the Liberals voted again, but this time against jobs and growth.

The confusion is clearly coming from the Liberal leader. Last week, he prorogued himself to go on a tax and spend road show and missed his party's motion.

Yesterday, we told the Liberal leader that his motion was divisive, and we were right. He divided his caucus. While some stood against him, even more chose to sit out the Liberal leader's motion. One Liberal MP even told the media it was "clown city".

Maybe the MPs the Liberal leader locked out of his spenders conference have caught on to what we have been saying, "The Liberal leader is not in it for Canadians; he is only in it for himself".

* * *

[Translation]

LE DEVOIR

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to *Le Devoir*, which celebrated its 100th anniversary on January 10, 2010.

In his first editorial on January 10, 1910, Henri Bourassa wrote that "*Le Devoir* will support honest folk and denounce scoundrels". This sentence is not devoid of meaning. From the beginning, the newspaper has always defended the interests of the public. With a slogan of "Libre de penser"—free to think—for its 100th anniversary, this daily expresses the independent nature of the Quebec nation.

These are times of great change for the print media, and *Le Devoir* has successfully maintained its authenticity while using new platforms like the Internet.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to warmly congratulate the staff at *Le Devoir* for their rigour and their professionalism, which contribute to the tremendous success of this wonderful adventure that began when the first edition of *Le Devoir* was published 100 years ago. The Bloc Québécois and the Quebec nation wish the newspaper another century of freedom of expression.

* * *

• (1420)

LE DEVOIR

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 100 years, *Le Devoir* has had a significant influence on intellectual and political life in Quebec and Canada.

Henri Bourassa, André Laurendeau and Claude Ryan showed to what extent a brilliant editor can shape debate in society.

Congratulations to the men and women at *Le Devoir* who are here today on Parliament Hill. Congratulations as well to the journalists who are carrying on a tradition of fortitude and courage.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the newspaper, we pay tribute to *Le Devoir's* ideal, which is to create a space where debate respects people's intelligence and is anchored in humanist and progressive values.

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[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal MP for St. Paul's sends out ten percenters with images insulting to Canada's aboriginal population, and the Liberal MP for Vancouver South accuses our forces of war crimes, and the Liberal MP for Parkdale—High Park lamely criticizes the success of the economic action plan, it is no wonder the Liberal leader has not invited them to his thinkers conference this weekend.

In fact, the Liberal leader has not invited any of his MPs. But the members across the way should not feel left out. We know what is really going on.

Like the tax and spend road show the Liberal leader prorogued himself for last week, the conference he has locked his MPs out of is really simply a spenders conference. He is out to convince Canadians that huge spending and promises of higher taxes are where Canada should go.

But Canadians know that higher taxes kill jobs. A big spenders conference will not change that, not even in clown city.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Government of Saskatchewan agreed to restore funding to First Nations University. It is calling on the federal government to do the same. I visited the campus last week. I spoke to the president of the University of Regina. I spoke to the leadership of First Nations University. I met the students.

It is obvious that this institution is prepared to turn over a new leaf and start again. The Government of Saskatchewan is prepared to give it a second chance. The question is, why will the Government of Canada not do the same?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been discussed in the House several times before, this particular institution has had problems with use and misuse of public moneys for some years now. We continue to work to rectify this problem.

The Minister of Indian Affairs has been very clear. There will not be a blank cheque. We are working on options and, whatever we do, we will ensure that any money given is used in a way that is fully in the public interest and used properly.

Oral Questions

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a bigger issue than a single institution. The Conservatives' approach to post-secondary education is in question here. This is the government that cut the Canadian Council on Learning. This is the government that cut \$254 million from student grants and scholarships. This is the government that cut adult learning and literacy.

Let me ask the question again. The Prime Minister said he is exploring options. Why does he not follow the Government of Saskatchewan and give First Nations University a second chance? Why should the students of today be punished for the mistakes of yesterday?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, problems have been ongoing, as I have said already. The government will take steps that will ensure that moneys are properly used. We will take steps when we are sure that is the case. That is our priority on this side.

In terms of our support for education and higher learning, this government's budget got an A grade from the university presidents of this country. It is a shame that the Liberal Party chose to vote against those initiatives.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's cuts will affect not only aboriginal peoples, but students throughout the country as well. It is going to hurt our economy.

The government has cut \$250 million in grants and bursaries for students. It has cut adult education and literacy programs. In addition, the Conservatives have slapped a new tax on research, which will discourage top researchers from coming to Canada.

Why does the Prime Minister not understand that investing in training and education is vital?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those statements are absolutely false. This government is spending a record amount on post-secondary education and training in Canada. For that reason universities and colleges were pleased with and applauded the budget, as did the Liberals' former colleague, Allan Rock. It is shameful that the Liberal Party voted against post-secondary education and training for Canadians.

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[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that it is spring, hundreds of thousands of students will be on the hunt for a summer job. For far too many of these students, not getting a job means they cannot go back to school.

StatsCan tells us that almost 70% of all full-time students rely on summer employment to continue their studies, yet the minister has added a measly \$10 million to Canada Summer Jobs. That is \$10 per student. It does not even make a dent in the problem.

Why will the government not get serious about the crisis in student unemployment?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has just pointed out, our government is spending record amounts on post-secondary education and help for students, all items of which the hon. member voted against.

We have invested in infrastructure so that colleges and universities have more capacity and more modern capacity to teach students. We have removed taxes from scholarships and bursaries. We have expanded the grants program to help low and middle income students.

We are doing this to help students get the education they need for the future. The Liberals should be supporting it instead of criticizing it.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's students face an unemployment rate more than double the national average. There were over 128,000 fewer jobs for students last year. The minister's plan creates 3,500 extra jobs. What about the other 97% of students?

Over \$100 million was wasted this year alone on government advertising. Let us look at it: \$100 million for propaganda, and \$10 million to help summer students. What do summer students need to do to get real assistance? Do they wear Conservative billboards on campus?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whereas the previous government, the member's government, took an elitist approach to university and college education through its scholarship foundation, our government replaced that with a non-repayable grants program to help low and middle income students get up to \$250 a month so they can afford to attend university. The hon. member voted against that too.

We are working to make sure that every young person, every adult, who needs and wants further education can access it. That is why we are also providing the colleges and universities with funding. They all appreciate it. So should he.

* * *

[Translation]

HAITI

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the rapid withdrawal of Canadian troops from Haiti is causing a lot of problems. As the soldiers leave that country after participating in the rebuilding efforts, they are taking with them materials and manpower, which is causing more destabilization, when things like airport infrastructure were just starting to stabilize. The pace of the rebuilding effort has slowed down considerably.

Why did the Prime Minister not wait for the International Donors' Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti, which will be held on March 31 in New York, before withdrawing our troops from Haiti?

Oral Questions

● (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the military mission in Haiti is not a permanent or long-term mission. It is an emergency mission. The soldiers provided considerable assistance to the people of Haiti, either helping in the hospitals or providing food and drinking water. We are transitioning to a different, long-term, humanitarian mission, led by people who work in development.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would simply ask him to wait until March 31 before making any decisions. That is not permanent, I think.

The Bloc Québécois supported the Quebec Forest Industry Council's idea to send wood to rebuild homes in Haiti. That would of course happen as part of a multilateral framework, respecting Haiti's requests and the rules of the WTO.

Does the federal government plan on presenting such a proposal at the International Donors' Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti on March 31?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only say that the international community is still working with the Haitian government to come up with a long-term rebuilding plan. Obviously, we will consider all suggestions and will see what comes out of the conference on March 31.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's immigration minister, Yolande James, said that Quebec is behind in processing applications from Haiti in part because of federal red tape. One astonishing example is the case of Mrs. Ocessite, who was granted refugee status but had to leave her two children behind.

Canada has all kinds of nice things to say about its involvement in Haiti, so how can the minister explain his failure to speed up immigration procedures?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have taken special measures to speed up processing times for cases involving sponsorship of family members by Canadians of Haitian origin. We have deployed more personnel to our mission in Port-au-Prince and set up a visa office in Santo Domingo.

We have also increased the number of staff handling information requests in Montreal. Quebec said that it would be sending us 3,000 more case files for expedited processing, but we have not received a single one.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been no results to speak of.

Two months after the Kosovo incidents, the government had set up a special system for Kosovars wanting to come to Canada. Within six months, 7,000 people had found refuge here.

Can the government explain why it was so quick to respond to Kosovars' needs, yet is so slow to process applications from Haiti?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situations in Kosovo and

Haiti have nothing in common. The Kosovars were pre-selected as political refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees before they were allowed to enter Canada.

Applications from Haitian citizens have to be verified to ensure that a family relationship exists with a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.

The government must exercise due diligence in selecting immigrants to Canada. Nevertheless, we are working as quickly as we can.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nine months ago, the House passed an NDP motion to reform our pension system.

A quarter of a million seniors live in poverty in Canada. The Minister of Finance just announced today another very limited round of consultations. There is no action plan, when that is what is really needed.

Why did they not take advantage of the prorogation to hold consultations so that action could be taken now on behalf of our seniors?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance announced some very important measures for the reform of the pension system in October.

We are continuing to consult not only the public but the provinces as well. They are our partners in the Canada Pension Plan, and it is essential that they participate.

It was our government that created the tax-free savings account and it was our government that created income sharing for retired people, but the NDP voted against these measures for our seniors.

● (1435)

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot afford to wait. Just ask the people at AbitibiBowater or at Nortel. They stand to lose virtually everything, and they need action to be taken right now. However, we are not seeing that sense of urgency from the government.

Canadians have already made their views known about where they want to see pension reform. Our pensions critic went right across the country and brought the results to this House, where we had a vote that was adopted, including with the support of the government caucus.

Why can we not see action on these issues now? Why more delay?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in October alone the Minister of Finance announced a range of important actions to enhance protections for plan members, reduce funding volatility for defined benefit plans, make it easier for participants to negotiate changes to their pension arrangements, and an improved framework for defined contribution plans. He has taken specific actions with regard to specific federally regulated plans that have been in some difficulty to help those plans' members. Of course, as I mentioned, we brought in a tax free savings account and income splitting for pensioners.

The problem is, every time we do things for pensioners, the NDP votes against them.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why will the government not take action right now, for example, to allow Canadians to put more of their savings in the pension plan that they own? It is called the Canada pension plan. It would provide them with the retirement security they are looking for.

Nine months ago the House passed a motion calling for precisely that. All parties supported it. What is holding the government up? Why not take some action to help the seniors all across this country? No matter what their income level is, no matter where they stand in the social structure, they need help and they need support and we can do it now.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister. Order, please.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the Canada pension plan, as I mentioned earlier, discussions are ongoing with the provinces on options. The fact of the matter is that the provinces are partners in the Canada pension plan, and we have to have agreement between two levels of government to make major changes. That is why we are talking to them.

In the meantime, we have brought in other measures, a range of measures I have already talked about, in terms of improving pensions and improving the lives of pensioners.

When those things happen, why will the NDP not stand up and actually vote for positive action?

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TAXATION

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance misled Canadians by implying that post-doctoral students were making \$70,000 per year. He got that one wrong. The average salary of the 6,000 post-docs in Canada is barely half that amount. Post-docs are often young, have families and still carry student debt.

The minister promised he would not raise taxes. Why is the minister penalizing our post-doctoral students?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, there has been no change in the taxation policy of the federal government with respect to post-doctoral fellowships.

The Liberal government before us taxed them. They are taxed because they are post-doctoral fellows who are working.

In budget 2010 we announced \$45 million to establish new post-doctoral fellowships at the rate of \$70,000 per year each. I encourage the member opposite to read the budget.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is 140 people out of 6,000.

[*Translation*]

The minister can say what he wants, but the fact remains that he is imposing a new tax on 6,000 post-doctoral fellows. These post-docs do not earn salaries of \$70,000, as the minister twice stated yesterday. Post-docs are a very valuable resource. They help foster innovation and research.

Is the minister aware of this?

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about what the member opposite is advocating.

In budget 2010 we created \$45 million worth of post-doctoral fellowships, which were welcomed by the university presidents across Canada and welcomed by the university community. What the member opposite is suggesting is that these should not be taxed, contrary to the policy of his Liberal Party when it was in government, and contrary to public policy now.

He thinks people should earn \$70,000 a year, his friends in universities, and not pay tax. A lot of Canadians do not earn that kind of money and they pay their fair share.

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CHILD CARE

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, child care spaces will close in Ontario this year because the Conservative government cancelled the previous early learning and child care agreements with the provinces.

In Toronto alone, over 2,000 spaces are at risk. The last of the federal funding has dried up. Now at the eleventh hour, the Ontario government has to pick up the tab for the government's negligence.

Investing in our children provides them with the best possible start and the return on investment is huge. When will the government invest in the spaces necessary for early childhood development?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government, our party, believes that the best person to decide how a child should be raised is the parent. That is what we believe.

Oral Questions

We are investing \$250 million a year through the provinces for the creation of these selfsame child care spaces so that parents do have the choice. We provide this funding to all the provinces and territories. We expect that Ontario should spend it responsibly in providing the spaces it is expected to create.

[Translation]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government does not help parents. These \$50 a month are not good for anything when there are no daycare spaces. People already have to wait several years to get a space.

When will the Conservatives give all children a space in daycare and pre-school education?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. member that this is a provincial jurisdiction and it is up to the provinces to provide daycare spaces. It is our job to help them and we are doing that to the tune of \$250 million a year. In addition, we are giving \$100 a month to the parents of children six years of age or less to help them choose.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at the Standing Committee on International Trade, a lawyer confirmed that loan guarantees for forestry companies would not violate trade agreements if the loan parameters were in keeping with market standards. This is exactly what the Quebec Forest Industry Council is asking for: financing at a commercial rate to get companies through this crisis.

Since loan guarantees comply with international agreements, why is the government refusing to act?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, provinces currently have two cases before the London tribunal. They are currently in arbitration, and we will know the outcome later this year.

Let us take another look at Export Development Canada. This apparently does not constitute financial support. What does accounts receivable insurance do? It allows a company to go to its financial institution and obtain credit to keep the company going. In two years, \$30 billion has been provided for all forestry products, and \$20 billion of this has gone to Quebec.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister and the government keep talking about \$30 billion in loan guarantees, but this is not true. EDC does not offer cash. We know that the government is coming up with excuses so that it does not have to help Quebec's forestry industry, even though it gave \$10 billion to help the automotive industry, which is centred in Ontario. Yet the numbers of jobs in these two troubled sectors are similar.

Loan guarantees are legal. Why does the government refuse to listen to the pleas for help from Quebec's forestry industry?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said it once and I will say it again. Export Development

Canada offers three main types of financial products: access to credit, loan guarantees and accounts receivable insurance. Quebec has received more than \$20 billion over two years. I remember quite well having recently read a press release from AbitibiBowater's vice-president of finance. It spoke of EDC's extraordinary support. And we must not forget that as of February 28, 2010, \$1.4 billion in support had been provided for Canada's forestry industry, and \$610 million of this had gone to Quebec. We are working with our partners.

* * *

● (1445)

BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is forcing the broadcasting industry to convert to digital by 2011, but it still has no plan to ease the transition. The CRTC has recommended, just as the Bloc Québécois did in its budget suggestions, creating a fund to help consumers convert to digital. This recommendation is even more important now that consumers are facing the possibility of higher bills to cover the higher fees.

Does the minister intend to act on these recommendations and set up a digital transition fund?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are certainly looking for opportunities for the transition that will occur in 2011. If my colleague has any ideas, we are open to suggestion.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the only firm decision in the new television regulatory policy from the CRTC is to reduce Canadian content, and thus Quebec content, from 60% to 55%, which suggests that domestic production is a burden on broadcasters, while in Quebec we produce much more than 60%. This is another good reason to create a Quebec CRTC.

Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, just for once, defend culture and artists and ask the CRTC to review its decision?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague is concerned about the CRTC's decision, then I would ask her simply to call Mr. von Finckenstein at the CRTC. It was his decision and they are his policies. If she has an opinion on this, she can call him.

As far as Quebec artists are concerned, it is very clear that our government is making significant, responsible and efficient investments on behalf of taxpayers in the artistic community of our country. Gilbert Rozon, founder of the Just for Laughs festival in Montreal, said that the Prime Minister recognizes the role that the arts play in the nation's economy. We keep our promises.

[English]

THE BUDGET

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very specific question for the Minister of Finance.

On page 242 of the budget, in detailing the knowledge infrastructure program, it states that the University of Prince Edward Island will receive \$30 million in new money for infrastructure upgrades, but now we find out that may not be correct.

Would the minister confirm that the statement that he made, that he published in this House, is accurate, is correct and is factual in all respects?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to reply to the hon. member in more detail upon reviewing the situation.

I can tell the House that there has been a series of discussions with the government of P.E.I. about how to allocate the knowledge infrastructure program to maximize the positive impact for that province, and it has been done in collaboration with the province of P.E.I. This government has been four-square in making sure the province of P.E.I. has its fair share.

I can assure the House that this program is very well received in the province of Prince Edward Island.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the commitment in the budget was crystal clear. The answer provided by the minister certainly was not.

There is one of three things going on here in the House today. One, the statement is correct, and I would suggest that the minister across stand up and say the statement is correct. Two, there is a horrendous screw-up going on, and I would suggest that the minister stand up and say he will resign. Three, this statement is another attempt to mislead and deceive Canadians, and I would suggest that the minister stand up and say he apologizes.

Which is it?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I assure this place that when I was in Prince Edward Island to announce the knowledge infrastructure program, the response of Islanders was very positive.

They knew this was an investment in innovation, an investment in the students of P.E.I. They knew this government was putting its money toward good projects that were going to make a difference for innovation and competitiveness in P.E.I. That is the response I got from Islanders, and the hon. member should be ashamed of himself.

* * *

● (1450)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic coastal action program involves 16 non-profit environmental organizations. It trains and motivates volunteers to protect our environment.

Last year, 1,100 volunteers worked more than 35,000 hours in environmental action. The program does applied research, educa-

Oral Questions

tional campaigns and communications. It is an essential and important organization, and it is about to lose its funding.

Will the minister now confirm funding for ACAP, or is he going to fail to protect the environment yet again?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is not correct in suggesting the funding has been terminated.

We value the working relationship we have with the Atlantic coastal action program. Last year, Environment Canada participated, as I recall, in some 59 different projects; that means approximately \$1.2 million. These are grants and contributions from the Government of Canada.

When I was last in Nova Scotia and announced consideration of Sable Island as a national park, some questions were brought to my attention by members of the public about how the dollars within that program were allocated, which organizations they were allocated to and whether we were achieving results. Since that time, I have been carefully scrutinizing this program.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, five environmental groups in New Brunswick may have their budgets cut and no longer be able to implement certain programs if the Conservatives do not provide funding for the Atlantic coastal action program.

In my riding, the Société d'aménagement de la rivière Madawaska et du lac Témiscouata may have to scale back its conservation programs. Six months ago, the provincial government gave it \$60,000, whereas the Conservatives gave it nothing.

Why did the Conservatives decide to end this partnership after 17 years, when so much remains to be done? Why make more cuts to environmental programs?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there certainly is much to be done in terms of conservation. That is why this government has in fact expanded Canada's national parks footprint by 30% over the past four years. That is why we have invested over the duration of the government close to \$1 billion with conservation groups. That is why we will in fact carry on with the Atlantic coastal action program after due consideration of where those dollars will be invested, with which organizations and what kind of results Canadians are seeing.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, can the right hon. Prime Minister please update the House on any diplomatic progress that has been achieved toward removing U.S. dual national restrictions as they relate to the international traffic in arms regulations following President Obama's speech of last week?

Oral Questions

As we know, these restrictions prevent many Canadians of ethnic origin from working for Canadian companies involved in projects that include sensitive U.S. products.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to discuss this issue with Vice President Biden in Vancouver. Since then, President Obama has outlined his intention to work towards resolving the dual national problem. This is a hopeful sign and I am thankful to the administration for this step forward.

We will continue to work with our U.S. counterparts to ensure we resolve this issue in a way that respects both our national securities and also the rights of all Canadians to be treated equally under the law.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the gap between American and Canadian food safety standards is almost as embarrassing as it is concerning. The government promised 170 new inspectors, but a senior CFIA official says there are only 35 in training and 35 to be hired over the next two years.

Last week, the minister stood in this place and said, “We will have hundreds of new inspectors by this time next year dedicated to that front line operation”. Somebody cannot count. Is it the CFIA or is it the minister?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member I passed math in school and can count.

What I said was we will have hundreds of new inspectors since we formed government. We will. To March 2009, we had net 445 new inspectors working. We continue to add to that line.

I know the member opposite is listening to one particular union. There are two that represent CFIA. He does not have the full numbers from both of them.

•(1455)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was actually the management of the CFIA, not its union.

More empty promises will not keep our food safe. The fact is that since the 2008 listeriosis crisis, the number of meat inspectors on the ground has not increased. The government waited for the U.S. to force it to start fixing the gap between American and Canadian inspection standards. Even though the government promised to complete it by last January, we still have not seen the resource audit demanded by the Weatherill report, which it requested, to know how many inspectors we really need.

Canadians deserve a clear answer. When will the long-overdue inspectors be in place?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the audit has begun and is in full swing to know the efficacy of the CFIA, where we need people and how many more we need.

We have not waited for the full report. We have begun to hire them. We put in budgetary moneys, \$75 million, immediately after

Weatherill. We have allocated another \$13 million. Together that will hire 170 new placements within CFIA. We are getting the job done.

The unfortunate part is that every time we tend to move forward, the NDP votes against those initiatives. That is shameful.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is refusing to tell unemployed people in eastern Quebec whether or not it will extend the transitional measures. The Conservative member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup has already given up. He says that the government has decided that it will not extend the transitional measures.

Can the government tell us today if it intends to add three weeks of benefits to cover the spring gap?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say again, as I said last week, that with regard to employment insurance and transitional measures—for the Lower St. Lawrence and the North Shore, among others—we are still studying this matter.

I would like to remind members that this measure has been extended five times since 2000. We are taking a hard look at this measure. I would also remind the House that we have put in place six or seven new measures to help the unemployed in recent months and that, each time, the Bloc, the resistance party, voted against them.

* * *

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the latest supplementary estimates show that the government spent less than expected on the guaranteed income supplement, and that the surplus will go into the consolidated revenue fund instead of being used to improve the living conditions of our seniors who survive below the poverty line. On May 27, 2009, the opposition parties supported a Bloc Québécois motion to improve the GIS.

What is the government waiting for to improve the guaranteed income supplement and to help our poorest seniors?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done a number of things to help seniors, and especially our poorest seniors. For example, we increased the guaranteed income supplement exemption, before the GIS has to be reimbursed, from \$500 to \$3,500.

We are also helping seniors through pensions. But the Bloc Québécois voted against all these measures.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 14 months ago, the Conservatives promised pension reform within 90 days, and today they recycled that promise again, some 330 days overdue. Some, including CARP, have likened the Conservative approach to serial stalling when it comes to pension reform, while the Liberals are clearly ready to act now.

If the minister is serious, why will he not immediately address issues such as income trusts and bankruptcy amendments? Is the government only stalling until the provinces get tired of waiting and move first?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals cannot even figure out how to vote in this House. Now they want to tell us how to run the pension system.

Their idea of a conference is to do something like they are going to do this weekend: hold this meeting that has the oxymoronic name, Liberal thinkers' conference.

These important issues are not done on the back of an envelope. They are not done with a half wit. They are done cautiously and they are done in co-operation with our provincial partners. We are doing consultations. So is British Columbia. So is Ontario. So is Alberta.

• (1500)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those provinces wanted to act months ago and the Prime Minister who wanted to privatize the Canada pension plan is hardly one to act at all.

[Translation]

I imagine that the Prime Minister still thinks that the Canada pension plan should be privatized instead of strengthened.

Given the Prime Minister's Reform ideology, how can we believe that he wants to improve the Canada pension plan?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said this morning in announcing the further listening to Canadians before the finance ministers meet again in May, which is what British Columbia is doing, which is what Alberta is doing, which is what Yukon is doing, all options are on the table.

I know the official opposition on the back of an envelope has decided on a voluntary CPP plan. I know the NDP on the back of another envelope, or maybe the same envelope, has decided that it has to be a mandatory CPP plan.

All options are on the table as they are with our provincial partners and our territorial partners. We are prepared to listen to Canadians.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Saskatchewan government said it had faith in the new administration and governance of First Nations University. It committed \$5 million to keep FNUC open in an agreement with the University of Regina.

The minister said he pulled the funding from FNUC because the province did it first.

Will the minister again follow Saskatchewan's lead and commit to keeping the university open by providing full federal funding to this agreement, or is the Conservative promise to first nations education just another hollow promise?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have promised is that any funds that will be used at FNUC or any other post-secondary education facility will have accountability, transparency and will be used for the purposes intended.

That has been the problem with that university for a number of years now and why both the federal and provincial governments and the university teachers association and others have chastised it and condemned it so soundly.

The MOU that is in place right now still does not flow any money to it. There are still agreements that have to be negotiated. There are still specifics on how this is going to work.

We look forward to the work of that committee. We are not a member of that committee because it is a provincial jurisdiction, but we look forward to the details as they come forward.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister often talks about education following the individual, but if there are no institutions to provide services, funding to individuals simply does not help.

That is the situation facing women served by women's shelters in Montreal and Alberta. The end of the aboriginal healing fund will close programs for women in Montreal and cuts by INAC women's shelters in Alberta have put their programming in jeopardy.

Oral Questions

Shelters save lives. Why is the minister turning his back on vulnerable aboriginal women right across the country?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not true.

While this government has moved ahead not only to support programs to prevent violence against women and violence against aboriginals generally, we also increased the funding from \$18 million that we inherited from the Liberals on this program to over \$30 million this year. It has been increased to the highest level ever.

Not only that, we have also committed to and started construction on five new women's shelters across the country. The funding is there. The funding has increased and we continue to do the job.

Support from the NDP would be useful but it is not necessary. We are still going to get the job done.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government was working hard to improve Canada's retirement system long before it was on the opposition's radar. Last year we consulted with Canadians and made important reforms to make federally regulated pensions more stable.

Recognizing that fewer than 10% of pensions are federally regulated, we have built on that first step by working with our provincial partners to create a national solution to pensions.

Could the Minister of Finance please update the House on the next steps?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians work hard to realize their retirement dreams.

Today I announced our government will give everyday Canadians an unprecedented opportunity to be part of the debate on Canada's retirement income system. This will be cross-country and public from town halls, round tables, online discussions and much more over the next several weeks leading to the meeting of finance ministers in the month of May, when we will talk about the results of our consultations with our provincial partners responsible for pension reform.

* * *

• (1505)

TUBERCULOSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Tuberculosis Day. Tuberculosis is Canada's forgotten disease. The tuberculosis rate among status Indians is 31 times higher than that of non-aboriginal Canadians, and the rate among Inuit is 186 times higher.

Why does the government think that sub-Saharan TB rates are acceptable among aboriginal Canadians?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as someone from the north, I understand how serious this issue is. Our government takes the health and safety of all citizens very

seriously and remains vigilant in the efforts to address tuberculosis. Our government has almost doubled its spending on the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis in aboriginal communities compared to the Liberal Party in the last four years of its time in government.

This year alone, we have contributed about \$10 million. More than that, we are addressing a number of other areas that will help prevent the spread of tuberculosis, including infrastructure, investment in housing, tobacco, food—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ahuntsic.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a Correctional Service of Canada official told the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security that pedophiles are still being sent to a halfway house near an elementary school in my riding.

The Montreal school board asked the government to stop this practice. The member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, the former public safety minister, told the House that he would direct his department to put an end to the situation.

Three years have passed since then. Will the new Minister of Public Safety finally protect children by giving the Correctional Service of Canada clear instructions not to put pedophiles in halfway houses near schools?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my predecessor did indeed indicate that he would look into the matter. I will get back to the member. However, I find it passing strange that that member from that party would stand up and indicate that those members are concerned about pedophiles when, in fact, they voted against a bill that would strengthen penalties for pedophiles.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the members of the Canadian National High Schools Debate Team reigning world champions: Iqbal Kassam, Jonathan Carson, Veenu Goswami, Keenan MacNeal, Lyle Dobbin, Sophie Bird, Sarah Levy, Andrew Morrison and Vinayak Mishra.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie on a point of order.

LE DEVOIR

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of this House to move the following motion:

That the House congratulate the newspaper *Le Devoir*, a free and independent source of information that defends the values of freedom, equality, solidarity and integrity, on its one hundredth anniversary and for its outstanding contribution to public life.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1510)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Over the past 100 years, *Le Devoir* has become a respected reference among political and cultural newspapers. As such, it is my great pleasure to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of Mr. Bernard Descôteaux, publisher of this distinguished newspaper, and Ms. Josée Boileau, editor in chief. On behalf of all my fellow parliamentarians, I wish to congratulate you on this 100th anniversary.

I invite all hon. members to join me in Room 216, immediately following the taking of the divisions, to celebrate this most important anniversary. Keep up the good work.

* * *

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 8

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, March 23, 2010, the House will now proceed to the putting of the question on Motion No. 8 under ways and means proceedings.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1515)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 17)

YEAS

Members

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Abbott | Ablonczy |
| Aglukkaq | Albrecht |
| Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac) | Allison |
| Ambrose | Anders |
| Anderson | Armstrong |
| Arthur | Ashfield |
| Baird | Benoit |
| Bernier | Bezan |
| Blackburn | Blaney |
| Block | Boucher |
| Boughen | Braid |
| Breitkreuz | Brown (Leeds—Grenville) |
| Brown (Newmarket—Aurora) | Brown (Barrie) |
| Bruinooge | Cadman |
| Calandra | Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country) |
| Cannon (Pontiac) | Carrie |
| Casson | Chong |
| Clarke | Clement |
| Cummins | Davidson |
| Day | Dechert |
| Dei Mastro | Devolin |
| Dreeshen | Duncan (Vancouver Island North) |
| Dykstra | Fast |
| Finley | Flaherty |
| Fletcher | Galipeau |
| Gallant | Généreux |
| Glover | Golding |
| Goodyear | Gourde |
| Grewal | Guergis |
| Harper | Harris (Cariboo—Prince George) |
| Hawn | Hiebert |
| Hill | Hoback |
| Hoepfner | Holder |
| Jean | Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission) |
| Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's) | Kenney (Calgary Southeast) |
| Kent | Kerr |
| Komarnicki | Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings) |
| Lake | Lauzon |
| Lebel | Lemieux |
| Lobb | Lukiwski |
| Lunn | Lunney |
| MacKay (Central Nova) | MacKenzie |
| Mark | Mayes |
| McColeman | McLeod |
| Menzies | Merrifield |
| Miller | Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) |
| Moore (Fundy Royal) | Nicholson |
| Norlock | O'Connor |
| O'Neill-Gordon | Obhrai |
| Oda | Paradis |
| Petit | Poilievre |
| Prentice | Preston |
| Raitt | Rajotte |
| Rathgeber | Reid |
| Richards | Richardson |
| Rickford | Ritz |
| Saxton | Scheer |
| Schellenberger | Shea |
| Shiple | Shory |
| Smith | Sorenson |
| Stanton | Storseth |
| Strahl | Sweet |
| Thompson | Tilson |
| Toews | Trost |

Private Members' Business

Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young— 143	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Ashton
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Beaudin
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bigras	Blais
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Donnelly
Dorion	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter	Faille
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guay	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Hyer	Julian
Kania	Laforest
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lavallée	Layton
Lee	Lemay
Leslie	Lessard
Lévesque	Malhi
Malo	Maloway
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Oliphant	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Proulx	Rae
Rafferty	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Savoie
Siksay	Simson
St-Cyr	Stoffer
Szabo	Thibeault
Tonks	Trudeau
Valeriotte	Vincent
Wrzesnewskyj	Zarac— 124

PAIRED

Members

Bonsant	Calkins
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Payne	Roy
Thi Lac	Uppal— 6

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (removal of waiting period), as reported (without amendment) from committee, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, March 23, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-241, under private members' business.

• (1525)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 18)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Arthur
Ashton	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brison
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crombie
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Donnelly
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Foote
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes	Hyer
Julian	Kania
Kennedy	Laforest
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Leslie

Lessard
Malhi
Maloway
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McGuinty
McTeague
Mendes
Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Oliphant
Pacetti
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Patri
Plamondon
Proulx
Rafferty
Regan
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Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
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McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
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Minna
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Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Ouellet
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paquette
Pearson
Pomerleau
Rae
Ratansi
Rodriguez
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simson
Stoffer
Thibeault
Trudeau
Vincent
Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Flaherty
Galipeau
Généreux
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Holder
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mayes
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Armstrong
Baird
Bernier
Blackburn
Block
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Cummins
Day
Del Mastro
Dreeschen
Dykstra
Finley
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goodyear
Grewal
Harper
Hawn
Hill
Hoepfner
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lobb
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mark
McColeman
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon

Points of Order

Obhrai
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Scheer
Shea
Shory
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Yelich
Oda
Petit
Prentice
Raitt
Rathgeber
Richards
Rickford
Saxton
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PAIRED

Members

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Payne
Thi Lac
Calkins
Roy
Uppal— 6

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

REFERENCES TO MEMBERS OR MINISTERS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a longstanding rule that during speeches, members may not allude to the presence or absence of another member or minister in the House. This rule can be found on page 614 of O'Brien and Bosc.

I would like to call your attention to a situation that has been troubling me a great deal for the past few days. It has been brought to my attention that on several occasions, namely, on March 11, 12, 18 and 19, 2010, the member for Ottawa—Orléans used the social networking site Twitter to report the exact number of members of each party present in the House, even mentioning the names of some members who were absent or present.

There is another longstanding rule that we cannot do indirectly what is not allowed directly. If a member is not allowed to make comments on the presence or absence of members in the House during speeches, this rule should also apply to new technology. In other words, when members are sitting in the House and therefore have access to privileged information, they should not be allowed to share that information outside the House.

I would therefore seek the unanimous consent of the House to table a copy of the comments published by the member for Ottawa—Orléans. I find this situation even more appalling considering the fact that the member for Ottawa—Orléans was once an occupant of the chair and, as such, he is very familiar with this rule.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I would like you to rule on this matter and call the member to order.

Routine Proceedings

● (1530)

The Speaker: The matter raised by the hon. member for Joliette is certainly important. I will examine the facts he presented and come back to the House with my ruling in due course.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADA-JORDAN FREE TRADE ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-8, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present today, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank all of the members of the committee for their hard work and collaboration.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-500, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House for allowing me to reintroduce a bill that two years ago passed this House and went to the Senate.

The bill is a reintroduction of the tax deductibility of RESPs, registered education savings plans. The contributions would give young people an opportunity to get access to and acquire higher education.

I want to thank my hon. colleague for Mississauga South for graciously accepting to second the motion. It is significant that he also supports the bill, given his background both in terms of finance as well as accounting. I am very pleased to receive his support.

In the last decade, the average yearly tuition for an undergraduate degree almost doubled, and the average debt load upon completion is now in excess of \$20,000. With projections indicating that the cost

of an undergraduate degree will reach \$100,000 in the near future, families need assistance to help save money for post-secondary education. I am pleased to reintroduce this bill.

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

* * *

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (pension protection).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to introduce an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other acts, on behalf of the active and retired forestry and manufacturing workers in the riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Northern Ontario, and indeed other active and retired workers around the country who fear for the security of their hard-earned retirement income.

This legislation is long overdue and respects the right of hard-working Canadians to the pensions they have earned throughout their working lives. I would also like to thank the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for his strong leadership on this issue and his ongoing involvement in the promotion of this bill.

This bill should ensure that underfunded pension plans receive a greater share of the assets of bankrupt or restructuring companies. It would do so by moving pensions up the priority list in the bankruptcy and restructuring process, which requires no spending of revenue whatsoever by the federal government.

With this bill, it is clear that New Democrats stand once again with workers and their families. I hope that all members of this place will recognize the importance of this balanced bill and offer it their full support.

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

* * *

● (1535)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House commends the Government of Canada for the clear position it has taken against the Anti-Homosexuality Bill currently being debated in the Parliament of Uganda and encourages continued direct diplomatic efforts in conjunction with other countries and organizations to see the bill withdrawn, homosexuality fully decriminalized in Uganda, and the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and transsexual Ugandans fully respected.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

* * *

COMPETITION BUREAU

[Translation]

PETITIONS

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the request of the people in my riding, essentially the municipality of Richmond, I am presenting a petition. The people are against Bill C-384.

[English]

NATIONAL MEMORIAL WALL

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the urging of veterans across the country, in particular Ed Forsyth, I wish to table today a petition on behalf of the residents of Prince Edward—Hastings and Canadian citizens from across Ontario. They are calling upon Parliament to establish a national memorial wall, comprising the names of all of Canada's fallen soldiers and peacekeepers.

In the history of our nation, over 100,000 Canadian men and women paid the ultimate price in defence of freedom of democracy and the rule of law. Their names should be immortalized in a single location, publicly accessible, where all can pay their respects for their sacrifice.

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition today calling on the government to restore its funding to KAIROS.

The petitioners point out that KAIROS is a Canadian ecumenical justice initiatives group that promotes sustainable development, human rights and peace through education, advocacy and cooperative programs linking more than 21 organizations in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.

The programs delivered by KAIROS benefit hundreds of thousands of people in marginalized communities who are facing humanitarian crises as well as political oppression.

Specifically, the petitioners point out that the cut in funding will mean cuts to vital projects such as a legal clinic to assist women who are victims of the ongoing violence in the Congo, African youth organizations, a women's organization protecting against human rights abuses in Colombia, grassroots local support to peace and human rights work, women in Israel and Palestinian territories who work as partners for peace in the Middle East, and various environmental initiatives.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to immediately restore its funding relationship with KAIROS, so that this respected ecumenical organization can continue to improve the lives of millions of people living in poverty and conflict around the world.

While I know that the rules of the House do not allow me to endorse a petition, let me just say how delighted I am to table this petition on behalf of the over 250 signatories from my riding of Hamilton Mountain.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this petition has several hundred signatures of voters in the riding of Manicouagan.

Consumers constantly have to deal with fluctuating gas prices. This situation has been going on for far too long. The current Competition Act has major shortcomings that prevent the Competition Bureau from initiating an investigation.

Accordingly, the petitioners are calling on the government to have the House of Commons pass Bill C-452 to authorize the commissioner of competition to launch investigations into the fluctuation of gas prices.

• (1540)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union collected signatures to petition the government to continue government funding of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

The USSU Women's Centre is a pro-choice organization that serves as a resource and information centre that, among other things, organizes around issues of gender equality and human rights. It supports the work of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in its work to promote education, access to birth control, safe abortions, and HIV prevention in countries around the world.

Both the petitioners and I look forward to the minister's response.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by dozens of Canadians.

The petition has a lot of whereas clauses in it. One clause draws the attention of the House of Commons to the fact that there has been ongoing violence against workers and members of civil society by paramilitaries in Colombia who are closely associated with the current Uribe government with more than 2,200 trade unionists murdered since 1991. As well, there has been a host of violence committed against indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, human rights activists, workers, farmers, labour leaders and journalists.

The petitioners call on Parliament to reject the Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out, and that the agreement be renegotiated along the principles of fair trade which would take environmental and social impacts fully into account while genuinely respecting labour rights and the rights of all affected parties.

Routine Proceedings

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions today.

The first petition is signed by thousands of Canadians who are calling on Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights. Bill C-310 will compensate air passengers with all Canadian carriers, including charters anywhere they fly.

The bill provides compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. It also addresses issues such as late and misplaced bags. It requires all-inclusive pricing by airlines in all their advertising.

The legislation has been in effect for five years in Europe. Why should Air Canada passengers receive better treatment in Europe than in Canada. Airlines will have to inform passengers of flight changes, either delays or cancellations. The new rules must be posted in the airport. Airlines must inform passengers of their rights and the process to file for compensation. If the airlines follow the rules, it will cost them nothing.

The petitioners call on the government to support Bill C-310 which would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by Canadians calling on the Canadian government to match funds personally donated by the citizens of Canada for the earthquake victims in Chile.

The Chilean community has been mobilized in Canada. A fundraiser was held on Saturday, March 6, in Winnipeg where it raised \$10,000. This past Saturday, March 20, at the University of Manitoba, over 1,000 people showed up for a fundraiser there.

The petitioners ask, when will the Prime Minister give the same treatment to the earthquake victims in Chile as he did for the earthquake victims in Haiti, and match funds personally donated by Canadians to help the earthquake victims in Chile?

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table signed petitions addressing concerns pertaining to the proposed Canada-Colombia trade deal. The petitioners underline the following concerns: the ongoing violence against workers and members of civil society, including that 2,200 trade unionists have been murdered since 1991; and the fact the framework is the same as that of NAFTA, which has basically benefited the large multinational corporations with little benefit to working families.

Moreover, labour agreements such as this one have not been effective at protecting labour standards. The labour protection provisions in this agreement make a mockery of human rights, and widespread and very serious human rights violations are a daily occurrence.

This trade deal is not a fair deal that would respect social justice, human rights, labour rights and environmental stewardship as prerequisites to trade.

As well, the petitioners opine that the Prime Minister is ignoring concerns and proceeding without due diligence.

These Canadians call on Parliament to reject the Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out and the above noted concerns are addressed, and that any deal be a fair trade deal that would respect environmental and social impacts and respect human and labour rights.

I am pleased to table the petitions on behalf of these Canadians.

* * *

• (1545)

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.

* * *

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.

The Speaker: The Chair has received notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt. I will hear him now.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

PHOTOGRAPHY OF MEMBERS AT COMMITTEE

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege with regard to a picture taken at committee by Tisha Ashton, who I believe is employed by the member for Kings—Hants, my good colleague on the international trade committee.

She placed that picture along with a statement on Facebook. The picture shows me with my eyes closed, not an uncommon result when snapping a photo. My staff have drawers of these photos with me in my office.

Her comments below the picture were, "sleeping at committee... again".

First of all, taking pictures during a committee proceeding is against the rules. Second, she has used this photo to misrepresent what I was doing. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, I did not fall asleep during the committee proceedings. In fact, the transcripts of the committee show me taking a five minute round as the second government questioner at committee.

This photo and her comments have tarnished my reputation in the eyes of my constituents.

On page 288 of O'Brien and Bosc it states:

Before the advent of broadcasting of House of Commons' proceedings, photographs of the House during a sitting were taken with the permission of the House. In the late 1970s, once the House had dealt with the question of broadcasting, the matter of still photography arose. There were no provisions for print media to take pictures of the House at work, except by special arrangement, whereas the electronic media now had access to images of every sitting of the House. On a trial basis, and now standard practice, a photographer was allowed behind the curtains on each side of the House during Question Period. The photographers are employed by a news service agency which supplies other news organizations under a pooling arrangement. When in the chamber, they operate in accordance with the principles governing the use of television cameras, described in chapter 24, "The Parliamentary Record". Only these photographers, and the official photographers employed by the House of Commons, are authorized to take photographs of the Chamber while the House is in session; even Members—

—I repeat, even members—

—are forbidden from taking photographs.

Standing Order 116 provides that:

In a standing, special or legislative committee, the Standing Orders shall apply so far as may be applicable, except the Standing Orders as to the election of a Speaker, seconding of motions, limiting the number of times of speaking and the length of speeches.

Thus the rule for taking photos in the House would also apply to committee, and since Tisha Ashton is not the official photographer, she has breached the rules of this House.

These rules, Mr. Speaker, are intended to protect members and the proceedings of committees.

On page 214 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* there is a reference to reflection on members. It states:

The House of Commons is prepared to find contempt in respect to utterances within the category of libel and slander and also in respect of utterance which do not meet the standard. As put by Bourinot, "any scandalous and libellous reflection on the proceedings of the House is a breach of privileges of Parliament..." and "libels or reflections upon members individually—"

Mr. Speaker, a picture does say a thousand words and a misleading description below the picture says volumes.

I would also reference for you, Mr. Speaker, a Speaker's ruling from October 29, 1980, on page 4213 of *Hansard*. The Speaker said that:

in the context of contempt, it seems to me that to amount to contempt, representations or statements about...members should not only be erroneous or incorrect, but, rather, should be purposely untrue and improper and import a ring of deceit.

The actions of Ms. Ashton, Mr. Speaker, on the face of it, or I should say, on the Facebook of it, are untrue, improper and definitely import a ring of deceit.

I realize the last two rulings I referred to were brought down before we had such things as Facebook, cameras, cellphones and

Routine Proceedings

Blackberries. However, as you know, Mr. Speaker, contempt is intentionally flexible to address changes in technology that can breach our privileges.

On page 83 of O'Brien and Bosc, this very issue is addressed. It states:

Throughout the Commonwealth most procedural authorities hold that contempts, as opposed to "privileges", cannot be enumerated or categorized. Speaker Sauvé explained in a 1980 ruling: "...while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits. When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred".

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to consider my arguments and find that the actions of Ms. Ashton constitute contempt and a breach of my privileges.

• (1550)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I became aware of this during question period. At that time, I sent a note to the hon. member apologizing for it. I have spoken with my staff member and asked her to take it off Facebook. Again, I was unaware of it and I apologize to the hon. member for any slight or contempt that he may feel was done to him, and I am very sorry about it.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on the same point of order.

While I applaud our hon. friend, the member for Kings—Hants, for offering an apology, I should point out that I do not think that resolves the situation.

I would point out a most recent ruling that you made, Mr. Speaker, on a question of privilege brought forward by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, at which time he indicated that a ten percenter had been sent into his riding under the name of the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

When the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin made a heartfelt apology in this House, he indicated that while a ten percenter did indeed go into the member's riding and contained inaccurate information, the content of that ten percenter had in fact been written by a staff member, not by the member himself.

In your ruling, Mr. Speaker, you still found a prima facie case on a breach of privilege, even though it was admitted, both by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and by the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, that the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin was not responsible for the literature itself. It was written by someone else. I believe, Mr. Speaker, you would find in your ruling, even though this was perhaps implied rather than stated verbally, that members are responsible for their staff.

Mr. Speaker, I would just ask that you apply the same reasoning in your determination of the breach of privilege brought forward by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore to this case, because, quite clearly, the reputation of my colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt has been tarnished. This Facebook posting is definitely injurious to my colleague's reputation. It implies to his constituents that he was not working on their behalf and that he was asleep during a committee meeting. While I can appreciate the fact that the member for Kings—Hants may not have taken the photograph himself, his staff member did and he is responsible for his staff member.

Government Orders

I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, to find, as you did in the case of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, that there is a prima facie case for breach of privilege in this instance.

The Speaker: I appreciate the submissions of hon. members on this point, but I point out two things that I think are important.

First, whether or not there has been an apology that satisfies the hon. member or all hon. members, I do not think is relevant at this point. In my view, this is a matter of privilege in the committee. It is the privileges of the committee that have been damaged, not of the House.

The member for Saskatoon—Humboldt who has raised this issue had his privileges breached as a member of the committee, and normally committees deal with matters involving their proceedings first. If committee members wish to make a report to the House suggesting that members' privileges have been breached by something that happened in the committee, they can do that. They can come to the House with a report, which the House can then consider. However, the normal practice would be for this to be raised first in committee, where the committee makes a decision on what went wrong and then reports the matter to the House.

Therefore, I would invite the hon. member to return to the next committee meeting and raise this issue there and see if the committee wishes to make a report on the matter to the House. This may result in the matter then being referred to another committee, namely, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, for study as a breach of privilege.

However, I do not believe it is for the Speaker to rule on whether what happened in a committee was or was not a breach of members' privileges. It is the normal practice for the committee to deal with that. Hence, I am asking the committee, of which the hon. member is a member, to deal with the matter first.

I sympathize and I think the statements here have been clear. The member says he was not asleep in the committee. I cannot imagine anybody falling asleep in a committee, let alone in the House with the things that go on in this place. I do not think the member should have a worry on that score.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a final submission, Mr. Speaker.

I would point out to your attention that while you are quite correct that in this instance the taking of the photograph did occur in committee, the posting was on Facebook, a social media, that can be broadcast worldwide, if the posting went viral.

While this might have occurred in committee, the impact on my colleague is certainly not a committee matter. It has impugned and hurt his reputation as a member of Parliament, a member who sits in this House. So while the instance might have been generated in committee, its long-lasting impact goes far beyond committee.

•(1555)

The Speaker: The fact is the picture was taken in the committee. That is my point. I have no idea, but maybe the committee was allowing people to take pictures in there. It is for the committee to decide, in my view, and report to the House. We should hear from the committee before we make decisions on questions of privilege arising out of it. I understand that the photograph has been removed

from the site. That is what we have been told now. It is not there now.

I think we had better have the committee report on this. I do not think it is an unreasonable suggestion on my part to have that happen first. If it comes back and the House wants to deal with it by sending it to another committee, we can happily do that as a chamber. We are entitled to do that. However, I think the committee ought to make a decision because it may have allowed cameras in, for all we know. I have no idea. I am not a member of the committee. I do not attend its meetings.

Perhaps we could proceed with the orders of the day, but before we do, I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by eight minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC) moved that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, our government has indicated the priority that we place on implementing free trade agreements to help Canadian businesses compete in international markets. Today's debate on approval of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement reflects this objective of creating jobs and opportunities for Canadian workers through trade.

[Translation]

It is more important than ever to ensure economic cooperation with key partners. The government is therefore determined to establish and strengthen bilateral and multilateral trade relations to ensure the continuing prosperity of Canadians.

The global economic crisis emphasized the importance and urgency of expanding trade and investment relationships through improved market access.

[English]

Our government is committed to pursuing bilateral and multi-lateral trade relationships that bring continued prosperity to Canadians right here at home. The global economic crisis emphasizes the importance and urgency of expanding trade and investment relations to improve market access.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is one of many efforts by our government to expand opportunities for Canadian business. As members know, we have entered an age of fierce global competition.

[Translation]

Emerging economies continue climbing the value chain and establishing themselves in an ever-widening range of sectors.

[English]

Canadian businesses and Canadian workers are up to the challenge of competing internationally.

[Translation]

We must seek out more trade and investment opportunities for our businesses. Our government recognizes these challenges.

[English]

We are standing up for Canadian business to ensure that they can compete and succeed worldwide, and in particular, Canadian workers.

The government launched negotiations with Colombia and other Andean partners in June 2007. I am proud to say that we continue working hard to create new opportunities abroad to benefit Canadian workers at home.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, along with the related agreements on the environment and labour are an important part of this broader trade agenda.

[Translation]

Canada currently has long-standing free trade agreements in force with the United States and Mexico under the North America Free Trade Agreement, and agreements with Israel, Chile and Costa Rica.

[English]

Under this government, we recently implemented new free trade agreements with the European Free Trade Association and Peru.

In 2009, we also signed a free trade agreement with Jordan, which I had the pleasure of tabling in the House today.

On August 11, 2009, the government successfully concluded free trade negotiations with Panama. At the announcement of the conclusion of the Panama negotiations, the Prime Minister himself emphasized that Canada's commitment was to stronger trade partnerships.

We are on the right track and are also looking ahead to other important partners in the world. At the Canada-European Union Summit last May, the government launched negotiations toward a comprehensive economic and trade agreement with the European Union. We also remain dedicated to advancing our ongoing free trade negotiations with other partners, including Central American countries, the Caribbean community and the Dominican Republic.

Those are all examples of how hard the government is working to pursue, develop and expand trade opportunities and relationships that work for Canadians. Our trade agenda is ambitious and Canadians deserve the opportunities our government is continuing to deliver.

We are currently working to launch negotiations with new partners, such as Morocco and the Ukraine, and exploring deeper trade ties with India and Japan.

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The government is also working to send a clear message to the world: Canada is open for business. And we are getting the job done.

Our recent economic action plan is making significant investments in our national innovation strategy. We have also cut corporate taxes to make Canada more attractive to business. We have the lowest taxes on new business entrants who are creating jobs, lower taxes on new business than anywhere in the G7. In 2012 we will have the lowest business taxes across the board in the G7.

We have made Canada the first country in the G20 to have a tariff-free zone for a broad range of machinery and equipment for Canadian manufacturers. Eliminating tariffs on new equipment, parts and machinery will help make our manufacturers more innovative, more productive and more cost-competitive. We are helping Canadian companies at home and we will continue to ensure they can compete abroad.

• (1600)

[Translation]

By bringing down barriers to trade and investment, this government is helping Canada's businesses compete in an ever-more competitive world and stimulate the Canadian economy.

By passing this free trade agreement with Colombia we are listening to Canadian businesses and providing what they need to stay competitive.

A closer economic partnership with Colombia will reduce tariffs for Canadian exporters.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement will also expand opportunities for Canadian investors and service providers.

Colombia is already a significant trade partner for Canada.

[English]

In 2009, our two-way merchandise trade totalled \$1.335 billion and Colombia is an established and growing market for Canadian exports. Over the past five years, Canadian merchandise exports have grown by over 55%.

[Translation]

Colombia is also a strategic destination for Canadian investment. The stock of Canadian investment in Colombia reached approximately \$1.1 billion in 2008.

[English]

However, that is not all. The Colombian market is an exciting one. With 48 million people. Colombia's macroeconomic policy and improved security under its current leadership have generated favourable economic conditions. Colombia's government is committed to reversing years of underinvestment and public infrastructure. Investment in infrastructure has grown from 4% of the country's gross domestic product in 2005 to more than 8% in 2009.

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A country like ours, with so much expertise in this area, can offer a lot. These are areas where Canadian companies can compete. In fact, the potential goes far beyond infrastructure and includes other key sectors like agriculture and industrial goods, and services like engineering, mining, energy and financial services. These are all areas where Canada and Canadians excel.

Moreover, those sectors are linchpins of our economy in communities large and small across this great nation, but this agreement is not just about creating opportunities for Canadian business. It is also about strengthening our partnership with Colombia.

[*Translation*]

This will help solidify ongoing efforts by the Government of Colombia to create a more prosperous, equitable and secure democracy. The Government of Colombia has taken positive steps toward this goal.

[*English*]

Colombia has demonstrated its continued efforts to curb violence, fight impunity and promote peace and security. This government recognizes that challenges remain in Colombia and is committed to working with Colombia to address those issues.

This government believes that economic growth through free trade, rules-based trade and investment can contribute to alleviating poverty and create new wealth and opportunities for Colombians. We want the business of both nations to grow and expand together. Colombians are looking for and need these kinds of opportunities and they are seeking new partnerships abroad.

The Government of Colombia, like ours, is working hard to acquire new markets for its citizens. In fact, Colombia is moving forward on an ambitious economic agenda that includes free trade agreements with a range of partners. Canada's main competitor in the Colombian market, the United States, has already completed a free trade agreement with Colombia.

Our firms and Canadian workers expect that their government will work for them and put in place trade agreements that address the situation and allow them to compete in international markets on a level playing field. Canadians deserve this. Our government is ensuring that they get the opportunity to compete and succeed in Colombia and around the world.

We cannot put our exporters at a relative disadvantage. The time for Canada to act is now. The time for members opposite to stand up for Canadian workers is now.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Not only will we be competitive with European nations, but Canadian business will also have an important opportunity to gain advantage over our main competitors in the United States.

With this FTA, Canadians will be able to expand into this important market. This is exactly the kind of opportunity Canadian businesses across the country have been asking for.

[*English*]

I believe it is important for the members of the House to clearly understand the importance of the Colombian market for the business in their regions, for their constituents and, in fact, for all Canadians.

Starting on the east coast, the provinces of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador exported about \$52.8 million worth of products to Colombia directly benefiting core industries such as oil, paper, paper board and fertilizers. These industries will clearly benefit from freer trade with Colombia.

What about machinery and industrial goods?

[*Translation*]

It is no secret that Canadian manufacturers, especially in Canada's industrial heartland in Ontario and Quebec, are facing tough times these days.

[*English*]

Our economic recovery is fragile and they need all the opportunities they can get to grow stronger and more competitive.

[*Translation*]

This means opening doors in new markets like Colombia. With this agreement, Colombian tariffs on all machinery and industrial goods will be eliminated over time.

This is especially significant for Canadian manufacturers of mining equipment, centred in Ontario and Quebec, which all benefit from the immediate elimination of Colombia's 5-15%+ tariffs on products in this sector.

I must say this agreement is also very important for the province of Quebec. After all, 21.6% of Canada's exports to Colombia were from Quebec. That is over a fifth. Quebecers employed in industries such as paper and paperboard, copper and machinery will clearly benefit from free trade with Colombia.

[*English*]

The Bloc members' opposition to this baffles me. They do not stand for Canadian business. They do not stand for Canadian workers. They do not even stand for Quebec workers. We will stand up for Quebec workers and give them the opportunities they need.

The Prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba will also benefit from the agreement. The immediate removal of Colombian tariffs from such cornerstone crops as wheat, barley and pulses will make these products from the Canadian Prairies even more competitive in the Colombian market. Prairie producers are a cornerstone of our economy. They will see clear benefits from free trade with Colombia.

I should also point out that Canada enjoys significant investment presence in the Colombian market thanks to oil and gas projects. We fully expect this presence to deepen as projects continue to develop.

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Our free trade agreement with Colombia would help secure Canadian investments in the region by providing greater predictability and protection for investors. These investment provisions will directly benefit those Alberta firms that are investing in Colombia. British Columbia also stands to benefit, especially B.C.'s mechanical, machinery and paper industries. In fact, many British Columbia companies have told us that they are looking to expand trade with Colombia.

With those kinds of benefits across Canada, it is no wonder that Canadian businesses, investors and producers alike have been calling for closer commercial ties with Colombia for some time now. The time to act is now. Members opposite should listen to Canadians who have been loud and clear.

Colombia has an ambitious and aggressive free trade agenda that includes some key competitors for Canada, competitors like the U.S. and the EU. We need to take steps sooner rather than later to ensure that Canadian exporters, investors and producers in regions and provinces across the country are not put at a disadvantage relative to our competitors.

Our Canadian exporters, investors and producers welcome the opportunity to establish themselves in this market ahead of the competition. They can compete with the best in the world. Let us give them the opportunity to do so. We have negotiated a good deal for Canadians and Colombians alike.

This agreement would give Colombians greater access and opportunities in the North American market. Colombians would also benefit from a greater range of Canadian products. This agreement would also promote economic development in the region.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

I cannot stress enough how important that is. Building and maintaining important trade partnerships is the only way to grow and create opportunities for people.

[*English*]

That is why we are here today. The government wants to create opportunities for our citizens and the citizens of Colombia. This agreement is the way to do exactly that.

We have heard the reasons why we should support this agreement before. We have debated it for over 30 hours and the standing committee has already studied it twice. It is now time to move ahead with the legislation. Unlike the NDP approach to trade, this government's priority is to aggressively pursue a free trade agenda. Now is the time to resist protectionism and open our markets. Our free trade agenda has proven to create jobs for all Canadians, in fact, trade is the key to our prosperity.

At a time of economic uncertainty, this should be the priority of all hon. members. For this reason, I ask for the support of all members for the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement and ask them to stand up for jobs for all Canadians. Now is not the time to play political games, move dilatory motions and tie up the House while we delay the economic opportunities for Canadian workers and businessmen. Let us get on with this legislation. We must move expeditiously forward for the benefit of all Canadians.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to help ensure and measure progress in the area of human rights, the Liberal official opposition asked for and received agreement from the Colombian government to the following.

First, there must be a prior written agreement between the governments of Canada and Colombia, where each country provides annual reports to their respective parliaments on the impact of this FTA on human rights in both Canada and Colombia.

Second, Bill C-2 must be amended at committee by adding, "The Minister shall cause to be laid before each House of Parliament by March 31 of each year or, if that House is not then sitting, on any of the thirty days next thereafter that it is sitting, a report of operations for the previous calendar year, containing a general summary of all actions taken under the authority of this Act, and an analysis of the impact of these actions on human rights in Canada and Colombia."

Will the minister now confirm his government's unequivocal agreement to this course of action?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, our government has never been reluctant to talk about human rights and advance human rights, even as we advance the trade agenda. The agreement has beside it parallel agreements dealing with labour and securing individual human rights with regard to collective bargaining in an assortment of labour areas. It also has a parallel agreement on environment to protect the rights of Colombian citizens.

In the spirit of not being afraid to advance human rights interests, we would certainly be amenable to an amendment of the type suggested by the hon. member.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. The same government that brought forward the brilliant and diabolical kill-a-trade-unionist, pay-a-fine provisions of the current Colombian agreement is now saying that the Colombian government can basically report to itself on its own human rights violations.

The problem all along has been the Colombian government's complete lack of ability to deal with these major human rights violations with its connected paramilitaries and its own military arm. To say that the government has the magic bullet, because it is now asking the government to report on itself, is absolutely shameful. Two years ago, at the time when there was a much more progressive Liberal leader, the trade committee said very clearly that there needed to be an independent and impartial human rights assessment of the effect of this agreement. That is what the NDP stands for.

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Putting in place an independent human rights assessment would allow the government to perhaps defend this agreement, but it cannot. It cannot and it will not because it knows that every human rights organization in the western hemisphere opposes this agreement and knows that it will increase human rights violations in Colombia.

• (1615)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, our government is pleased to support the government of Colombia as it makes efforts to improve the human rights conditions in its country. Significant advances have been made under the Uribe government.

We are not alone in our effort to improve human rights conditions by engaging Colombia through freer trade, which creates jobs and opportunity and will improve the human living conditions for Colombians. In his recent state of the union address, President Obama indicated his support for going forward with a free trade agreement with Colombia. He views that as critical to improving human rights conditions. The European Union is also on the same page. These are hardly countries that have a disdain for human rights.

The records of President Obama and the countries of the European Union are clear, as is the record of Canada in advancing human rights as the cornerstone of our foreign policy around the world. We will continue to do that and we believe this agreement will help support and further advance human rights in Colombia and around the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are good free trade agreements and there are bad ones. Time often tells which they turn out to be.

I get the feeling that, in this case, the government made a positive assessment strictly from a business perspective, and that is more than we can say, because we are far from convinced that this is a good deal.

Colombia is not one of Canada's major trading partners. The human rights aspect does not seem to have been assessed properly.

In the words of my colleague from the NDP, the trade committee said very clearly that there needs to be an independent study. Why does the government not accede to this request?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, Canada's priority in entering into free trade agreements is to create jobs and increase opportunities for Canadian workers.

We are very interested in human rights. That is why we are supporting the amendment put forward by the official opposition today. That is also why we have a parallel agreement on labour rights and one on the environment.

We are confident that a free trade agreement with Colombia will advance the interests and human rights of all the Colombian people. Consequently, all parties represented in this House should support this free trade agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the renewed interest

of the Liberals on behalf of this trade agreement and in the spirit of co-operation, it looks as if we will get some assistance from them. Certainly it is disappointing to hear the NDP continuing to use the same old rhetoric, as if there is no trade going on with Colombia at this very time.

The part of this debate that I find most amazing is the fact that we are doing \$1.3 billion worth of trade with Colombia today, and I will give an example.

A company in my riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's does a lot of business in South America and Central America. It has a contract for a gas dehydrator in Colombia. It is looking at building that dehydrator in Mexico because Mexico can trade with Colombia without paying the tariffs.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the point the hon. member for South Shore makes is a very valid one.

When this agreement is in place, there will be a reduction of tariffs on Canadian machinery and equipment going into Colombia in the range of 5% to 15%, depending upon the equipment. Fifteen per cent is a significant number that could make the difference between a contract being viable or being able to get into a marketplace.

That is why it is important. If we want to create jobs and opportunity for individuals like those workers in the hon. member's riding in Atlantic Canada, we need to support this free trade agreement.

• (1620)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister will understand the directness of my question and need for a direct answer.

Could the minister confirm that he will in fact accept the amendment as has been outlined and proposed by my colleague from Kings—Hants, yes or no?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is yes, and I indicated that earlier. I certainly welcome the hon. member for Toronto Centre's enthusiastic support for free trade because I know he has not always been on that page, but it is great to have him here.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is quite amazing when I sit here and listen to the minister say that human rights issues will be in parallel agreements and other things of this nature.

If he and his government are so convinced to tell Canadians that they are really serious about human rights abuses in Colombia, why then are human rights issues not in the main text of the agreement? Why must human rights, the environment and other issues always be on the side? Why can they not be in the main body of the agreement?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the reason is very simple. Because it is a trade agreement. If we want to have an agreement relating to human rights, that has to be a parallel agreement dealing with human rights.

We have a labour agreement already in place that protects the internationally recognized rights of workers and ensures that those will be respected. We also believe it is a positive thing to engage with Colombians.

The approach of the NDP is one of opposing each and every free trade agreement it encounters. What is interesting to me and this government is how each trade agreement requires some new and creative arguments for the reason for opposition. I can assure the House that if we satisfied every one of the criticisms raised by the NDP, it still would not support this free trade agreement or any free trade agreement.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we last debated this legislation in the fall of 2009, I asked the House to consider the human dimension of this free trade agreement.

I said that this debate should not be about ideology, it should be about people, the people of Colombia whose lives have been ripped apart and turned upside down by civil war and narco-politics, the good, decent and proud people of Colombia who deserve a better future and the kind of economic opportunities provided by legitimate trade.

Throughout the debate on this FTA, the Liberal Party has put people not ideology first. Unlike some of the other parties in the House, we have not been blinded by an ideology that believes that all free trade agreements are good or, on the other hand, that all free trade agreements are bad. Instead we have carefully studied the conditions surrounding Colombia's political environment, economy and society.

We have examined and considered carefully how this free trade agreement could impact the people of Colombia and the people of Canada. We have looked for ways to strengthen this agreement in order to better protect the people of Colombia and to strengthen our engagement on human rights issues with the people of Colombia.

There is no question that Colombia is a violent country, where human rights abuses have been fueled by the illegal narco-economy. At the same time, the Colombia government has made significant progress toward reducing violence and human rights abuses. This progress must be supported.

As President Barack Obama said after his meeting with the president of Colombia:

I commended President Uribe on the progress that has been made in human rights in Colombia and dealing with the killings of labor leaders there, and obviously we've seen a downward trajectory in the deaths of labor unions and we've seen improvements when it comes to prosecution of those who are carrying out these blatant human rights offenses. President Uribe acknowledges that there remains more work to be done, and we look forward to cooperating with him to continue to improve both the rights of organized labor in Colombia and to protect both labor and civil rights leaders there.

Earlier this month, Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, tabled her annual report on the situation of human rights in Colombia. In this report she also recognized that:

—the significant progress made in terms of a drastic reduction in the number of complaints of extrajudicial executions and the continuous prosecution of members of Congress and public officials for alleged links with paramilitary organizations.

She also recognized:

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—the Government's openness to international scrutiny...[and] the spirit of cooperation that exists between the Government and OHCHR-Colombia and the commitment of the Government to address human rights challenges.

On the issue of extrajudicial executions, she writes:

Since November 2008, complaints of extrajudicial executions attributed to security forces...have drastically decreased, primarily as a result of the implementation and monitoring of the measures adopted in October and November 2008 by the President and the Ministry of Defense.

Therefore, the government is taking action. There is more work to be done, but the fact is the government is doing everything it can. It needs support and it needs legitimate trade opportunities to wean people from the narco-economy, which fuels much of this violence.

The report explains that:

In 2009, the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law National Unit of the Attorney General's Office recorded 7 cases compared to 144 in 2008 and 464 in 2007.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights continues by placing the violence in context:

The report demonstrates how the internal armed conflict continues to pose many challenges for the country, including the complete disregard for international humanitarian law by guerrilla groups [FARC]. This situation is exacerbated by violence against civilians committed by illegal armed groups that emerged after the demobilization of paramilitary organizations, links between illegal armed groups and drug trafficking, and the particularly acute impact of the internal armed conflict on indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian communities.

The armed conflict is drug fuelled by drug money. It began initially as an ideological battle with FARC on the left. It has now become largely a drug war between demobilized paramilitaries who are now drug thugs and the FARC. Again, it is a business of the narco-economy and drug money fuelled conflict. The best way, once again, to wean the people from this violence is to provide legitimate economic opportunities.

● (1625)

On a previous visit to Colombia, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said:

I was impressed by the increased expenditure on government programmes to protect and support vulnerable groups. Such efforts, in a country facing such a complex and multifaceted armed conflict, must be acknowledged and encouraged.

Still, we all recognize that there is much work to be done.

Standing in the way of further progress is poverty, resulting from persistently high unemployment rates in Colombia. That is one area where free trade could help. To increase trade, Canada can help build Colombia's legitimate economy, creating real jobs for Colombians, including the most vulnerable. We can provide opportunities that help wean Colombians off their illegal and violent narco-economy. At the same time, this free trade agreement can help strengthen the protection of Colombian workers.

In fact in committee, Canadian senior official Pierre Bouchard of HRSDC has called the labour cooperation agreement in this FTA "the most comprehensive labour agreement in the world today". No two countries have signed an FTA with a labour agreement as strong as the one in this trade agreement and our amendment today, as we move forward, will even further strengthen human rights and labour rights in Colombia.

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The Liberal Party did want to do better and go further, wanted to do more to ensure engagement on labour rights and human rights in Colombia. That is why we sat down with the Colombian government. We listened to the concerns of Canadians and worked to strengthen this agreement by improving public oversight in the area of human rights.

While Liberals recognize that free trade can create jobs and strengthen the economies of both Canada and Colombia, we also share the concerns of those who believe this FTA must strengthen the protection of human rights in Colombia. The result is a first for any free trade agreement in the world.

Both Canada and Colombia will, under this agreement, now be required to measure and analyze the impact of this FTA on human rights both in Canada and Colombia. Each government must then table an annual report analyzing the impact of this FTA on human rights. This requirement puts the focus on achieving sustained progress in the area of protecting the rights and security of the Colombian people.

If the reports are tabled in Parliament, the human rights impact assessment will be available to the public, will be debated at the trade committee. We can hear from witnesses, both from Colombia and Canada, on an annual basis. It will deepen the transparency and accountability of this trade agreement, and I believe it will be a gold standard for trade agreements signed between countries around the world.

Dr. Jorge Rojas Rodriguez is a civil society leader in Colombia and president of the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement. He says about this amendment:

...this proposal sends a strong political message to Colombia about Canada's interest in seeing the human rights situation improve in the coming years.

He believes that this human rights reporting mechanism has the potential to become an important tool for improving human rights in Colombia and also for involving the private sector in achieving that goal. Dr. Rojas supports our outreach to Colombian civil society in the preparation of this innovative proposal and believes the amendment has the potential to set an important precedent for other FTAs.

Dr. Leon Valencia is a prominent civil society leader in Colombia and the executive director of Arco Iris. He says:

I think it is interesting and useful that the Free Trade Agreement between Colombia and Canada includes an amendment which requires both governments to present an annual report to the respective Parliaments on the repercussions of the agreement on human rights in each country.

This will provide an important yearly forum to discuss the situation in Colombia, and will give Canadian citizens the opportunity to monitor human rights violations in our country.

Dr. Valencia goes on to say about this amendment:

Canada's proposal is innovative and converts the Treaty into something which is dynamic and provides new platforms for analysis and discussion. Perhaps this could be included in other free trade agreements.

Dr. Gerardo Sánchez Zapata, president of Colombia's apparel and textile industry trade union, representing eight other private sector unions, has said:

This procedure is welcomed by Colombian workers and we are thankful to the Honorable Parliament of Canada for its position, because it helps strengthen a mechanism already in place that monitors and evaluates the progress in matters of

human rights and freedom of association in our country, through annual reports to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations.

It also helps our efforts, as trade unions, in interceding with the national government to adapt our legislation to the international standards and regulations...

● (1630)

This amendment, this approach, this deeper human rights engagement and accountability and transparency is being endorsed by private sector unions in Colombia, by some leaders of civil society in Colombia and by human rights organizations. With this amendment in place, Canadian parliamentarians will be able to call forward civil society groups on an ongoing annual basis and require testimony from our public officials and expert witnesses in order to hold governments and companies to account for actions taken under this FTA.

If it becomes clear that the FTA is not strengthening human rights, the fact is that either country can cancel the agreement with six months' notice. But we have to believe that this agreement will be upheld and that further progress will be achieved because economic engagement, through the right trade agreements, can fortify human rights engagement. Colombia has a strong, independent judiciary that can be counted on to uphold the rule of law, and we have seen that recently. In the words of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights:

The Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office are incredibly brave in investigating and bringing to trial public officials linked to mafias and drug trafficking in the so-called 'Para-politics'.

We should all support their efforts in such difficult circumstances and continue to uphold the independence of the judiciary—something Colombia is rightly proud of.

On the issue of President Uribe's seeking a third term, the leader of the official opposition, the hon. member for Toronto Centre, our foreign affairs critic for the Liberal Party, and I, as trade critic for the Liberal Party, had serious concerns that we raised directly with President Uribe. On February 26, 2010, Colombia's constitutional court ruled 7:2 against a referendum permitting presidents to run for three consecutive terms. Despite the overwhelming support of the Colombian congress for this popular referendum, the court ruled that the measure posed substantial violations to democratic principles and was thus unconstitutional.

President Uribe announced immediately that he would respect the ruling of the court. That decision by that court demonstrates the independence of the judiciary in Colombia. This free trade agreement will put in place a more robust legal framework that will better protect the environment, strengthen labour laws and encourage stronger corporate social responsibility for Canadian investors.

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As Carol Nelder-Corvari, of Finance Canada, emphasized in her testimony before the trade committee, trade between Canada and Colombia is already taking place but without a rules-based system to encourage stronger labour and human rights. So we already have a trading relationship. This trade agreement brings with it stronger rules on labour and the environment, which can only help fortify labour rights and environmental protection in Colombia.

As Carol Nelder-Corvari said at committee: “I want to be clear that Canadian investors are investing in Colombia, have been investing in Colombia and are increasing their investment in Colombia”.

She said that this is the strongest labour agreement related to any FTA in existence, that corporate social responsibility aspects of this agreement are the first time Canada has placed such commitments and that they are in the investment chapter and in the environment chapter. It is an area of cooperation that has ongoing dialogue with Colombia and our investors in Colombia. This agreement gives us avenues of engagement we have never had before.

Canadian businesses are taking note. With the signing of this agreement, Canadian entrepreneurs are prepared to make long-term investments that will benefit the Colombian people. Canadian agricultural interests are supportive of this agreement. Canadian business organizations, including some members of the small business community, see the opportunities with this agreement.

In terms of infrastructure, and I heard the minister refer earlier refer to the importance and the dramatic need for the Colombian people to invest in and strengthen their infrastructure, Toronto's Brookfield Asset Management recently established a \$400 million Colombian infrastructure fund to invest in and help the Colombian people develop their infrastructure.

• (1635)

We must support these investments and work to increase the opportunities for and protection of Colombian workers.

I want to mention the geopolitical stability of the Andean region, which is under threat from the Chavez regime in Venezuela. It is important that we engage and not isolate Colombia at this time, as isolation would leave the Colombian people vulnerable to the effects of border closures and trade blockades and the ideologically motivated attacks of the Hugo Chavez regime in Venezuela.

It is important that we engage Colombia and the Colombian people as a partner in progress to help the Colombian people achieve a more peaceful and prosperous future. I believe this agreement, particularly with this amendment, will strengthen human rights engagement on an ongoing basis and ensure that this Parliament on an annual basis will receive a report on the human rights impact of this agreement, will help continue the debate, continue the engagement and strengthen human rights and labour rights in Colombia.

We have a responsibility in this Parliament to do the right thing, not to be purely focused on ideological issues and to be ideologically rigid but to do the right thing for both the people of Canada and the Colombian people.

Accordingly, I move:

That this question be now put.

• (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion is in order.

[*Translation*]

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 Halifax, Oil and Gas Industry.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly—and I ask my Liberal colleague the question—we just saw the birth of a new Liberal-Conservative coalition to speed up the adoption by the House of Commons of a free trade agreement in spite of the commitments to have an independent study conducted on such an agreement before the Government of Canada could ratify it and Parliament could approve or reject it.

We just saw a major loss of support for all the communities in Columbia that are victims of human rights abuses. Would the member who just spoke explain how a government that has been unable to put an end to all the abuses, murders and displacements could produce a credible report every year that the Standing Committee on International Trade would have to take into consideration? This makes absolutely no sense to me.

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that the main reason we are talking about human rights in Colombia is that we are talking about a free trade agreement which demonstrates that economic engagement leads to human rights engagement. It is highly unlikely we would be having a debate in this House today on human rights in Colombia if we did not have a free trade agreement.

An annual reportage mechanism would ensure, on an annual basis, that the House of Commons trade committee could hear from witnesses from Colombia and from Canadian NGOs on progress and understand the impact of the trade agreement on human rights in Colombia.

I suggest that the hon. Bloc member and perhaps the NDP ought to just say that they are against free trade, that they do not support free trade, and get this foil that it is throwing over this that this is somehow an issue of human rights. This is their latest tactic in an ideological fight against free trade that has nothing to do with human rights.

If they are sincere about engaging the Colombian people and strengthening human rights in Colombia, they will support this agreement and, as good members of Parliament, they will engage on an annual basis in this House in debating the effects of this agreement on human rights in Colombia.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his cogent intervention on this very important issue, which is the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. It has often been said, and it bears repeating today, that these kinds of agreements are what makes Canada one of the great trading nations of the world.

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We know that Canada is one of the great traders of the world and it is free trade agreements like this that are absolutely critical to our long-term prosperity. Yet, over the years we have become so dependent on the United States. Some 75% to 80% of our trade is still with the United States. It is incumbent upon us to explore more of these trade agreements.

I would ask the member a question relating to human rights. Is he aware of other free trade agreements that Canada has already signed that have actually led to improvements in human rights and labour protection in those countries?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Canadian companies, through their investments in other countries, are known globally as leaders in corporate social responsibility.

In my travels to places like China and the Americas, I speak with business people and government leaders who refer to Canadian companies as setting a gold standard. Canadian companies are accountable to this Parliament and to the Canadian people and Canadian values. The presence of Canadian companies in these countries often leads to a strengthening of labour rights and improvements in human rights in general.

I agree with the hon. member that economic engagement is important. I think the hon. member agrees that we need to ensure that through robust labour agreements we continue to ensure progress on labour rights and human rights, not just with the signing of one trade agreement but on an ongoing basis.

I hope this Parliament will pass this motion, which will help enable the Colombian people to move forward with both a more prosperous and a more peaceful future.

• (1645)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly be gentle on the member for Kings—Hants. He has been strongly criticized by organizations across the country for his comments in this House defending the Uribe regime and denying the killing of trade unionists. I will not go over that ground again. His constituents have written in. I was at a standing room only meeting in Wolfville in his riding where his constituents were expressing concerns about human rights in Colombia.

It is fair to say that this latest position of the Liberal Party, that used to stand for human rights and for an impartial and independent human rights assessment, is being repudiated by every reputable human rights organization around the planet and every independent union, whether we are talking about Canada or Colombia. The facts speak for themselves.

This latest whitewashing where somehow the Colombian government produces a report on itself means that in some way we are reinforcing human rights, can be taken as pretty ridiculous and pretty sad. However, it does show how desperate the Conservative government is in trying to push this bad bill through.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, there was no question and, in fact, no point, to the hon. member's intervention.

The NDP has been against every free trade agreement Canada has ever signed and against every free trade agreement that any country has ever signed. The New Democrats have an outdated, Marxist-

Leninist policy when it comes to the economy. They are globophobic, socialist Luddites who do not understand the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. In fact, their ideological rigidity prevents them from doing the right thing and helping the people of Colombia with real economic opportunities so that they are not forced to depend upon the drug economy that is killing young Colombians.

The member should be ashamed of himself for not giving legitimate economic opportunities to the people of Colombia and forcing them into the narco-economy that is killing so many Colombians. The real crime is the NDP being blinded by ideology, hurting the people of Colombia, refusing to stand up for human rights in Colombia and respecting and engaging the Colombian people in a reasonable, moderate and fair way.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank my colleague from Kings—Hants for the masterful job he did with this file, how he opened up the discussion with Colombian officials and for putting forward the motion that he has today, which, seemingly, has been accepted by the government.

Just a short time ago, I was reading what was tabled earlier concerning another free trade agreement between Canada-Jordan. It talked about the parallel agreement when it comes to labour, a labour co-operation agreement, but instead of dealing with that, I would like for him to talk about it from the Colombia perspective.

Some of the initiatives within this particular free trade agreement do discuss and help enshrine things such as collective bargaining, the elimination of child labour, forced labour and workplace discrimination. Some of these things are enshrined within it. I would like him to talk about that and how this will be, not could be, beneficial to a place such as Columbia.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, we already have a trade relationship with Colombia that has grown by 55% in recent years and Canadian companies are investing significantly. I mentioned Brookfield Asset Management earlier putting together a \$400 million infrastructure fund. So we do have a trade relationship.

This trade agreement, with the labour and environment agreements, and this amendment that will be put forward at committee, will fortify and provide a rules-based framework around labour that we do not have currently. When we do not have rules around a trade relationship, adding rules can only strengthen our engagement on these issues of labour rights.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to say very clearly at the outset that the Bloc Québécois is not in favour of Bill C-2, which the government tabled in the House today.

Government Orders

We do not like this bill any more than we liked it in the last session, despite the amendment, or the supposed amendment, that the Liberals are going to propose at the Standing Committee on International Trade. We fail to see how we could possibly be in favour of an amendment like that. It will leave the two parties involved in control and will mean that the governments of Canada and Colombia will be both judge and jury in evaluating respect for human rights. It does not make sense.

I am very familiar with the entire issue and with the previous positions of the Liberal Party, and I really cannot understand what they are doing now. Their previous position was to protect and respect human rights in Colombia. But now they have gone off in another direction.

Canada initiated discussions in 2002 with the Andean countries of Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia about a possible free trade agreement.

Canada negotiated bilateral agreements with Colombia and Peru over the space of a few years. On June 7, 2008, Canada and Colombia announced they had completed their negotiations, and on November 21, they signed the free trade agreement.

We looked for the main reason why the Conservative government would sign this agreement regardless of the major objections that were raised.

We noted that the agreement does not really help trade. The trade issue is a red herring, because the agreement is actually about investment. It is obvious that an agreement like this is intended to promote investment.

It has a chapter on protecting investments that will make life easier for Canadian investors in Colombia, especially in the mining sector.

When it comes to trade, Colombia is only the fifth-largest market for Canadian exports to Latin America and the Caribbean and the seventh-largest source of Canadian imports from that region.

It is obvious that Canada has trading partners in this region that are a lot more important than Colombia. Concluding an agreement with Colombia, therefore, has absolutely nothing to do with the reasons always used to justify a free trade agreement. Far from it.

Canada's trade with the other countries of Latin America has tended to increase over the last few years, meaning that the proportion of our trade with Colombia has fallen.

The bulk of Canadian investment in Colombia is, as I just mentioned, in the mining sector.

What use then is a free trade agreement? It does not make sense.

We have statistics on the amount of trade between Colombia and Canada. It is hard to understand why the Conservative government is so attached to this agreement. When two countries want to negotiate and sign a free trade agreement, it is usually because they are especially strong trading partners and the trade flows between them are particularly heavy.

● (1655)

When the value of trade is high, abolishing trade barriers becomes more interesting because it facilitates further trade.

Trade with the market we are talking about is limited. We do trade with Colombia, as with all countries, but we fail to see what kind of business benefits Quebec and Canada could find in this agreement. As I said before, this agreement is all about stimulating investments, and not so much about stimulating trade.

In the last few years, Canada signed investment protection agreements but the one that would bind Canada and Colombia has been ill conceived. All these agreements contain clauses that enable foreign investors to sue the local government if it takes measures that reduce the return on their investment. Foreign investments have been growing exponentially.

In order to create a predictable environment and ensure that a foreign investor does not end up losing his assets without compensation in the event of nationalization, for example, countries sign agreements to protect investments. This is perfectly normal and the Bloc Québécois approves such agreements. In fact, the North American Free Trade Agreement includes a chapter on investment protection.

However, NAFTA's chapter 11 marked the beginning of a negative trend. The provisions were not well structured and were highly criticized. For example, as soon as some environment protection legislation affects the returns of a foreign investor, the government is open to massive lawsuits.

Still, over the years, the Government of Canada has signed a number of bilateral agreements modelled on NAFTA's chapter 11. There was so much criticism that even the Liberals, who just gave their support to an agreement that they condemned for many legitimate reasons, stopped signing such agreements.

Under the Conservatives, Ottawa is now on the offence and is negotiating all kinds of agreements like this one. In this case, the government is handing responsibility for deciding what is in the best interest of the people over to multinationals. They are giving up. They are saying that since such an agreement is good for investments, the multinationals can determine whether displacing thousands of people is acceptable.

The Bloc Québécois opposes the bill to implement the free trade agreement with Colombia because it contains clauses based on chapter 11 of NAFTA. Our party is asking the government to revert to the old treaty formula, which did not give multinationals control at the expense of the common good.

The bill will be referred to committee and we will see if it can be amended.

I would also like to talk about corporate social responsibility. In recent years, Colombia has had one of the worst records in terms of human rights and corporate social responsibility. Colombian exports tend to come from rural regions in the most remote parts of the country. These regions have valuable natural resources, but they are also the most violent regions.

● (1700)

Allowing these investments will only aggravate the problem.

Government Orders

Coming back to the rural regions I mentioned earlier, these regions have experienced 87% of all forced population displacements, 82% of all human rights and international humanitarian law abuses, and 83% of all union leader assassinations.

The measures allowed by the free trade agreement with Colombia will only make this situation even worse. The agreement will increase the presence of foreign investors, especially multinationals and mining companies.

I asked the minister a question a moment ago. We are not necessarily opposed to free trade agreements. There may be some very good free trade agreements, just as there may be bad ones. But we do not believe this one can be a good agreement in trade terms. The volume of trade is so low that we do not see how an agreement will change things. This agreement will encourage investment, however. Generally, when one country signs a free trade agreement with another country, the economies of the two countries are similar. The reason is very simple: measures to protect investment can slow the development of poorer countries because they give corporations the power to take the government to court if it makes laws or regulations that reduce the return on investments. If we look at the socio-economic data, it is readily apparent that Canada and Colombia are very different.

The fact that Colombia is a country where enormous poverty prevails cannot be ignored. In 2006, 47% of the population was living below the poverty line, and 12% of the population was living in abject poverty. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, poverty hits hardest in rural areas. In 2006, 68% of the population was living in poverty, and this is a serious problem. A government often has to adopt measures to get its country out of poverty and develop it. Such measures can take the form of labour, environmental or health legislation or nationalization of certain economic sectors. So this kind of protection for investments jeopardizes the ability of the Colombian government to effectively combat poverty. Essentially, the Government of Colombia has to continue fighting poverty, but with a chapter that provides for protecting foreign investments. This agreement ties its hands, and that will prevent it from making progress, even if it has good intentions to reduce violence in Colombia. In Colombia, there are still paramilitary groups that are not controlled by the government. In my view, it is unacceptable for a government or a democracy like Canada to sign an agreement like this. Colombia is a democratic country, but it is a democratic country that is unable to take action against human rights violations. Personally, I think it is a democracy that cannot be seen as having the same characteristics as other democracies on the planet.

Colombia has one of the worst track records in the world when it comes to human rights, and certainly the worst in Latin America. In order to improve the human rights situation in the world, governments often use the carrot and the stick. They support efforts toward greater respect for human rights and they reserve the right to withdraw certain benefits if there is backsliding. By signing this agreement, Canada will be giving up any ability to bring pressure to bear. Let us hope that some Liberal members will recall their earlier position. Canada will be giving up any means of bringing pressure to bear against a human rights situation that is unacceptable.

●(1705)

The Conservatives say over and over that the human rights situation in Colombia has greatly improved. It may be less catastrophic than it was a few years ago, but it is still very far from ideal.

Canada's former ambassador to Colombia, Mathew Levin, said basically the same thing in speaking of the Colombian economy: "The [Canadian] government knows that the Colombian reality is not ideal. There is poverty, violence, lack of access to services".

I want to provide just one statistic. Since 1986, 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered. Although these murders declined somewhat after 2001, they have increased since 2007. According to Mariano José Guerra, the regional president of the National Federation of Public Sector Workers in Colombia, "thousands of people have disappeared and the persecution of unions continues".

In view of all these facts, we cannot understand why the Conservative government is so intent on concluding this agreement. With all the population displacement we see, we wonder as well why the Liberal Party is very likely to support the agreement. That is totally unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last time this bill was before us, the issue of an independent human rights assessment already had been dealt with at committee. In fact, the committee had reported back to the House that such an assessment should be done prior to proceeding with this bill. I understand that even Amnesty International had been reluctant to come forward to conduct such an independent assessment.

Does the member believe such an assessment would be valuable? Does he believe it would change the understanding of the House with regard to current human rights conditions in Colombia?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, in response to the first question, I think an independent evaluation would give us a true picture of the human rights situation in Colombia. Even the Colombian government is not able to control everything that happens in the country. An independent study is absolutely necessary to help us make a much more reassuring assessment of the situation.

As for the second question, we would need to have the results of an independent study in order to know whether our opinion would change. Such a study might change our minds if it showed that things are getting better. I tend to think the opposite. We do not know, though, because no independent studies have been done.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I quite liked the speech of the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain. Even though he has been the international trade critic for only a short time, he understands the situation in Colombia and the need to reject this agreement much better than people who have been sitting on the committee for years.

Government Orders

What was proposed today changes nothing. They think the Government of Colombia could write a report itself and that might improve the human rights situation. It is totally ridiculous. All the organizations in the country that are concerned about this bill will surely let our Liberal colleagues know. The Liberal members will respond by thinking that the facts have changed.

I want to ask my colleague from the Bloc Québécois a question. According to figures provided by the Colombian comptroller general, drug dealers and paramilitary forces own about half of the farmland in Colombia. In view of the fact that no independent studies have been done, does the hon. member think the agreement could worsen the human rights situation in Colombia?

• (1710)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, I totally agree. As long as there is no independent study, I think it will be very difficult to understand precisely what is going on in Colombia. If I understood the hon. member correctly, paramilitaries control half the rural territories. If that is truly the case, it is terrible.

I find it completely unacceptable that some members of Parliament, being aware of this situation, would still accept the fact that the Canadian government is proposing a free trade agreement with a country that is unable to control the paramilitaries.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain for his clear understanding of the situation in Colombia.

I want to remind him that the two main goods imported from Colombia are grains and beef. It seems to me that we have plenty of both those products here in Canada.

What is this really about? I think we know. There are a lot of hypocrites around. There is a concentration of wealth in Colombia. I would like our colleague to elaborate on the subject of mines. Clearly, the purpose of this agreement is to allow Canadians to invest in mines.

I would like my colleague to say a bit more on that.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

That is exactly what I was saying earlier. Trade between Canada and Colombia is nothing compared to trade with all of Latin America.

We know very well that the fact that a free trade agreement is before this House at this time has nothing to do with increasing or facilitating trade between Canada and Colombia. It is a way to promote investments and to promote investors who will continue to make off with the natural resources of a country like Colombia. In fact, these people think that because we have the expertise here, we will continue to trade.

We know that the mining industry in Colombia just encourages more violence and causes more people to be displaced. These people, who are already very poor, lose their land and are exiled to the cities. Every day, about 50 people arrive in the capital with no means of survival. This bill will only encourage this.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the agreement between Colombia and the United States has been before Congress now for a considerable amount of time. I know that the President mentioned it in his speech in January, the state of the union address.

A group of us were down in the United States on Congressional hearings on February 19 and the member for Kings—Hants was there. Although we were in different groups, we did meet with a number of senators and members of Congress. On at least two occasions Republicans told us that this deal had absolutely no chance of making it through Congress. If the member for Kings—Hants knows that, then why is he and his allies in the government so bent on forcing this agreement through, when the Americans, as I have said, have had it before Congress now for several years and they have no intention of doing anything about it this year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, I have a feeling that this question is addressed more to the member for Kings—Hants. Earlier, he announced his intention to put an end to the debate by moving that the question be put. This is likely a new form of Liberal-Conservative coalition to speed up the adoption of a free trade agreement with Colombia, an agreement that goes against the values of a great many people.

As the NDP member who asked me a question earlier said, the Liberal members will surely be hearing from their constituents, who will be calling on them to reconsider. This is the complete opposite of their previous position. Before, they supported the people and said that an agreement would be harmful to them. They will have to answer for their decision.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by identifying what this agreement and bill is not about. It is not about any real intentions of the government to push Canadian exports.

I just came back from Argentina. I was down there with FIPA. I asked the trade commissioners what the budget was for Canadian export supports for the market of Argentina. Argentina is a country of 40 million people. That is larger than Canada. The entire amount that the government is giving to export promotion supports, such as product promotion and service promotion, comes to a grand total of \$400 a week. That is unbelievable. That is less than what an average corner store spends in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster.

[*Translation*]

That is less than an east Montreal corner store spends.

[*English*]

But that is what the government is giving in export promotion support.

Government Orders

While we have trade commissioners having to pay for coffee of potential clients out of their own pockets, while we have \$400 for the entire market of Argentina, our competitors like Australia, the United States, the European Union are spending hundreds of millions of dollars in export promotion support.

Therefore, the government is a government of trade dilettantes. It has absolutely no overall strategy to actually build export development. It does not invest in export development. To say that in some way this agreement is part of an overall strategy, when the government has failed so lamentably on the whole issue of export development, I think is to say the least disingenuous.

The other point that the Conservatives have been bringing up is why did the NDP not support the softwood sellout and why did the NDP not support the shipbuilding sellout? I would like to say to the members of the Conservative Party, it is because they negotiate bad agreements. It is as clear as that.

The softwood sellout, the shipbuilding sellout, and now this Colombian trade agreement either repudiates Canadian jobs or it repudiates Canadian values.

This is not about trade. It is about whether our foreign policy, our trade policy, should in some way be connected to fundamental Canadian values. The most fundamental Canadian value is human rights. That is something that Canadians share from coast to coast.

The Conservatives have no interest in the human rights component. Liberals have abandoned any real attempt to build on human rights. If they were really concerned about human rights, they would have stuck with their support of the NDP motion to amend the trade committee report from two years ago that called for an independent and impartial human rights assessment. That was put forward by the committee.

Conservatives promptly backtracked, but Liberals under their former leader, to their credit, stuck to their guns and said that we should not move any further with negotiations with Colombia until we have an independent and impartial human rights assessment about what the potential impacts would be.

Just a few weeks after the report was issued, the government slapped the Liberals around and everyone else in the committee and said, "No. We're going to move forward with this agreement just the same".

A year ago this week, the Conservatives brought this bad bill and this bad agreement forward to the House of Commons.

The NDP and the members of the Bloc Québécois are sticking to those fundamental Canadian values of human rights. We are not going to allow the Colombian government, given the egregious human rights violations that take place in Colombia, to get some kind of reward from the Canadian Parliament.

I certainly hope that Liberal members of Parliament, once they get a sense of the public reaction to this whitewashing, will share the view that they should go back to their original position under their former leader and stand up very clearly for human rights.

What is the human rights situation in Colombia? Over the last few years it has actually gotten worse, despite some of the comments we have heard from Conservatives and Liberals. Over the last three years the number of trade unionists killed in Colombia has tragically increased, not decreased. In fact, there was a 25% jump in 2008, maintained in 2009, and tragically we are seeing further murders this year.

Colombia is the most dangerous place to be a labour activist than anywhere else on earth. That is a reality.

Members of the Conservative Party and Liberal Party who want to push this bill forward have offered absolutely no proof that the bill and the treaty would actually improve human rights in Colombia. In fact, as I will get to later on, every single reputable human rights organization, every single independent union either in Colombia or Canada, has actually said the contrary. They have said that in a very real way, and a very dangerous way, the bill and the treaty with Colombia could worsen the human rights situation in Colombia.

● (1720)

There is the killing of trade unionists. What else? There are the hundreds and hundreds of the so-called false positives in Colombia over the last few years. Hundreds and hundreds of the so-called false positives is a banal term that masks a horrifying reality. These false positives are nothing less than cold-blooded murder of people in rural areas, aboriginal people and Afro-Colombians who were taken out and shot by the Colombian military.

It is important to note that a number of human rights organizations have cited the fact that in the Colombian military, there are bonuses offered for the killings of so-called guerrillas, which encourages the murder of innocent peasants and rural residents. Those hundreds and hundreds of false positives are a blight on the Colombian government and a blight on the human rights reputation of Colombia. If we pass this bill, we are essentially saying that we do not have fundamental concerns about the killing of trade unionists or these false positives by the Colombian military.

As horrific as those cold-blooded murders are, as horrific as all of that is, perhaps the most egregious aspect to the human rights situation in Colombia is the ongoing forced and violent displacement of millions of Colombians. It is the second worst situation of its sort in the entire planet, only rivaled by Sudan. In other words, the millions of Colombians who have been forcibly displaced by paramilitary groups often connected with the government, or guerrilla groups that oppose the government, are leading to the development of shantytowns throughout Colombia, particularly in Bogota.

When I was down in Colombia with the trade committee that looked at that, we went to Soacha. We met and spoke to those residents. They expressed real concerns about what is happening in rural Colombia. That has resulted in a concentration of land in rural Colombia that has intensified and it is now estimated that over 60% of agricultural land is in the hands of 0.6% of the population.

Government Orders

That forced displacement has led to a small number of landowners, drug traffickers and paramilitary organizations that are connected to the government taking over this rural land. The comptroller general of Colombia noted in his speech just a few years ago that drug traffickers and paramilitaries now own almost half the agricultural land in Colombia.

That is the reality. When we talk about human rights abuses, the fundamental reality is that as parliamentarians, we are obliged to consider when we look at something like a privileged trading relationship with President Uribe's regime. When we talk about the killing of trade unionists, we talk about killings by the Colombian military, the so-called false positives which are cold-blooded murder, we talk about the forced displacement by paramilitary groups connected to the government of millions of Colombians. We are not talking about some kind of state where human rights are improving, but rather we are talking about a human rights catastrophe.

That is the situation before us now in Colombia. It is not something that can be fixed by the whitewashing of reports. It is not something that can be fixed by having the Colombian government report on itself.

What is worse is the timing around what the government is bringing forward right now. It is an electoral period in Colombia. The issue of these so-called free trade agreements, and the Colombian state and human rights and democratic development in Colombia are being discussed to a certain extent by some Colombians. As the International Pre-electoral Observation Mission released in its report just a few days ago, at this critical time, it talked about the factors that impede free and fair elections in areas of Colombia. We are going into an electoral process. That is why the Colombian government is pushing this agreement, so that we Canadian parliamentarians can get involved in some way in this electoral process.

● (1725)

Reputable observers are saying there are factors that impede free and fair elections. The factors that they mention include widespread fear among the Colombian population and the fact that public moneys are being transferred for illicit uses in the election. They talk about negative practices such as vote buying and selling, misuse of identity documents, illegal possession of identity documents including stolen documents, coercion and intimidation of voters, fraud committed by polling officers at the polling station, obstruction of electoral observers, and control over public transportation to prevent voters from moving freely.

This is the situation right now. Instead of taking a step back, which the government should have done, to send observers so that in some way we could put pressure on the Colombian government to actually produce the free and fair elections that are being denied, the Conservatives with their Liberal allies are moving forward to reward the regime for what are clearly not going to be free and fair elections at this time.

The Conservatives and Liberals are working together to deny Colombians their democratic choice that will take place in a few weeks. Reputable observers are saying that these are the problems. Instead of putting pressure on the government, Liberals and

Conservatives are saying, "Well, that is okay. We will try to get this deal through for you. Maybe that will help you in the election".

It is so highly irresponsible, so highly inappropriate. I think Canadians in general can understand very clearly what is going on.

When we talk about the Uribe regime, the regime that is in power now, and given the impediments to a free and fair election in Colombia, presumably the government would be re-elected, we are talking about concerns that have been raised consistently about the Uribe government.

BBC News broke the story last year about the fact that a drug lord in prison in the U.S. said that he and his illegal paramilitary army funded the 2002 election campaign of Colombian President Álvaro Uribe. This particular individual, Diego Murillo, also known as Don Berna, was the successor to drug lord Pablo Escobar. As we know from the history of President Uribe and the defence intelligence agency briefings back in the early 1990s, President Uribe was a close associate of Pablo Escobar. Don Berna is his successor and he says that he funded that campaign in 2002.

Now there are elections in 2010 that are impeded; there are obstacles to free and fair elections. Very clear concerns are being raised about violence, about coercion, intimidation and fraud. Instead of the Conservative and Liberal members of Parliament standing up and saying that they are going to consider seriously this issue and that they are going to apply pressure, they are giving a free pass, a reward.

As was reported in the *Washington Post*, Colombians found out that the secret police, run by the government, had spied on supreme court judges, opposition politicians, activists and journalists. Suspicion swirled that the orders for the wiretapping as well as general surveillance had come from the presidential palace. Those revelations have come on top of an influence-peddling scandal involving the president's two sons, Tomás and Geronimo, and a widening probe of the links between Uribe's allies in congress and right-wing paramilitary death squads. Also, there have been journalists in Colombia who have expressed concern about President Uribe's links from the very beginning with the drug trade.

When Conservatives stand in this House and say that they are opposed to the drug trade, to cocaine use and at the same time push, at this sensitive time, a trade agreement that is a privileged trading relationship with the Uribe administration, it strikes the very heart of hypocrisy.

● (1730)

The Conservatives cannot stand in the House and say that they are against the drug trade, that they are against the Colombian drug cartels when they are rewarding a regime that has very clear connections and consistently over time has had personal association with the paramilitary organizations that are part of the drug trade. Yet that is what the Conservatives are pushing today in this House. They are pushing this at a sensitive time of elections when they should be stepping back and implementing an independent and impartial human rights assessment. They are trying to push forward. It is highly inappropriate and a complete repudiation of the basic Canadian values that Canadians hold dear.

Private Members' Business

There is no doubt that if Canadians were polled on this issue, they would overwhelmingly reject this agreement because they would be concerned about human rights. As people in the province of British Columbia, the "show me" province would say, the government has to show me that it has done due diligence. It has to show me an independent and impartial human rights assessment.

The Conservatives have not done it because they know darn well that the human rights assessment would show what report after report has shown.

Whether it is MiningWatch Canada, Inter Pares, Amnesty International, Peace Brigades, they have indicated in reports that it is inappropriate to move forward with this agreement. Briefing notes by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, the Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have said that it is inappropriate to move forward with this agreement.

Report after report after report, every single reputable report has said the same thing. Every single one of them has said that it is inappropriate to move forward with this agreement.

I will read from the executive summary of the last one I mentioned:

Trade can support development and the realization of human rights, if it brings benefits to vulnerable populations and allows states, who are willing, to promote developmental outcomes and protect the environment. But neither the political conditions in Colombia nor the terms of the Canada-Colombia FTA provide these reassurances. Indeed, while Canadians were promised that this agreement had been tailored to take account of human rights concerns, in fact the agreement turns out to be a standard "market-access" oriented trade deal, with ineffectual side agreements on labour and the environment. Colombian civil society and human rights organizations have been clear: they do not want this agreement.

Colombian civil society and human rights organizations have been clear: they do not want this agreement.

We could spend the next couple of weeks citing report after report after report, but what is very clear is that killer trade unionists pay a fine, that the reward for bad behaviour, that the complete refusal to have Canada in any way try to provide incentives for free and fair elections, all of these are repudiations of basic Canadian values.

In this corner of the House, NDP MPs stand for those Canadian values. We stand for those human rights. We stand for freedom of speech. We stand for labour rights. We believe that criminals should be prosecuted, not rewarded. That is why we will be voting no on Bill C-2.

• (1735)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member will have a 10-minute period of questions and comments when this debate resumes.

It being 5:38 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC BRIDGE

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should purchase the Pont de Québec for one dollar and commit to quickly finishing the repair work so as to respect its importance as a historical monument and vital transportation link for the Quebec City region.

He said: Madam Speaker, the Quebec Bridge is the longest cantilever bridge in the world. The Government of Canada built it between 1910 and 1917 to connect both banks of the St. Lawrence River. It is a main artery through the Quebec City region in terms of trade, tourism, history and heritage.

Two major tragedies occurred during construction of the bridge. Twice, in 1907 and in 1916, part of the structure collapsed, killing dozens of workers. With plenty of history behind it, the bridge was declared an international historic civil engineering monument in 1987.

The only one of its kind in the world, this imposing structure designed by architect Theodore Cooper has attracted the admiration of many. The Quebec Bridge was also designated as a national historic site by the Canadian Heritage minister in 1996.

The Quebec Bridge was built primarily for economic purposes, and it was used exclusively for rail transport for 12 years. In 1923, it was decided that Quebec could build a roadway across it. An agreement between the governments of Canada and Quebec regarding usage of the route took effect in 1928 and will expire in 2012. More than 110,000 people use the Quebec Bridge every day. I am willing to bet that it will be 2012 before the present government does anything.

In 1993, the Government of Canada sold the Quebec Bridge to Canadian National for the token amount of \$1, with bonus parcels of land valued at an estimated \$104.2 million at the time of sale. Canadian National committed to funding a major bridge maintenance program and to installing and maintaining architectural lighting. But in 1995, the Government of Canada privatized Canadian National by issuing public shares.

In 1997, a \$60 million deal was signed to complete the restoration of the bridge over a period of 10 years. The project promised a Quebec Bridge that would once again attract admiration worthy of the city's 400th anniversary celebrations in 2008. From a more practical perspective, the purpose of the agreement was also to ensure the long-term viability of the structure and the safety of those using it.

Now, 12 years later, only 40% of the work has been completed, and the project is at a standstill. Is the current Prime Minister just as incompetent as the one the Liberals had when they were in power? Back then, he accused the governing party of being so incompetent it could not even repaint a bridge.

Private Members' Business

It has become habit to say that nothing more can be done about the Quebec Bridge issue as long as it is still before the courts. Legal matters take a long time. We have to wait for the court to appoint stewards before lifting a finger. Is this another manifestation of the slowness of the federal government bureaucracy, which we suspect is intentional?

In the meantime, last January, the Delcan report, commissioned by the Department of Transport, revealed that the Quebec Bridge structure is in good to fair condition. The report also stated that there are areas of significant corrosion that are deteriorating. The restoration technique that was chosen to save money is already outdated, and it is not just that the work has not been completed, it is that the government is not living up to its responsibilities.

Again this week something new and unpleasant has hit the headlines. Tests done by Environment Canada, disclosed by the CBC, tell us that the land under the Quebec Bridge is showing disturbing levels of lead contamination. CN has apparently been aware of this for many years. Does the government intend to see what the situation is and take action immediately to ensure the safety of the people of Quebec City, in relation to this situation? If history is our guide, we may well doubt it. This is yet another reason to force the government to live up to its responsibilities in this matter.

As far as the protection of historical and cultural heritage is concerned, it is well known that this is the least of the government's concerns, but it is very much on the public's mind.

• (1740)

And what about concern for the safety of those who use the bridge? Most of the people who take the Quebec Bridge live on the south shore of the region. Those people are represented by Conservatives. The token members of the federalist parties are contemplating voting against the interests of their own constituents. I wonder how they sleep at night.

So what is preventing the government from taking back possession of the bridge and dealing with this before it collapses for a third time?

In a letter I have here, CN says it is prepared to transfer the bridge. We have to stop hiding our heads in the sand and live up to our responsibilities. That is why this motion proposes that the government purchase the bridge and restore it to the condition expected of an historic monument that is also a vital transportation link supporting the economy of Quebec.

This has nothing to do with the case in the courts. We have to act now, quite apart from the legal proceedings. When they are over, either the bill will be sent to CN or we will have saved millions of dollars that are going up in smoke as the costs attributable to this government's inertia rise.

The work on the Quebec Bridge has been dragging on for 12 years now, which is far too long. The public is waiting for the elected officials to assume their responsibilities and act now. We have a duty to take this matter in hand and resolve it once and for all.

I have an idea for this irresponsible government. In my motion, it says, "and commit to quickly finishing the repair work". If the government thinks that the approximately 5,000 officials in the

Department of Transport are incapable of dealing with the Quebec Bridge once it has been purchased, there is nothing to prevent the government from negotiating with the Government of Quebec so that it can take over the responsibility, assuming that it is given all the money needed to rehabilitate the bridge. In Quebec, we have enough self-respect to be consistent.

The ongoing problem with the Quebec Bridge fuels public cynicism toward politics. It is proof of the flagrant lack of leadership in this country and it makes people think that politics is useless. People have lost faith in the role of politicians, who generally just bob and weave. Politicians today are free to tell lies in order to restrict the freedom of citizens. Since the word lie is banned as unparliamentary, everything happens as if there were no false pretences at all, when actually government is shot full of them.

One needs only to have witnessed the desperate obstinacy with which the Prime Minister of Canada denied there was an economic crisis. One needs only to see the distress of our military personnel and their loved ones, while the armed forces insist that all is well. One needs only to see the unfeeling reports promising that the public water supply is safe, while people in the community are dying. One needs only to see the extent to which older people are kept in ignorance of their right to programs to assist them. One needs only to see the backward steps in equality between men and women. One needs only to see how working people are left to lose their jobs and struggling industries are denied assistance, while there is no change to the draconian rules governing employment insurance. One needs only to see how announcements of projects like the Super PEPS are repeated over and over to mask the shameful administrative malingering that drives costs into the stratosphere. One needs only to see the government's game of hide and seek when it comes to the Quebec Bridge.

This matter is urgent. The government must stop hiding behind procedure. Nobody is fooled by that anyway.

Resuming my speech, I would like to draw the attention of the House to words that we are very likely to hear in the next few minutes. I am sure that my colleagues in the Conservative Party will try once again to hide behind legal procedures in order to avoid assuming their responsibilities. I am eager to hear what the other parties have to say. The debate has resumed after the House was prorogued.

• (1745)

I am understandably very anxious to see whether this pause that the Conservatives forced upon us has enabled them to engage in some introspection and thought about what the citizens of the ridings of Lévis—Bellechasse and Chaudière—Appalaches, as well as my own riding and the population of the entire region of Quebec want, so that the Quebec Bridge problem can finally be solved.

I am nearly certain—although we would be agreeably surprised if it were not the case—that my colleagues in the Conservative Party will object to this proposal, although it is the only viable way in the short run to resolve the problem with the Quebec Bridge.

Private Members' Business

I am looking forward to hearing all the reasons that the hon. members from the south shore of the Quebec City region will devise to explain to their constituents why they are again turning their backs on the Quebec Bridge, the people of Quebec and the Quebec City region. Anything goes.

The Conservative Party and the other parties have the floor now, and I am very much looking forward to what they have to say.

• (1750)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the speech by the member for Louis-Hébert, who gave a fine demonstration of the kind of verbiage to which the House has become accustomed over the past 20 years from the Bloc, that is, verbiage rooted in improvisation and inaction.

I should point out from the outset that I intend to vigorously oppose this motion because the people of Quebec City, Lévis, Bellechasse, Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, basically everyone in Quebec, deserve better than verbiage. They deserve action, and action is what I am interested in.

The Quebec City area is getting major investments from the federal government. I think of the National Optics Institute, which is located in his riding, and the congress centre in Lévis. I think also of the expansion of the Rouge et Or's football stadium, as well as structuring, strategic investments for the Quebec City area.

Like all Bloc members, the member for Louis-Hébert does not want to see Quebec City take its place as Quebec's national capital and does not want to see Quebec play a leadership role within the Canadian federation.

I would like him to tell me how he can once again sit on his hands in this House when action is required. He does not act, but he makes speeches that put us to sleep.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: Madam Speaker, I always have and always will refuse to be a token Quebecker as he is every time he stands in the House to vote against Quebec's interests. This is unacceptable.

In my speech I predicted that the Conservative Party would skirt the issue. He listed a series of achievements that, for the most part, have already happened. This is the fourth or fifth time they have been announced.

We are talking about the Quebec Bridge. Once again, we see that the Conservative Party is not listening to the Quebec population. It is not listening to Quebeckers.

I will never be a token Quebecker like this member.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, specifically dealing with the resolution, I do not see any reason why members in the House would not support the resolution and vote for it.

The member mentioned that 120,000 people used the bridge every day. We know it is a storied bridge with a storied history that began in 1907. In fact, its collapse killed about 80 people a number of years ago.

The fact is this bridge was transferred by the Liberals to CNR a number of years ago and then it was privatized. A private company now owns it. The member mentioned that the bridge included a bunch of land worth millions of dollars.

The issue is this. Are we in a position to unravel the Liberal mess and get this bridge back without compensating CN for the millions of dollars of land it received with the bridge? Then when we take responsibility for the bridge, we have to pay to fix it, while CN gets the benefit of the land.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

As I said, the case is currently before the court. There have been two agreements between Canadian National and the government. The court must analyze the complex judicial process. This is why the Bloc Québécois decided to act and propose a motion that would force the government to shoulder its responsibility while taking nothing away from the court proceedings.

In 10 or 15 years, when the court has ruled on the responsibilities of both Canadian National and the government, the government can simply send the bill to Canadian National if the court decides it is responsible. And if that is not the case, we will have saved millions of dollars in cost increases related to inflation and the Quebec Bridge's deterioration. This debate has been ongoing for more than 12 years.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Motion No. 423, presented by the hon. member for Louis-Hébert, regarding the acquisition of the Quebec Bridge from Canadian National Railway.

I just want to say that this is not a game. This is a very serious issue to the people of Quebec and all Canadians in relation to this particular bridge. Therefore, I resent the fact that the Bloc member would actually refer to this as a game.

As the House knows, Motion No. 423 was last debated on December 1, 2009, and it reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should purchase the Pont de Québec for one dollar and commit to quickly finishing the repair work so as to respect its importance as a historical monument and vital transportation link for the Quebec City region.

CN is the owner of the Quebec Bridge and is certainly responsible for its operation, maintenance and safety. The Government of Canada recognizes the very importance of maintaining the Quebec Bridge in good condition, like all bridges and all the infrastructure in this country, the great investments we have made represent that. We are taking steps to find a solution that will lead to restoration work on the bridge being completed and completed as soon as possible.

We recognize that the Quebec Bridge is an important historical structure as well and a vital transportation link, as mentioned by the member of the NDP. Built in the early part of the last century, it is the longest standing cantilever bridge in the world and it stands as a testament to the expertise and the dedication of the many Quebeckers and Canadians who helped construct it.

Private Members' Business

I can tell this House that after hearing from the Conservative member from Quebec City and the member from the Bloc, that the Bloc will never be able to deliver results to any Quebecers. It is the Conservative MPs who deliver real results, as we have seen from the good work of the member for Lévis—Bellechasse. We have seen that time and time again. I have had an opportunity to visit his riding and I have seen the Lévis Convention Centre and other things that he has brought to the riding. He does excellent work in representing his constituents.

In 1987, the Canadian and American Society of Civil Engineers actually declared the Quebec Bridge an historic monument, and this is the testament of the bridge as well. In 1996, the bridge was declared a national historic site of Canada.

The Quebec Bridge continues to provide an important rail and roadway link between both shores of the St. Lawrence, connecting communities, businesses and families in the area on a daily basis. The bridge is nearly 1,000 metres long and consists of a three-lane roadway and a single rail line. Thousands of vehicles do pass over it every day and, indeed, CN and VIA trains use the rail line on a daily basis. The Quebec Bridge is an important historic symbol and transportation link that continues to play a key role in the economic and social viability of the region and, indeed, of all Canada.

Before discussing various efforts on behalf of the government on what we have done in the short period of time that we have been involved in this file, I would reiterate that CN is the owner of this bridge. CN is responsible for its operation, maintenance and safety. CN has confirmed to the government that the bridge is in good condition and, based on recent inspections, that there are no immediate concerns with the condition of the bridge, the safety of the bridge or the people using it.

Fully completed in 1918, the Quebec Bridge quickly formed part of the Canadian government railways. In the early 1920s, the Government of Canada conferred the operation and management of all Canadian government railway lands, including the Quebec Bridge, to CN, a newly formed crown corporation at that time. The CN management operation is no stranger to this particular asset. Essentially, CN has been operating and managing the Quebec Bridge for more than 80 years.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Government of Canada began divesting itself of transportation assets and removing itself from the direct involvement of delivering transportation services because, in part, people locally do a better job than the provinces and certainly the cities of managing those assets.

Accordingly, in 1993, Transport Canada entered into an agreement with the Canadian National Railway to transfer title to the railway company of all Canadian government railway lands across Canada for \$1. It was a great deal. One of the assets transferred to CN under this agreement was the Quebec Bridge. In exchange for this, CN agreed to undertake a major restoration of the Quebec Bridge itself and, to ensure its long-term viability, the government then completed the transfer of the bridge to CN finally in 1995 at the time of CN's privatization.

● (1755)

To be clear, CN became the full owner of the Quebec Bridge in 1995, some 15 years ago. At that time, it assumed responsibility for the bridge's restoration, operation, maintenance and safety, and was fully aware that it was taking on that responsibility. As mentioned, CN received generous compensation in 1993, in the form of land transfers to assume all of these responsibilities.

Even though CN owns the Quebec Bridge and it is their responsibility, the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of maintaining the structure in good condition and is making significant efforts to see this objective is achieved.

In 1997, to help CN meet its obligations, the government signed a tripartite agreement with CN and the Quebec government to fund a 10 year, \$60 million restoration program for the Quebec Bridge. This has been ongoing for some period of time. The amount of funding was based on CN's estimates of the cost of the restoration work. The total commitments over 10 years were as follows: The Government of Canada, \$6 million; the Government of Quebec, \$18 million; and Canadian National Railway, \$36 million, toward the restoration of this project.

CN had entire control of the project. It had full control over the entire work program for the bridge. The \$60 million budget was depleted at the end of 2005 without the project being completed. Approximately 60% of the bridge surface has still not yet been painted. In addition, work on some elements of the structure has not been completed.

In the Government of Canada's opinion, the relevant agreements envision the completion of the painting and infrastructure work for this project. To maintain the Quebec Bridge in good condition and protect the interests of the taxpayers and people of Quebec, the Government of Canada believes that CN should complete the restoration work on the bridge.

CN owns the bridge and was compensated for taking responsibility for the bridge and restoring it. CN committed to completely restoring the bridge and ensuring its long-term viability at that time, some 15 years ago.

The Government of Canada has made several other attempts to work with CN to find a solution that would lead to the restoration work on the bridge being completed. However, quite frankly, those efforts have not been successful.

As a last resort, this government initiated court proceedings in February 2007 to compel Canadian National to fulfill its obligation to completely restore the bridge. These court proceedings, as mentioned, are still ongoing. The Government of Canada hopes that these proceedings against CN will lead to a satisfactory conclusion, with the railway company completing the restoration work on the bridge and ensuring its long-term viability.

The Canadian and Quebec taxpayers deserve this. They deserve no less than to have their tax dollars protected. Canadian National received generous compensation to take responsibility for the bridge and the taxpayers contributed funding, even then, toward the bridge's restoration program.

Private Members' Business

To conclude, the Government of Canada acknowledges that the Quebec Bridge is an important historical symbol as well as an essential transportation link. It recognizes the importance of keeping the Quebec Bridge in good working order. As mentioned, Canadian National has confirmed that the bridge is in good condition and, based on recent inspections, there are no immediate concerns about its condition.

The government is well aware of the situation with the Quebec Bridge. In fact, the member from Lévis took me on a tour of the bridge some four or five years ago when he was first elected. I had a firsthand chance to look at this in my role as parliamentary secretary. I know firsthand that he has brought it to the minister's attention on numerous occasions, so we are working on it.

Before I close, I should also note that the Bloc Québécois has changed opinions on how to resolve the Quebec Bridge issue no less than three times in recent years. That is the Bloc's record. It flip-flops from issue to issue. I wonder what new idea will be proposed in 2010 after it becomes tired of this one.

Fortunately, our government is taking a reasonable and serious approach to address the Quebec Bridge issue, one that aims to protect taxpayers, taxpayers' dollars, and their interests, and to find a solution that will lead to the bridge being completely restored to the satisfaction of the people of Quebec.

● (1800)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise here today to speak to a motion that is of personal interest to me. I am of course referring to the motion put forward by my Bloc colleague regarding the Quebec Bridge. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should purchase the Pont de Québec for one dollar and commit to quickly finishing the repair work so as to respect its importance as a historical monument and vital transportation link for the Quebec City region.

I am from Quebec City and my paternal ancestors are from Quebec City and the surrounding area. When I was 15, I had the pleasure of being a guide at the Citadel, another historic site in a city whose heritage is internationally recognized. As we all know, Old Quebec has been designated a UNESCO world heritage site.

When I was giving tours to tourists visiting the Citadel along the cliffs overlooking the St. Lawrence, I would invite them to look to the west, towards the Quebec Bridge. I would proudly explain to them that that bridge was, in its day, one of the world's engineering marvels.

I would explain to them the great challenges that had to be overcome in order to complete the bridge. There was a great human tragedy that involved the loss of many lives.

I would also like to point out that I am myself an engineer. The association of professional engineers distinguishes itself by the fact that all engineers in Canada wear an iron ring—now it is stainless steel—after they graduate. In a ceremony that was written by Rudyard Kipling, we swear to be true to the values of integrity that must guide us in our profession.

I mention this because there is a connection to the Quebec Bridge. Rumour has it that the iron rings given to the first engineers were made from a beam that was part of the central section of the Quebec Bridge, the section that collapsed into the St. Lawrence during construction. I am sorry to say this myth still persists today, but it makes a nice story.

● (1805)

[English]

Close to my riding of Westmount—Ville-Marie sits the Victoria Bridge. Opened as a federal rail bridge in 1859, the Victoria Bridge was the first bridge to span the St. Lawrence River. At the time, it was a sign of progress and a symbol of the power of industrial change that drove the century.

In a similar manner, the Quebec Bridge was built to permit travel between the south shore of the St. Lawrence River and the north shore at Quebec City.

[Translation]

In 1987, the Quebec Bridge was declared an international historic monument, as my colleague from Louis-Hébert mentioned, by the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering and the American Society of Civil Engineers. On January 24, 1996, the bridge was designated a national historic site of Canada. When it was completed, the Quebec Bridge became the longest cantilever bridge in the world.

[English]

Both bridges, the Victoria Bridge and the Quebec Bridge, which both accommodate rail and road traffic, are important transportation routes in their respective cities and both are undeniably jewels of railway architecture.

[Translation]

The Canadian National Railway inherited the Victoria Bridge from the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada in 1918. In 1962, Canadian National reached an agreement with Transport Canada which set out, among other things, a cost-sharing formula for bridge maintenance. This agreement delegated the responsibility for costs relating to maintenance and repair of the road surface and other operating expenses to Transport Canada.

Transport Canada also began compensating Canadian National for lost toll revenues, in the amount of \$664,000 per year. According to a 1997 departmental press release, \$150 million had been transferred to CN between 1962 and 1997 under this agreement. The maintenance costs for this bridge are shared by the government and Canadian National. Between 1997 and 2008, Transport Canada transferred approximately \$54 million to Canadian National under this agreement.

[English]

The Quebec Bridge has a different story. Ownership of the Quebec Bridge was transferred from the federal government to the crown corporation CN for \$1 in 1993. In 1995, CN, as we know, was privatized, making the bridge privately owned.

Private Members' Business

Unlike the Victoria Bridge, there is no ongoing agreement between the federal government and CN regarding federal contributions to the cost of maintaining the automobile portion of this bridge. In 1997 the federal government agreed to participate in a \$60 million restoration of the bridge with the province of Quebec and CN. Under this project, the federal government, as my colleague from the government stated, contributed \$6 million of the \$60 million, at roughly \$600,000 per annum over 10 years.

Due to a disagreement over painting the bridge, CN and the federal government are currently in court. The federal government alleges that the project was to include painting the bridge, but CN decided not to paint the bridge due to the additional necessary environmental mitigation costs.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

My Bloc colleague's motion proposes that the federal government assume responsibility for the Quebec Bridge and that it ensure that the necessary maintenance and repair work is completed.

The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie suggested a very sensible amendment to the Bloc motion. Essentially, my colleague is proposing that maintenance and repair costs be shared, under an agreement naturally, by the interested parties, namely Canadian National and the government. In other words, it is not acceptable for the government to be solely responsible for the costs.

I was born in Quebec City and my paternal ancestors were from Quebec City. I would like the Quebec Bridge to be preserved by ensuring that it is maintained. In my opinion, the amendment proposed by my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie—suggesting that we share the costs with Canadian National, one user of the bridge—is a pragmatic solution.

I hope that my Bloc colleagues will adopt this change. A solution was found for the Victoria Bridge. It seems to me that there is a solution for the Quebec Bridge that will ensure the preservation of this important part of our heritage.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, this problem is truly quite simple. The Bloc Québécois' solution is the only realistic option on the table.

In the Liberals' proposed change I see another example of their tendency to contradict themselves, as they did yesterday. Their words fell on deaf ears for two months on the importance of women's rights when it comes to reproduction and contraception.

This is the same Liberal Party which, last year, voted with the Conservatives to deprive women of their right to equal pay for work of equal value. Now they are trying to pass a private member's bill that has no chance of getting passed in the Senate. In the first instance, they voted against their own leader last night, which is unheard of in the history of this Parliament.

This is the same Liberal Party that rises today to say that it is indeed true that we were ripped off by Canadian National, but we will only make it pay for half the costs. That means that there are enough people on the board of directors at Canadian National who are cozy with the Liberals to say that, even though they are wrong, we will find a way for them to be right. The issue before us today is

simply a matter of whether a corporation that made an acquisition for \$1 and received huge compensation in the form of land, has the right to take advantage of Canadian taxpayers by refusing to do the work that is clearly part of the contract with CN.

Sometimes the Bloc has some very harsh things to say about my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse, which I do not necessarily agree with entirely. I want to help him by inviting him to think next time he speaks in the House. When we are discussing a specific matter, he should make an effort to stay on topic. He rose earlier to talk to us about Rouge et Or football, when we were talking about repairing the Quebec Bridge, which is at risk of falling down if we continue to do nothing about it. He really lacks seriousness when we are talking about matters of great public interest.

The fact that the federal government has been in court since 2007 shows that even the Conservatives know that Canadian National is at fault and did not respect its commitment. The minister's assistant admitted that although it had committed to complete the work in 10 years, only one third of the painting had been done; two thirds remain to be done.

It started out wrong. It was as though they just had to ask a few summer students to paint the bridge. We are talking about protecting infrastructure. As strange and implausible as it sounds in a society as advanced as ours, a structure that was built nearly a century ago will collapse because we are not smart enough to agree on how to maintain it. I am not making that up. This is what is going on with the Quebec Bridge.

I would like to have heard the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier on this issue, since he used to be quite vocal about his suggestions on a radio talk show back in the day. I lived in Quebec City in the 1970s and 1980s. I cannot believe that after years of discussions and delays, we still have not reached an agreement.

One of the two parties is not respecting the contract, and instead of taking action, the government is dragging it out in court. I am a lawyer and I have nothing against appearing in court; it is good for the profession. But seriously, it is not good for anyone if a structure this vital to Quebec's second-largest city, which just happens to be its national capital, were to become unusable overnight.

The weakest and most incorrect argument I heard came from the minister's assistant. He repeatedly said that CN has reassured us that the bridge is fine.

● (1815)

CN is a company that does not keep its promises. What do they expect it to say? The government is taking CN to court because it is made up of a bunch of liars, yet the government believes the company when it says that everything is fine, that the bridge probably will not fall down, and that everything will probably be okay.

Private Members' Business

The minister's assistant went to see the bridge with the member for Lévis—Bellechasse five years ago, and he said that everything seemed fine to him. What was he basing that assessment on? Is there nobody in Canada who is capable of carrying out an objective analysis? People who have seen the dilapidated state of this crucial piece of infrastructure for themselves know how gullible we would have to be to take CN's word for it. The government is responsible for protecting the public. Earlier, the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie was talking about engineers and their rings, a tradition that goes back to one of the beams that fell when the bridge collapsed. All I can say is that the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec* has one single mandate: to protect the public.

I was the member for Laval for 13 or 14 years, and there were all kinds of issues in my riding during that time. CNN ran stories about the City of Laval twice, both times because infrastructure had collapsed, taking human lives. Can anyone blame us for doubting what CN says about everything being okay and unlikely to fall down? Maybe it is time we put people first.

I would like to congratulate the Bloc Québécois member on this very practical motion. I disapprove of the Liberals' attempt to water it down and render it meaningless by suggesting that the burden should be shared. In the name of protecting people and preserving communications across this vast nation, I call on the government to shoulder its responsibilities and resume the process of taking control of this property for one dollar, along with all of the land given to compensate CN, which has turned out to be an unreliable partner. The government must start acting in the public interest rather than in the interest of its business partners, which have proven themselves to be unreliable when it comes to the public interest.

• (1820)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, I must agree with the member for Outremont about the future of the Quebec Bridge as well as with the motion from my Bloc Québécois colleague, the member for Louis-Hébert.

The Quebec Bridge has become a major issue for the latter member's riding, given what it represents. It is a recognized historic monument because of its engineering and construction. It is a cantilever bridge. It is also recognized as a main artery between the south and north shores.

When the Liberals were in power, the rust that is damaging the bridge was not taken care of. It was painted, but not with the right products. That has led to more rust and catastrophic deterioration. Not only is a historic monument being neglected, so is a main artery between the north and south shores.

The Conservatives are doing the same thing the Liberals did—hiding behind a legal battle between CN and the government.

For example, the bridge could be taken back and the restoration work done immediately and then an agreement could be reached with CN. It does not matter whose responsibility it would be; we just need action. The Liberals did not act. And no one is acting now.

We are talking about the Quebec Bridge. I do not want the member for Lévis to come to me saying that they had built a monument or that they had put money into the Quebec City airport. That is not what we are talking about. This is something else. We are

talking about the Quebec Bridge. We will do our best to keep them from changing the subject tonight. The Conservatives have nothing to say right now and that is why they are trying to dazzle people with talk about the other investments they have made.

Yesterday morning we learned that the lead in the bridge's paint is running into the river and that the runoff beneath the bridge contains up to 76 times more lead than standards allow. That is a consequence of allowing so much rust to accumulate on the bridge. I find it ironic that a federal law forbids dumping any harmful substances into the river, yet the Conservatives are the ones responsible for doing just that.

Instead, they should take the bull by the horns and agree to repair it. Then when the time comes to negotiate with CN, they can try to recover the funds from CN, which is an irresponsible owner. We have known that for some time. The bridge has been left to deteriorate and everyone is hiding behind legal procedures.

They did the same thing regarding Shannon. They even wanted to challenge the class action suit in the case of Shannon, because they do not want to pay the price or assume their responsibilities. Yet that, too, is a question of pollution. The Department of National Defence polluted the waters of Shannon.

In the past, maintenance was done on the bridge every five years. That is no longer the case. The member for Lévis—Bellechasse was saying earlier that we are being told that the bridge is safe, that it poses no problem and there is no danger. As the member for Outremont was saying earlier, we believe CN, but considering the promises it made regarding maintenance for the bridge, we now see that it has been an irresponsible owner.

If not for the motion put forward by my colleague from Louis-Hébert, we would not be talking about the Quebec Bridge here today. The Quebec Bridge would continue to be ignored.

One might have expected to see some funds allocated to restoring the bridge in the last budget. As we saw, funds were given to other provinces and to Montreal for the maintenance of certain bridges. I am not saying that money should not have been invested. There are five Conservative members in the region and even they were not able to get any money or to lock in the funding that would immediately correct the situation.

I do not know if the member for Lévis—Bellechasse will speak to this issue, but I would really like to hear from him regarding the future of the Quebec Bridge.

How much money will the Conservative government invest? What will it decide regarding its position on the bridge?

• (1825)

It is before the courts, and we are waiting. I have been in this House since 1993 and for at least 15 years I have been hearing about problems with the Quebec Bridge. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives have been able to find the right solution for the Quebec Bridge. Meanwhile, the bridge is deteriorating. It is a historic monument and has been recognized by experts as an extraordinary example of this type of bridge.

The Conservative government has greatly disappointed us in a number of files in the region. I also remember the plans to locate public servants in D'Estimauville, in the Beauport—Limoilou sector.

The entire Quebec City region, including the Chamber of Commerce and all leaders in the area, was mobilized. The Conservatives did not want to take action and the member for Beauport—Limoilou was not even at the press conference. She had to be pushed hard. In addition, there were three calls for tenders, and a great deal of time and money was wasted to finally get a “yes” out of the Conservatives.

When you want the Conservatives to take action, you have to put pressure on them. However, when they make a decision, they make three or four announcements. They organize press conferences to announce the same amount of money that had been announced one or three months before, but with delays of several years.

If a decision is not made immediately, it will cost a great deal more. And not just because of inflation. There is more and more rust on the bridge. Experts have examined the bridge and found that it is so highly corroded that it is going to be much more expensive to restore the bridge.

The member for Lévis—Bellechasse may be the last to speak and I would like him to speak about the Quebec Bridge. I do not want him to speak about anything but the Quebec Bridge. The motion is on the Quebec Bridge. I want him to stop listing the investments made in the Quebec City region and to stop saying that the Bloc does not want the region to grow. On the contrary, file by file, we are monitoring the future of the Quebec City region.

The member for Lévis—Bellechasse is laughing his head off, but I think he should be serious and show that the Quebec Bridge is important to him. I would like him to announce that the government is prepared to invest in restoring the Quebec Bridge. I urge him to look at the deterioration of the bridge. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they said they wanted to do better.

It does not look as if they are doing better for the Quebec Bridge. Or the Quebec City armoury, for that matter. It burned down two years ago. The government promised to rebuild it, but we do not know when that will happen; we have not heard a date. The government held public consultations. During the first consultation, they had to be backed into a corner for us to get information about the future of the armoury. Then a second consultation was held by a building expert, but this report was not made public. The government keeps everything secret and works in a vacuum. Quebec's national capital commission asked to be more involved in the issue, so that it could figure out how to adjust its development work in the area surrounding this historic focal point of Quebec City.

The Conservatives only do things their own way and they operate in a vacuum. We do not know where they are going. Perhaps the member for Lévis—Bellechasse will talk about the building in D'Estimauville. I can say that some mistakes were made, and three calls for tender were needed because no one knew what was going on and the criteria were extremely vague. It was not until two years later that any questions were answered. After the greater Quebec City region starting putting on the pressure, press conferences were even held on the subject.

Private Members' Business

I hope that the member for Lévis—Bellechasse will give us some good news about the Quebec Bridge. I hope he does not get too lost in his files, since tonight it is the Quebec Bridge we are talking about.

• (1830)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Québec.

I listened carefully to her speech and I would like to thank her for taking the time to point out the many achievements of the Conservative members from Quebec since January 2006. I thank her for pointing out these fantastic achievements, such as the Quebec City airport. I am very proud, because before I was even elected I went to meet with the airport management, who told us that Quebec City needed contemporary, modern infrastructure in time for the 400th anniversary celebrations.

That is what we did, under the leadership of the minister responsible for the Quebec City region and the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou. Of course, there have been other projects. She mentioned Estimauville, but of course that is not the purpose of my speech today. So I would like to thank her. There is also the Quebec City armoury. Unfortunately, the member for Québec votes against the estimates and the funding that have been proposed to respect our commitment to rebuild the Quebec City armoury. This is not the purpose of my speech either, but again, I would like to thank the member for pointing out the importance and the great achievements of the Conservative members. I am not done here; we will continue.

That being said, I want to talk about the motion before us today, a motion about the Quebec Bridge from the member for Louis-Hébert. I must say that I will oppose it strenuously and tirelessly. Nevertheless, we have found common ground today. All of the members who have spoken to this issue in the House, regardless of their party affiliation, recognize the importance of keeping the Quebec Bridge in good repair and taking all necessary measures to restore this important structure. I agree that we need to find a long-term solution for the Quebec Bridge, a viable solution that works for all stakeholders and users. The bridge is a heritage gem.

The member for Westmount—Ville-Marie referred to the legend of the engineer's ring. He is absolutely right. As the story goes, the rings are made from a supporting beam from the Quebec Bridge. All Quebecers and Canadians care about this structure. As we heard in his speech, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, my colleague from Fort McMurray—Athabasca, reiterated his personal commitment and his commitment as a government member to finding a workable solution for the Quebec Bridge.

But what did the opposition propose today? The Bloc has a tendency to improvise. Over the past three years, Bloc members have come up with three impossible ideas, much like a magician produces improbable rabbits from a hat. Some of those ideas have been utterly preposterous. They have suggested fixing a bridge that does not belong to us, reclaiming ownership, and investing. They are going madly off in all directions. Maybe they will have yet another idea by next week. The Quebec Bridge deserves better. It deserves good ideas. Most of all, it deserves a clear direction, a strong will, and a solid commitment to see to its long-term viability.

Adjournment Proceedings

Earlier, the NDP member from the Montreal region said that there was a problem because the private sector had not done its job and taxpayers were going to have to pay the price. He suggested that taxpayers were being played for fools and would have to clean up the private sector's mess in the end. That is not quite how we approach the issue. The government has to take a responsible approach. I would like to offer the NDP member some reassurance. Transport Canada inspectors have inspected the bridge. It is safe. My wife crosses it every day, and I sleep soundly at night.

That said, I would like to remind the members of the House that it was the members opposite, the Liberals, who were in power when the problems with the Quebec Bridge first began. They chose not to act. We had to wait until February 2007—I remember that we came to power in 2006—before the government took concrete measures to force Canadian National to respect the agreement. So, we put an end to the inaction and we took measures. That is what I want to talk to you about today, the measures that we are taking to restore the Quebec Bridge to its glory days as well as its role as an important symbol for both the Quebec and Chaudière—Appalaches regions.

In February 2007, we took legal action after years of dithering from the former Liberal government. That government had done little to ensure that Canadian National would repair the bridge, as it had promised to do.

• (1835)

We saw enough of their promises without results. It is a broken record.

In the meantime, the Bloc, yesterday and today, has proposed a host of inconsistent policies that taxpayers will eventually have to pay for.

In 2008, the leader of the Bloc or the leader of the resistance—I am not sure what to call him these days—improvised by proposing:

that Ottawa resume the work immediately and cover the cost and when the trial is over, if the government wins, it can send the bill to CN.

How can the government unilaterally do work on infrastructure that does not belong to us? The answer is in the question. That is just not done. This makes no sense. We are not going to commit taxpayer money to something so risky.

That is surely why today the hon. member for Louis-Hébert is proposing another idea. He is pulling yet another rabbit out of his hat. This is full-blown improvisation. Fortunately, recess is over. The Liberals' inaction and the Bloc's improvisation stop with our government.

We think the Quebec Bridge is in good shape, but we must take the necessary measures to ensure the work is done.

I would now like to move on to the lawsuits against CN that are under way. In the proceedings, Transport Canada is asking the court to rule that Canadian National did not meet its contractual obligation to repair the Quebec Bridge. We are also asking that CN be required to finish the repair work, including painting the structure. If not, it will have to reimburse Transport Canada for the contributions made for repairing the bridge.

When do we expect a decision to be made? The court has accepted CN's proposal to split the proceedings in two. Accordingly, the first case will determine the nature and scope of Canadian National's obligations under the agreements made in 1993 and 1997.

A second case to determine whether Canadian National has breached its contractual obligations will be heard afterward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

He will have two minutes left when the bill is next considered by the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, something really exciting is happening in Nova Scotia.

There was a very exciting announcement this summer where our government announced that it was looking to get 25% renewables on line by 2015. This is a pretty ambitious target when we consider the fact that Nova Scotia does not have vast sources of hydro like other provinces. The vast majority of our electricity actually does come from coal-fired power plants. I applaud the NDP government in Nova Scotia for this bold move.

We are one of many provinces across Canada that is looking to renewables to clean up our electricity systems while at the same time creating the jobs of tomorrow.

Earlier this month in question period, I asked the minister if the federal government planned on being a serious partner with the provinces in these efforts. Right now it does not look like it is ready to be that serious partner, because the ecoEnergy for renewable power project is out of money for new projects and the sustainable development technology program was completely absent from the last budget.

This hurts Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada and all of Canada. The government is funding carbon sequestration projects over renewables at a ratio of 7 to 1, sending more and more of our money to oil companies and coal-fired plants than to tidal research or wind or solar. We have all kinds of wind producers in Nova Scotia, as an example.

In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I., and Newfoundland and Labrador, we are poised to produce green power, clean power. We have literally a tar sands worth of jobs right there, waiting for it, if we would just invest strategically in research and development.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Pembina Institute and Environment Northeast have done a really great analysis of this past budget in relation to renewables and energy efficiency technology. They actually did give this budget a failing grade. Despite the government's claim that we are in step with our American neighbours, we are in fact being outspent on renewables by a ratio of 18 to 1 at the federal level.

These two groups point out that the relative share of expenditures between our two countries is really important when we consider the inter-connectedness of our energy markets, and that we actually compete for clean energy jobs and capital investments. The relative levels of government investment and support in clean energy will actually play a part in dictating where clean energy investments are likely to happen.

I have witnessed this in Nova Scotia, at both the micro and the macro level. Starting with the macro in Halifax, I have met incredible researchers who are doing this kind of research and development in renewables, in particular in tidal and wind. We are centre of research and innovation in Halifax. We are a hub of knowledge and exploration. It is this kind of work that must be supported federally with programs like the SDT and ecoEnergy renewable power.

On the micro level in Nova Scotia, I had the privilege to work on the demand side management programs. These are energy efficiency programs that would actually be paid for and run by the utility. This was part of my work with the Affordable Energy Coalition prior to being elected.

In developing these programs, we actually had to have a budget line, right there. It was there for training new workers for these green jobs that we had created. Now it was not very many jobs, but we created jobs by investing in the green economy, by investing in green technologies. This is what we are losing out on if we fail to continue funding important programs like this.

I call on this government to renew funding for the sustainable development technology program and the ecoEnergy for renewable power program as soon as possible to ensure—

• (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, allow me to shine the light of reality on the real and significant extent to which the Government of Canada is supporting the full spectrum of Canada's diverse energy sector.

This government is putting into action a balanced set of initiatives that are delivering tangible benefits for Canadians by increasing our competitiveness, creating jobs and improving our air quality and the environment.

I should not need to remind the House that Canada is blessed with unparalleled economic advantages and resources. This government recognizes its responsibilities to leverage those advantages to secure Canada's place as a clean energy superpower and a leader in green job creation. We lead the world in clean electricity generation and will continue to do so.

Canada's electricity supply mix is already one of the cleanest in the world and we plan on making it even better through regulation. That is why we have set the goal of providing 90% of Canada's electricity needs by non-emitting sources such as hydro, nuclear, solar or wind power by 2020.

We are making the investments to make that happen. Natural Resources Canada is investing over \$7 billion in clean energy through initiatives such as our eco-energy programs, the clean energy fund and Sustainable Development Technology Canada.

On renewable energy investments, budget 2010 announced \$100 million over the next four years to establish a next generation renewable power initiative that will support clean energy technologies in the forest sector. That is good news for my home province of British Columbia and all forestry regions.

Our initiatives and our investments are helping Canadians use energy more efficiently, boost renewable energy supplies and develop cleaner energy technologies. This investment is creating jobs and providing economic and environmental benefits coast to coast and will continue to do so for many years to come.

Our renewable incentive programs provide incentives for each unit of energy produced for several years. The \$1.5 billion eco-energy for renewable power initiative provides incentives for up to 10 years after a project is built and is leveraging \$14 billion of private investments over 20 years. The \$1.5 billion eco-energy for biofuels initiative provides incentives for up to seven years after a project is built.

Many of these projects are still being built or will be built shortly, which means these programs are also creating jobs in trades and construction.

While these projects are being built and for several years after these projects are built, they create and maintain green jobs and provide economic and environmental benefits for Canadians.

Our clean energy fund is investing up to \$146 million over five years for renewable and clean energy demonstration projects, including the integration of renewable energy sources for heat and power.

In addition to our renewable energy programs, our energy efficiency programs support businesses, industry and households, reduce the amount of energy they use, helping the environment and leaving more money in the pockets of Canadians.

We are also investing in clean energy technologies to demonstrate the greatest potential for progress, such as carbon capture and storage. These programs are substantial and ongoing investments in jobs, our economy and our environment.

Adjournment Proceedings

Our \$7 billion investment in clean energy at Natural Resources Canada has achieved results and will continue to do so for the coming years.

Our actions are paying off. By developing and deploying clean energy technologies, we are helping Canada to become a clean energy superpower.

• (1845)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, I heard about forests, hydro and nuclear. It is not enough to tout current practices and current projects focusing on science and technology of the past. I am talking about the jobs of the future, the investments of the future, the innovations that we cannot even possibly imagine yet. If we continue to focus on the old energy economy, we will lose jobs and we will lose opportunities for private investment.

If the Obama administration is investing in research and development at a rate of 18 to 1 compared to Canada, where would you put your money, Madam Speaker? I bet it would not be Canada, not with those odds of finding the next breakthrough on renewables in the U.S. versus Canada.

The time for action is now, for the health of our planet and for the health of our economy. I hope the government comes to realize it soon.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Madam Speaker, that is why we are acting now. Through eco-energy we will produce two billion litres of renewable alternatives to gasoline and 500 million litres of renewable alternatives to diesel, add more than 4,300 megawatts of new renewable electricity and help more than 500,000 families increase the energy efficiency of their homes by an average of 22%.

Furthermore, through the clean energy fund we will make greater use of clean energy technologies, reducing Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions from energy production. We will allocate \$466 million for three large scale carbon capture and storage demonstration projects in Alberta. We will select 19 renewable and clean energy demonstration projects from across Canada, totalling up to \$146 million, and leverage around \$3.6 billion in investments.

These are apparently all initiatives the NDP opposes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

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