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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 7, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 7, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1000)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to Section 38 of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, to lay upon the table the report of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2010.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I would like to table in the House, in both official languages, two copies of the government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled "A Timely Tune-up for the Living New Veterans Charter".

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and other Acts.

The committee has studied the bill and is now reporting the bill back to the House without amendments.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the great honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing

Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to Bill S-210, An Act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act and the Auditor General Act (involvement of Parliament).

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendments.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

SENIORS

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to present an initial petition circulated by the FADOQ network and signed by more than 1,200 people from Quebec and my riding of Châteauguay—Saint-Constant who are calling on the government to improve the guaranteed income supplement paid out to our poorest seniors. This is a matter of social justice and dignity for those who built our society over the years, and who are now living below the poverty line.

● (1005)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to present in the House a petition from the Fédération de l'âge d'or du Québec network. It criticizes the fact that the federal guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance and the allowance for the survivor no longer fulfill their missions to allow low-income seniors to earn a reasonable living.

The petitioners are calling on the House to implement automatic enrollment for the guaranteed income supplement, for the spouse's allowance and for the allowance for the survivor, to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$110 per month for seniors living alone, and to increase the monthly allowance for the survivor by \$199. It also calls on the government to implement full and unconditional retroactivity, and to extend by six months the guaranteed income supplement and the spouse's allowance upon the death of one of the beneficiaries in the couple.

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to present a petition signed by 2,000 of my constituents, who are calling for improvements in Canada's guaranteed income supplement, spouse's allowance and survivor's allowance programs. I add my petitions to those presented by the two members who spoke previously. All these petitions call for automatic registration for the guaranteed income supplement, the spouse's allowance and the survivor's allowance; improvements in the guaranteed income supplement for people who live alone; an increase in the monthly survivor's allowance; full, unconditional retroactivity; and a six-month extension of the guaranteed income supplement and the spouse's allowance when a beneficiary dies.

[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased this morning to submit a petition signed by members of my constituency of Leeds—Grenville, as well as from others across Ontario.

The petition calls on the federal and provincial Ministers of Health to discuss allowing hospitals, private clinics and doctors to test for and treat CCSVI in all Canadians who desire testing and treatment. It also asks the federal and provincial Ministers of Health to plan and implement a nationwide clinical trial for the evaluation of venography and balloon venoplasty for the treatment of CCSVI in persons diagnosed with MS.

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I also want to present a petition that was signed by 1,068 people for the reasons explained by the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate her on taking the initiative to organize the tabling of these petitions on the federal guaranteed income supplement program.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to present this petition from seniors in Quebec. The petition calls on the government to protect seniors, specifically by improving the federal guaranteed income program, the spouse's allowance and the survivor's allowance.

[English]

OLD AGE SECURITY PENSION

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition on behalf of my colleague, the hon. member for Whitby—Oshawa and his constituents regarding Bill C-428, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (residency requirement).

The constituents from the riding of Whitby—Oshawa, spearheaded by Dorothy and Frank Murray, believe that the proposed change to lower the residency requirement from 10 years to 3 years for OAS is unmerited, as the current residency requirement for an OAS pension is sufficient.

Therefore, they call upon the House of Commons to oppose Bill C-428.

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition with 913 names. It is the same as the petition my colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant presented, and it calls for improvements in the federal guaranteed income supplement, spouse's allowance and survivor's allowance program.

• (1010)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following in the footsteps of the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, I also want to present a petition today calling for improvements in the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. My petition has more than 1,082 signatures. The Bloc Québécois has been fighting for many years to improve the guaranteed income supplement program. We want the government to bring in automatic registration for the supplement, increase the monthly benefit for people living alone by \$110 and introduce full, unconditional retroactivity for the seniors who have been cheated in recent years.

[English]

SKIN CANCER

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting four petitions, the first one with regard to skin cancer.

The petition states that one in seven Canadians will develop skin cancer in their lifetime and that melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer and one of the most rapidly increasing cancers in Canada.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support a national skin cancer and melanoma initiative to provide much needed access to newer drug treatments.

RIGHT TO LIFE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is with regard to life.

The petitioners point out that Canada is a country that respects human rights and includes in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that everyone has the right to life.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to pass legislation for the protection of human life from the time of conception until natural death.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition says that there are a number of severe, potentially life-threatening conditions that do not qualify for disability programs because they are not necessarily permanent.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to enact specific and precise legislation to provide additional medical EI benefits to at least equal to maternity EI benefit.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last petition is regarding the long gun registry. It states that the long gun registry has spiralled to an estimated \$2 billion and that the registry has not saved one life.

The petitioners are calling upon the House of Commons to support any legislation that will cancel the long gun registry.

PASSPORT FEES

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition calls upon the Canadian government to negotiate with the United States government to reduce the United States and Canadian passport fees. The petitioners are concerned that American tourists visiting Canada are at their lowest levels since 1972. American tourism has fallen by 5 million visits in the last seven years, from 16 million in 2002 to only 11 million in 2009.

Currently, one-half of Canadians have passports but only one-quarter of Americans have passports.

At the recent Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments, attended by myself and 500 other elected representatives from 11 border states and 3 provinces, the following resolution was passed unanimously. It reads, be it:

RESOLVED, that [the] Conference calls on President Barack Obama and [the Canadian] Prime Minister...to immediately examine a reduced fee for passports to facilitate cross-border tourism;

...we encourage the governments to examine the idea of a limited time two-for-one passport renewal or new application; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this resolution be submitted to appropriate federal, state and provincial officials.

To be a fair process, passport fees must be reduced on both sides of the border. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government to work with the American government to examine the mutual reduction in passport fees to facilitate tourism and, finally, promote a limited time, two-for-one passport renewal or new application fee on a mutual basis with the United States.

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present this petition, and I hope that the government will pay attention to the 86 pages filled with just over 1,050 signatures from people calling on it to improve the guaranteed income supplement as well as spousal and survivor allowances. Motion M-300, which I tabled in the House and which was adopted by the majority of elected members—only the Conservatives were opposed—proposed this same idea. The Conservative government needs to do something quickly for seniors, who built today's society.

I would like to draw attention to the fine work being done in my riding by the Richelieu-Yamaska region of FADOQ and by Mr. Leblanc and his members. I would also like to mention the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, our seniors critic, and her unrelenting efforts on behalf of Quebec's seniors.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

VETERANS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from citizens across many communities and all walks of life who wish Parliament to know that they genuinely support and value the contributions of our veterans and that they regard a veteran as a veteran regardless in which deployment or where an individual may have served.

The petitioners join the veterans ombudsman and General Walter Natynczyk in condemning the new Veterans Charter and the Department of Veterans Affairs for creating barriers to serving Canadian veterans.

The petitioners also demand that existing services, such as veterans hospitals, be mandated to serve modern-day veterans, including the more than 200,000 members of the armed forces who have served in peacekeeping missions since the Korean war.

The petitioners want there to be a full hearing in the House of Commons in response to the issues of special care, pensions, programs, services and the preservation of an independent Department of Veterans Affairs; and that Parliament act to ensure that veterans and their families receive the supports they have been promised and to which they are entitled as members of the armed forces, past, present and future.

* * *

● (1015)

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.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask for unanimous consent to revert to introduction of private members' bills as I had intended to introduce one today. It seems that somehow it slipped off the order paper. I am not sure how that happened but I would ask for unanimous consent to do that. It will take about 60 seconds.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert at this time to introduction of private members' bills?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

NATIONAL LOCAL FOOD DAY ACT

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-579, An Act respecting a National Local Food Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of Thanksgiving, I thank my colleagues for their indulgence.

Government Orders

This bill would give thanks to agricultural producers across this country by declaring the Friday prior to Thanksgiving national local food day. Passage of this bill would allow us to recognize and give thanks to those who produce the food that everyone across this country consumes day to day.

I hope my colleagues will support my bill. I also hope that they thank farmers in their local communities. We think of them often, but we just do not say thanks. As I sit down with my family this weekend and give thanks for my family and for this great country, I will also give thanks to all those involved in the farm community.

I hope all members will endorse my bill so we can recognize farmers at least one day during the year as we head into the Thanksgiving weekend.

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUSTAINING CANADA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-47, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a nice lead-in when someone thanks farmers. As a farmer of 35 years, I would like to echo that as we do go into this weekend of thanksgiving. I wish everyone a happy Thanksgiving weekend with their families.

Back to the order of the day, I do want to take this opportunity to begin debate on Bill C-47, sustaining Canada's economic recovery act. This bill represents a key component of Canada's economic action plan, including many important measures from budget 2010.

This is a key piece of economic legislation that demonstrates our Conservative government's continued focus on the economy, as well as our strong determination and commitment to help sustain Canada's economic recovery. It is a recovery clearly supported by our economic action plan, with real support for families, consumers, businesses and taxpayers. We heard last week that nearly 23,000 job-creating projects across Canada, supported under the plan, are currently under way or already completed. The continued implementation of the economic action plan through economic legislation such as sustaining Canada's economic recovery act will help ensure Canada meets the ongoing global economic challenges head on.

Indeed, Canada has met the recent global economic storm with an aggressive and effective response that has served as a model for other countries to follow.

Bank of Montreal deputy chief economist Doug Porter has declared that Canada has had “arguably one of the most successful stimulus programs in the industrialized world.

We likely will not hear that from the opposition, unfortunately. We also will not hear the opposition acknowledge that Canada has been performing relatively well compared with all other industrialized

countries. The opposition seemingly only wants to talk down Canada's economy at every opportunity.

However, let us look at the facts. Canada is the only G7 country to have virtually recouped economic output and private domestic activity lost since the start of the recession. Canada is the only G7 country to have posted significant positive job growth since the summer of 2009, in fact creating almost 430,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

Canada's total government net debt to GDP ratio is projected to remain the lowest by far in the G7. What is more, according to the IMF and the OECD, Canada is expected to be the fastest growing economy in the G7 over the 2010-11 period. Again, the opposition might not want to admit it, but this is the reality. Canada is in a relatively solid and enviable economic position compared with other industrialized countries. If the opposition does not want to take my word for it, which I am assuming it may not, it should listen to independent observers both at home and abroad. Let me read only a sample of the commentary that has appeared in recent months.

TD economist Craig Alexander stated, “The pace of Canada's economic revival stands out in the world”.

The Conference Board of Canada economist Glen Hodgson declared, “Canada is in a much stronger fiscal position than almost every other industrialized country”.

A *Victoria Times Colonist* editorial proclaimed:

The truth is that far from needing a lecture on financial management or sound public policy, Canada should be delivering one.... [T]he facts are plain. Our handling of the economic downturn has been an example for the world.

The *Toronto Star*, not normally known as a fan of our Conservative government, stated as well:

Canada has come through the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression remarkably well—better than any other industrialized nation in the world.

Internationally, Canada has been held up as a model of strong economic leadership to follow.

• (1020)

The BBC said:

As Americans and Europeans face deficits and drastic government cuts, Canada's economy is recovering from only a mild recession.... The Canadians, it seems, have answers for even the toughest puzzles.... [I]n this economy, we all want to be Canadian.

The *Los Angeles Times* remarked:

[O]n such critical issues as the deficit, unemployment, immigration and prospering in the global economy, Canada seems to be outperforming the United States. And in doing so, it is offering examples of successful strategies that Americans might consider.... Canada's financial house is tidy and secure.

The OECD recently commented:

I think Canada looks good — it shines, actually. Canada could even be considered a safe haven.

All that said, we cannot be complacent or smug. Uncertainty remains. Beyond our borders, the global economic recovery is far from secure. This is especially true in the United States, which is, of course, our largest trading partner, where grave economic challenges persist.

At home too many Canadians are still looking for work. Without a doubt, the economy must remain our priority. Canadians expect nothing less. That is why our Conservative government is focused on the economy above all. We are demonstrating this commitment by working to fully implement Canada's economic action plan.

We are demonstrating it through this, the sustaining Canada's economic recovery act, an act that would help Canadian families get ahead by, for instance, indexing the working income tax benefit, as well as by further strengthening federally regulated pension plans and allowing a 10-year carry forward for registered disability savings plan grants and bonds.

It is an act that would help cut red tape for taxpayers by allowing them to request online notices from the Canada Revenue Agency, registered charities with disbursement quota reform and job-creating small businesses by allowing them to file their taxes semi-annually instead of monthly.

It is an act that would help protect consumers by improving the complaint process when dealing with banks and the financial services industry.

It is an act that would close down tax loopholes by better targeting tax incentives for employee stock options and addressing aggressive tax planning related to tax-free savings accounts.

It is an act that would promote clean energy with an accelerated capital cost allowance for clean energy generation.

In the time remaining, I would like to take a few moments to further highlight a few of the positive steps in this act that I alluded to a few moments ago.

First, I would like to spotlight the improvements we are making to the working income tax benefit, locally referred to as WITB.

Often low-income Canadians who want to enter the workforce face substantial disincentives through reduced benefits and increased taxes. To help low-income Canadians who want to work, our Conservative government introduced the WITB as an incentive to make work pay.

WITB has been successful, making work more rewarding for approximately 1.5 million low-income Canadians annually. Last year, we made WITB more generous by effectively doubling the support provided by it. Building on that action, the sustaining Canada's economic recovery act would ensure that WITB amounts would continue to be indexed to inflation on an annualized basis.

I note that WITB's introduction and recent expansions have been widely praised. For instance, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy called it an "important...addition to Canadian social policy...helping welfare recipients get over the welfare wall, and supplementing the earnings of the working poor".

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Even the Liberal Party's current finance critic, the member for Kings—Hants, has lauded our Conservative government's action. He stated:

The working income tax benefit...has helped many working families and increasing it further will contribute even more significantly to helping make work pay.

Second, I want to highlight how, in this act, we are making the registered disability savings plan, RDSP, even better for Canadians with disabilities and their families.

● (1025)

We know that Canadians with disabilities make significant contributions to our communities, and that is something we always look to support. Since 2006, our Conservative government has taken several important actions to that effect, including the creation of the RDSP. The RDSP helps parents and family members provide long-term financial security for severely disabled children.

The sustaining Canada's economic recovery act includes two proposals to improve the RDSP.

The first improvement to the RDSP, to which I alluded before, proposes to allow a 10-year carry-forward of the Canada disability savings grant and the Canada disability savings bond entitlement in an RDSP. This measure gives families even more flexibility, recognizing that families of children with disabilities may not be able to contribute on a regular basis to their plans.

The second improvement proposes to allow an individual who has passed on to have his or her RRSP or RRIF proceeds transferred, on a tax-free basis, to an RDSP of an eligible dependant child or grandchild.

These improvements have been well received by Canadians with disabilities and their families since we announced them in budget 2010.

Bank of Montreal Financial Group's Tina Di Vito noted that it was:

...a fantastic measure that will benefit people with disabilities and give their parents and grandparents peace of mind. ...the benefit will be huge. This will allow more people with disabilities to get the care they need. ...Canada is leading the world in showing how smart policy can help provide financial security and independence for people with disabilities.

Third, I want to look at how the disbursement quota reform in this bill will better allow registered charities to concentrate on helping Canadians in need rather than dealing with red tape.

All Canadians recognize the invaluable role that charities play in communities right across this country. Since 2006, our government has taken steps to support charities and the great work they do. For instance, we have exempted capital gains on tax associated with the donation of publicly listed securities to public charities and private foundations.

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We are now proposing to build on this with significant reforms to the disbursement quota for charities. The quota, which has not been significantly modernized in three decades, has become outdated and imposes costly administrative complexity and unnecessary red tape on charities. This has only served to take their time and resources away from their charitable activities. That is why we are proposing to eliminate all the outdated disbursement quota requirements except, justly, those related to the requirement to disburse a minimum amount of investments and other assets not used directly in the charity's operations each year.

Reaction to this move has been overwhelmingly positive, underlining its importance to Canada's charities.

The Community Foundations of Canada, representing nearly 200 community foundations, applauded it and said:

...a win-win situation—it has a dramatic impact on communities, making it easier for charities to serve people in need.... We applaud the government's decision to reform the disbursement quota policy.

I quote Imagine Canada:

...extremely pleased that the federal government has responded positively to our concerns about the disbursement quota. [It]...added layers of red tape and reduced flexibility in responding to the needs of Canadians and communities.

Finally, the Salvation Army expressed its support by saying:

...removal of the quota will provide The Salvation Army, one of Canada's largest charities, with increased flexibility.... [It]...will allow us to better respond to the needs of the people we serve in 400 communities across Canada.

Fourth, I want to briefly highlight a step we are taking in this bill to clamp down on a tax loophole related to the tax-free savings account, or TFSA. Since our Conservative government introduced the TFSA in 2008, it has proven exceedingly popular and has been called the single most important personal savings vehicle since the introduction of the RRSP.

• (1030)

The landmark TFSA, the first of its kind in Canadian history, has allowed Canadians to watch their savings grow tax-free, but late in 2009 concerns regarding the use of TFSAs in tax planning schemes were raised regarding inappropriate transactions and the deliberate use of over-contributions providing investments and non-qualified investments by a small group of Canadians to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

Accordingly, we are addressing these serious concerns regarding the abuse of TFSAs and have closed these tax loopholes. This strong action to ensure Canadians pay their fair share of taxes has been loudly and widely applauded.

Tax experts, like Jamie Golombek, have underlined:

For the average everyday Canadian who is putting \$5,000 a year into a TFSA account, these changes will be of absolutely no interest. It is a group of highly sophisticated traders and investors who are exploiting the rules. ...this is targeting those people making enormous amounts of over-contribution.

These are only four important steps of many in the sustaining Canada's economic recovery act that illustrate its importance and how it will help Canadian families and Canada's economy in the years ahead.

Clearly this act, as a key component in implementing Canada's economic action plan, would help keep our economy moving in the

right direction. The act would help protect our economy against the ongoing global economic turmoil during this fragile period and keep Canada's economic advantage. As such, this legislation deserves the support of this entire Parliament.

• (1035)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my friend, the parliamentary secretary.

He talked about how much better off we are than most industrialized countries. He talked about how we have come out of the crisis quite well. He used different quotes, but he did not quote the average Canadian.

Today according to the OECD, average Canadians have among the highest debt per capita, almost \$41,000. When we compare that with some countries that are in grave difficulty, like Greece for example, we find their debt per household is just over \$30,000. Let us figure that out.

The member talked about tax savings accounts and all the government has done, and that is fine when the average Canadian has money to save. However, to come out of this debt, average Canadians have borrowed to survive.

What would the member say to all those Canadians who are so far in debt and who have indebted their future and their children's future? Where do they go from there? What would he say to them?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Scarborough Centre for that very interesting question.

What do I say to that? I say to my constituents and to all Canadians, thank goodness we do not have a Liberal government right now or we would be in a mess.

Personal debt, household debt, is certainly troubling. There is no doubt about it. However, for an average family of four it would be \$3,000 a year higher if the Liberals had their way, perhaps more.

What I am saying is that we have reduced taxes for an average family of four by \$3,000. That hon. member seems concerned about household debt. That would add \$3,000 to that family's debt, a sizeable amount of money.

The most important thing that I think this hon. member has missed is the fact that we have created jobs. Many of those people would not be working if it were not for our economic action plan. There have been 430,000 net new jobs since July 2009.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think what is very concerning for our party is the perception that the government is trying to portray itself as prudent at a time of recession, when it is blowing \$17 billion on stealth fighters and \$1 billion-plus mostly on pork barrel projects in the industry minister's riding, and it has chosen to build prisons.

In my riding of Timmins—James Bay, in Inglehart, Matachewan and Kirkland Lake I meet seniors all the time who cannot afford to heat their houses. They have no other houses to go to if they cannot afford to heat theirs, because there is no plan for senior housing. They are being told that their guaranteed income supplement is only worth \$1.55 a month. That is not even a Tim Hortons medium sized double-double.

Yet the government just recently announced a plan to spend between \$2 billion and \$10 billion on prisons, and the latest is that it is going to be \$155 million to build 576 cells. That is \$270,000 per prison cell, not counting what it is going to spend on prison guards and housing them. It is \$270,000 on prison cells when senior citizens in my riding have no place to go.

Why is the government choosing to go with the politics of fear and wasteful spending over working to help alleviate the situation for senior citizens in northern Canada?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, the question the hon. member poses is about protecting seniors. That is exactly what we are doing, protecting seniors against criminals, protecting all Canadians against criminals.

Every Canadian has the right to walk down a street, be it day or night, and feel safe.

If it were up to the NDP, we would have as many criminals on the street as we do ordinary Canadians. That is not fair. We have hard-working Canadians who expect the government to show leadership and that is what we are showing. We are providing support for these individuals all across the country.

It seems to be upsetting my colleague across the floor that we are actually trying to protect Canadians both physically and financially.

•(1040)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think it is an important point of order. The member for Crowfoot says he thinks it is outrageous that the government be asked to build any kind of seniors housing. That is what he said, and I want that in *Hansard* record.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, that is certainly not what I suggested.

What I did suggest to the minister, as the member was heckling away, is that we do not believe it is the federal government's role to build everyone a house in this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. If the member for Crowfoot and the member for Timmins—James Bay want to carry on this conversation they are free to do so, but at the moment the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor is rising on a question.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if it gets any more exciting than that, we will have to start doing pay-per-view on CPAC.

I want to tone it down just a tad, if we could. The parliamentary secretary started off his speech by saying the opposition will not acknowledge the fact that we have one of the strongest economies. I will acknowledge that as long as he acknowledges the fact that the heavy lifting was done before 2006.

Let us put that aside for a while, that being said. I would like to get to the details of some of the provisions that pertain to this as it comes back to one particular issue dear to my heart, which would be pensions.

Not a lot has been raised about pensions in the past little while, only for the sake of many pensions that have been stranded through

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the system, but there is also another element of pensions that we are not considering. That is the people who are currently working as transient workers across the spectrum, meaning from eastern Canada travelling to western Canada. It is hard for them to start these pension plans that are embedded within a certain company.

Did the government consider doing something similar to a supplemental plan to the Canada pension plan in order for people to take it upon themselves to invest in their own pensions as a direct contribution method, nationally?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for a very interesting and great question. I would remind him that actually since 2006 we paid down almost \$40 billion in debt. That is why we were in the financial situation in this country that we could afford to go into a short-term deficit.

However going back to the pensions issue, it is a good question because it was addressed in the finance ministers' meeting in Charlottetown in the spring, which put forward an idea about what we are referring to as multi-employer plans that would actually encompass those individuals that the hon. member speaks of, so that different companies in different industries could actually be part of a larger fund to be able to provide a pension fund for their employees.

It is a good question. We are working on it and we will have a report back from the officials at the December finance ministers' meeting.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan has time to ask a brief question.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance said that the government is protecting seniors against criminals.

Can he tell me if the government is protecting seniors against poverty? Government programs such as the guaranteed income supplement do not even provide enough money for these seniors to live above the low-income level or poverty line.

I would like to hear what he thinks about the current government's significant and serious shortcomings in this area.

•(1045)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have to reject the premise that we have done nothing for seniors. In fact, looking at all Canadians, since we have come to government we have taken nearly 950,000, just short of one million, Canadians completely off the tax roll, so they do not have to go through the process of paying taxes or are able to claim them back. That helps all Canadians. Less taxes leaves more money in their pockets for the issues that they deal with every day.

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Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-47, the implementation act for budget 2010. When I speak to people in my riding of Kings—Hants in Nova Scotia or to Canadians from coast to coast to coast, they tell me they are worried. They are worried because they do not know how they are going to make ends meet. They have a mortgage to pay and they are barely able to make payments now. They are afraid of what is going to happen as interest rates rise. They are struggling to save for their retirement. Many of the people I speak with tell me they are struggling with the costs of higher education for their children.

At the same time, many of them are part of a sandwich generation, where they are not only helping take care of children but are also taking care of loved ones, elderly parents who are sick and need their time and their care. These Canadians are looking for a government to help them get through this, to partner with them, but the Conservative government has not been there for them.

Budget 2010 failed to address the challenges that ordinary Canadians are facing. It is a continuation of the Conservatives' borrow and spend policies, out of control spending, out of touch with ordinary Canadians, the borrow and spend policies that are doing nothing to create jobs, improve Canada's competitiveness, or strengthen our long-term economic prospects and opportunities.

In July, the economy actually shrank. Even more troubling, the numbers were down in the construction industries during the height of the traditional Canadian construction season. Why is this? Simply put, the Conservative government's infrastructure program on budget 2010 has not achieved what it could have achieved. It has not been working for ordinary Canadians.

Under the Conservatives' watch, decisions on these projects have been slow. All too often these decisions have been driven by politics, not economics. Under budget 2010, we have seen funding go to floating gazebos, a portable dance floor, a wine therapy centre, a glass canopy over a private business's swimming pool. This is a waste of tax dollars. This is not the type of investment that will make Canada more competitive in the global economy of tomorrow.

Meanwhile, legitimate projects have been delayed, and in some cases, refused. Communities across Canada are worried that they will be left with a bill for projects that are not done by the March 31 deadline. We are asking for the government to be flexible on that. The Parliamentary Budget Officer recently estimated that between 25% and 50% of the projects will not be completed by March 31.

What I am talking about is not a new stimulus program or new funding required. It is simply for the Government of Canada to meet its commitments and promises already made under the existing pool of stimulus funds. What I am talking about is the need for the government to honour its promises to its provincial, municipal and community partners. People cannot swim in an 80% completed swimming pool. People cannot cross a 75% completed bridge, and people should not flush their toilets into a 90% completed sewage system, even in Halifax. So we are asking the Government of Canada for some flexibility to ensure that local governments and community groups are not left on the hook for incomplete projects because there have been delays due to federal red tape and inevitable delays due to the Canadian winter.

The communication agreements for these deals with municipal and community partners are almost laughably long. The Conservative government has been more preoccupied with tracking the advertising signs for each project and trying to locate these signs even with GPS than making sure that each project was on track and actually creating jobs. It has been more interested, in fact, in counting signs than in counting workers.

The Conservatives have tripled the budget for advertising to \$130 million. They have a sign fetish. Tens of millions have been spent on signs for the stimulus package. There is a sign on McNabs Island in Halifax. Nobody goes to McNabs Island, but there was a project there and there is a sign. One could say it is the loneliest erection in Canada. But what has been the result of the Conservative stimulus package?

The fact is that construction numbers are down. Unemployment figures are actually quite high nationally, at 8%, which is two points higher than when the government took office. Youth unemployment is almost 17%. But those numbers do not tell the full story. In Canada, 200,000 full-time jobs have been lost. We are losing full-time jobs and they are being replaced by part-time work. So when the Conservatives talk about a recovery, what they are really talking about is a weak statistical recovery with a continued deep human recession.

● (1050)

Last year, Canada saw its first trade deficit in 30 years. That is troubling, because we are a small, open economy that depends on external trade for our wealth. To be buying more than we are selling is ominous for the long term.

Consumer confidence in Canada has dropped in each of the last four months. That reflects the fact that private and household debt in Canada is at a record high of \$1.4 trillion. Each Canadian owes an average of \$42,000 in terms of personal debt. As my colleague said earlier, this is worse than almost any other advanced OECD country. As interest rates nudge higher, Canadians are justifiably worried about how they will make ends meet and pay the bills.

Government Orders

It would seem that the Conservatives have run out of ideas. Either that or their ideology is preventing them from developing ideas, or perhaps they just do not believe in government. I have heard the discussion earlier on the tax-free savings account, which was developed under the Liberal government and implemented by this Conservative government. The WITB was introduced by a Liberal government and further developed by the Conservative government. We could say the Conservative government is a government of sound and original ideas, but unfortunately, its sound ideas are not original and its original ideas are not sound. One of those original ideas was to eliminate the long form census so that Canadians would not have to go to prison and languish away in Canadian penitentiaries on long form census issues, but I digress.

The fact is that Conservatives have failed to protect jobs with their stimulus. They have failed to protect jobs today, and more importantly, they have failed to create the jobs of tomorrow. What we have gone through and are going through is not an ordinary recession. What we are going through is a global economic restructuring. That is why it is important that Canada in its infrastructure investments not simply recover to where we were before the recession. That is not good enough, because the rest of the world has gone somewhere else. Wayne Gretzky, that great Canadian economist, once said that we have to skate to where the puck is going. That is what the rest of the world has done. Other countries have gone to where the global economic trends are going. They have focused on green investments. They have focused on scientific investment, on research and development, on modernizing the energy grid, on modernizing energy production and transmission, on investing in clean energy technologies so that they are competitive in the emerging global, carbon-constrained economy. Our competitors have focused their investments on science, technology and the green economy because they know that is where the jobs of tomorrow will be.

The Globe and Mail had a few things to say about the Conservative stimulus package. They called the Conservative stimulus package “a squandered opportunity”, and said:

[T]o throw billions into a hodge-podge of boondoggles and call it world-beating economic policy is a bit of a stretch

The *Globe* went further:

[T]oo much of the stimulus appears to have wound up feeding local egos, and wallets, without leaving an enduring economic mark.

Finally, it concludes that the stimulus package's legacy:

may be a swelling deficit that crowds out spending on the kind of infrastructure the country really needs.

A squandered opportunity indeed, in fact the Mandarin word for “opportunity” is the same as the Mandarin word for “crisis”. Other countries, our competitors, were careful not to waste a good crisis. South Korea invested 79% of its stimulus package in green technologies, creating 1.8 million green jobs of the future. China invested \$218 billion of its stimulus funds toward clean environmental technologies. On a per capita basis, the U.S. put 14 times more money into green and clean energy investments than Canada, modernizing grid and building new energy production.

A more strategic approach in Canada could have been to help build Canadian competitiveness, a more energy-efficient Canadian economy, and a Canadian economy with a lower carbon footprint.

What could this have meant in terms of jobs? We could have created the jobs of tomorrow in this emerging green economy. Properly targeted, we could have greened the Government of Canada buildings, over seven million square metres of office space, creating green construction jobs across Canada. Properly targeted, we could have done more to help Canadians green their homes and to help Canadian companies green their companies and factories, which would have meant that after this recession, those Canadian companies would have been more profitable. Their bottom lines would have been bigger. They would have paid more business taxes because they would have been making more money. They would have employed more Canadians. Those Canadian households would have had more money at the end of the month to live on and to pay for their children's education. Any investment in reducing the energy consumption of a government, of its citizens and of its companies pays endless dividends for generations, notwithstanding the importance to the environment.

● (1055)

There was a real opportunity for us to have a game-changer here. This was a massive stimulus package and I fear it missed the mark and we will not know the degree to which it missed the mark until we see where other countries go in the next 10 to 20 years.

The 2010 budget provided no real vision.

A couple of weeks ago, the finance minister delivered a speech before the Canadian Club of Ottawa. Instead of offering an economic vision for the country, the minister debased both himself and his role as a minister of the crown by launching into a long partisan rant about the opposition. He was trying to distract Canadians from his bad economic record of waste and mismanagement, and he was trying to distract Canadians from the fact that the biggest spending, biggest deficit finance minister in Canadian history also lacks an economic plan for the future. He has a bad record and no plan for the future. He has no vision, no ideas to address the real concerns of Canadians. Canadians across the country were justifiably offended.

The *National Post* described it as “overcooked rhetoric”.

The *Calgary Herald* said:

Wave after wave of pointless and misleading provocation gushed from his podium before a Canadian Club audience which, except for the Conservative cheerleaders among them, appeared unimpressed by his fear-and-loathing diatribe. Eyes were openly rolling, whispers were exchanged under furrowed brows, groans could be heard when [the finance minister's] script soared over-the-top, which was often.

The Canadian Press said:

The attack before a Canadian Club audience, which lasted the better part of a 20-minute, was received with stony silence by those in attendance.

Even L. Ian MacDonald of the Montreal *Gazette* described it as:

A clip and paste job directly from the Prime Minister's Office by the dark side of the Langevin Block

He went on to say:

Even Conservatives in the room were staring at their shoes in embarrassment

Finally, Don Martin of the *National Post* said:

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How a government, which has emptied the public purse far into the future, ratcheted up the deficit to historic highs and bloated the bureaucracy to unprecedented size can stand for re-election as a conservative-friendly government is beyond me.

I knew those guys were not that progressive socially, and now I find out they are not even conservative economically. That is indeed unfortunate.

The fact is that the Conservatives inherited a \$13 billion surplus from the Liberals, but the borrow and spend Conservative government increased program spending in its first three years of office by 18%. They spent the cupboard bare even before the downturn. In fact, they actually put the country into deficit before the downturn.

What are the borrow and spend Conservatives now spending hard-earned Canadian tax dollars on? They are spending \$16 billion on fighter jets, without a fair tendering process; and \$10 billion to \$13 billion on U.S.-style mega-prisons despite the fact that crime rates are going down. Of course, we need those to lock up those unreported criminals who have been doing unreported crimes.

The Conservatives spent \$1.3 billion for a 72 hour photo-op at the G20 and G8 summits that included \$1 million for a fake lake; \$300,000 for a gazebo and bathrooms that were 20 kilometres away from the summit site, so I hope they bought some Depends; \$400,000 for bug spray and sunscreen; over \$300,000 for luxury furniture; \$14,000 for glow sticks; and millions on high-end hotels. If it were not so wasteful, we could find this funny. If Canadians were not working so hard to pay their taxes, they would probably find some humour in this. But it is tragic for Canadians who are barely getting by.

In budget 2010, the Conservatives are borrowing \$6 billion to pay for corporate tax cuts during a time of deficit. We cannot afford these tax cuts. The Liberal government did cut corporate taxes and personal taxes, the biggest tax cuts in Canadian history, but it was during times of surplus. It is fundamentally different economics to borrow money today to pay for tax cuts than it was to actually provide tax cuts during times of economic surplus.

● (1100)

Last week, the Minister of Finance missed another deficit target. Forecasters are now expecting that the deficit will go even higher. Canadians have to wonder what they got for that \$54 billion deficit. Has it protected the jobs of today? No, it has not. Unemployment is two points higher than when the Conservative government took power.

Has it created the jobs of tomorrow? No, it has not. Other governments around the world have invested in creating the jobs of tomorrow and positioning themselves to compete in the sciences focusing on the green jobs of the future.

What do Canadians have to show for this wasteful, visionless spending frenzy? They have fake lakes, floating gazebos and thousands upon thousands of advertising signs. The Conservative borrow and spend policies do not reflect the priorities of Canadians. A Liberal government would cancel the Conservatives' planned tax cut for Canada's largest corporations. We would do this to reduce the deficit and to invest in Canadian families.

Yesterday, our Liberal leader announced our family care plan. It is our plan to stand with Canadian families by helping family caregivers with the cost of caring for sick and aging loved ones at home. It includes a six-month family care EI benefit which would be similar to the EI parental leave benefit. It would allow more Canadians to care for gravely ill family members at home without having to quit their job. It would also include a family care tax benefit that is modelled on the child tax benefit. For low and middle income family caregivers who provide essential care to a family member at home, this would help ease their financial burden.

Those are the kinds of policies and the type of leadership that Canadians are looking for. This is the kind of compassion that Canadian families who are struggling to survive need.

Canada's Conservative government has been more focused on this week's polls than on the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Today I have focused mainly on the Conservatives' fiscal and trade deficits but the most troubling deficit has been the Conservatives' leadership and vision deficit.

These are challenging times and it is during challenging and difficult times that countries and businesses need smart, visionary leadership. As the Conservative ministers go into the cabinet room, they may pause for a moment and look over the door where there is a biblical quotation that reads, "Where there is no vision, the people perish".

The nature and severity of the challenges faced by Canadians today in this global economic restructuring are so serious and so important that without real leadership a lot of the aspirations of Canadians for their themselves, their families and their futures will perish with the lack of vision they are getting from the Conservative government.

We often hear the Prime Minister use the excuse that we have a minority Parliament and that is why we cannot really get things done. I would remind the Prime Minister and the Conservatives that it does not need to be this way. Minority Parliaments have worked in the past. The Pearson minorities in the 1960s led to the Canada pension plan, medicare and bilingualism. The Pearson minorities were productive because the parties worked together to make things happen. There was co-operation, collaboration and respect.

The word "respect" is critically important because respect for Parliament means there is respect for the people who chose this Parliament. For the Prime Minister to say that he cannot get anything done, that he cannot have any big ideas and that he cannot really implement his plans for the country because of a minority Parliament is a cop-out. It shows a lack of respect for Parliament or a lack of understanding of Parliament.

If we are going to make this Parliament successful, we need to all work together and try to address this and ensure there is respect for this Parliament. We can get things done but it will take vision and ideas. The Liberal Party of Canada is offering Canadians compassion, vision and ideas and the real leadership it needs for the 21st century.

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•(1105)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's speech. He tried to prepare me in advance so that I might be interested in his comments.

However, I find it a little rich that a representative of a party, which voted wholeheartedly for the budget that offered nothing for energy savings and the environment, is criticizing that very budget. I will be watching very carefully how this member votes on this budget update.

I am glad the member mentioned that it was reprehensible that this budget cut all the programs for renewable energy and energy retrofits. With seniors suffering in this country and their energy bills mounting, I would have expected that this budget would have reversed that.

We heard some interesting news from the Alberta energy minister, Mr. Liepert, who said that he thinks carbon sequestration is not the answer. He said that it would be far too expensive and probably would not work, even though billions of federal and provincial taxpayer dollars have gone into.

Will the member respond accordingly with his vote on this budget?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I remember last September when the hon. member propped up the government at a time when it was not convenient for the NDP to have an election.

I know the hon. member has a history of environmental activism, which is why I cannot understand how she could have campaigned against putting a price on carbon in the last election. She knows that is one of the reasons that the environmental community across Canada has abandoned the NDP. She should also explain to the environmental community members why—

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I feel that it is necessary to clarify the record. At no time have I ever campaigned, nor have I ever spoken against, putting a price on carbon.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the NDP had a national campaign last time against a carbon tax that would have made a positive difference.

The NDP most recently came out with an astoundingly bad environmental idea to cut the taxes on home heating fuel instead of helping seniors and low income Canadians replace their energy inefficient furnaces to save them some real money and the environment. The NDP chose a cheap tax gimmick similar to the kinds of tax gimmicks the Conservatives chose.

Instead of actually helping senior citizens and low income Canadians cut their energy consumption for decades, for generations, they chose a cheap political tax gimmick more like what I would expect from the Conservatives. Those members are playing politics and that is why the environment—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member made many comments about green energy and the green economy. I have two specific questions for him.

Does the member and his party support federal dollars for offshore wind energy projects that may be located on our Great Lakes?

Also, does the member support the green energy act that the Liberal Party of Ontario has implemented in the province in which I reside?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I think Ontario has positioned itself to be one of the most competitive long-term economies in Canada in terms of green energy, feed-in tariff approaches, as well as investment in clean energy, but more important, providing the fiscal and economic levers for Ontario's businesses, communities and citizens to participate in the green economy.

Do I support Ontario's direction in terms of its green energy policy? Yes, I do. In the short term, some of these things can cost money but, in the long term, they are real investments in the next generation of economy.

In terms of investing in wind or other alternative energy projects, generally, yes, I support those kinds of investments. However, I do think that some of the greatest areas for Canada are in the areas of clean conventional energy. For instance, in terms of biomass, if we look at the agricultural and forestry sectors and the capacity for them to become significant players in green energy, I think it is important and it is real.

I also happen to think there is still potential to invest in carbon capture and storage. In fact, if we look at the research of what the U.S. and the Chinese are putting in it, the opportunity is real in those areas as well.

In 20 years, 80% of the world's energy will still come from hydro carbon, so we not only need to invest in alternatives but we also need to cleanup conventional energy.

•(1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with our hon. colleague who said that it would have been interesting if the government's economic action plan had focused more on moving toward a green economy. But that was not the case; in fact, quite the opposite.

I heard our Liberal Party colleague talk about the importance of taking care of our seniors. Yet when I was first elected to this place in 2004, the Liberal Party was in power and we were calling for an increase in the guaranteed income supplement, as well as reimbursements to many seniors cheated out of their guaranteed income supplement for a number of years. Nothing happened. Instead, the Liberal Party at the time plundered the employment insurance fund, stealing from the unemployed, and that has continued under the Conservatives.

Last week we voted on Bill C-306. Unfortunately, most Liberals voted against the bill. With all due respect to the member, whom I know well, I have to wonder why he is talking about social measures. The closer they get to power, the more they seem to adopt the Conservatives' ideology when it comes to social programs.

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Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question.

Frankly, it is very important for governments to strike a balance between social investment and fiscal responsibility.

First of all, the Liberal government did a great deal to reduce and eliminate the deficit. Also, it invested considerably to help seniors. At the same time, it negotiated agreements with all the provinces and territories for child care, for instance. In fact, the Quebec model has been very effective.

I agree completely with the hon. member. It is important to make investments to help our seniors. That is exactly what the future Liberal government will do. It will make the investments we indicated in our announcement yesterday. We announced a very extensive program for seniors.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two comments.

First, the member wonders why the Conservatives have no vision when they go through the cabinet room and there is a saying above the door related to vision. The reason is that they do not have all their cabinet meetings in that cabinet room, only some of them, because they are hiding from the press. All governments have.

In fact, we did an access to information to find out where the rooms were in which they had met and they refused to answer. They said that it was for security. It is kind of laughable that we all meet in public every day here, every MP, but that it would be a security concern if a subset of those had met in past meetings. That shows how secretive the government is.

My second comment is related to the announcement yesterday. It really helps rural Canadians to have care at home because sometimes they are hours away from institutions and are not be able to visit family members or take them for medical tests. A lot of costs are involved. This is a tremendous program that has been praised across the country and it is particularly helpful for people in rural and northern communities.

•(1115)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member represents a riding with a lot of rural and small town constituents, similar to my riding, and the fact is that access for rural Canadians to medical care for seniors is extremely important. For rural Canadians who have sick or critically ill relatives, it is absolutely essential that we make these kinds of investments, particularly with issues such as Alzheimer's, dementia and some of the other health issues that are only going to grow with the shifting demographic.

We need to make these plans for the future. It is good social policy and very important economic policy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to congratulate my Liberal Party colleague who is now leaving the chamber, but who has been appointed official opposition finance critic. I would like to congratulate him on that appointment. He is joining us on the Standing Committee on Finance.

The Standing Committee on Finance is very important since that is where we will try to see what is in Bill C-47. It is actually somewhat discouraging. As one of my old employers said, it looks a little messy. This Bill C-47, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures, is like a dish of spaghetti or a bowl of chowder. There are some measures from the budget—and I will talk about them in a moment—and there are measures concerning personal income tax, charitable organizations, business taxes and energy production companies. These are areas where it has been decided it is time to implement certain measures. In the standing committee, we look at those measures and we try to refine them and clarify them. At the same time, the government is taking the opportunity to bring up old business, if I may put it that way.

There are no specific clauses, but other measures have been mixed in relating to personal income taxes or to businesses. So we have to look back in time to clarify some of those things. There are also other measures that are completely unexpected and surprising, things we have never seen. We do not know where they come from. That is how things work in this kind of bill. There are measures relating to individuals, businesses and governments. So if I may put it that way, what we have is a dog's breakfast of a stew or a bowl of spaghetti with all kinds of things thrown in.

So let us try to sort it out. Obviously, the Bloc Québécois voted against the budget as a whole. Do we need to explain why? Because we realized that all of this government's economic policies since 2006 have been focused on the needs of Ontario and Alberta. The budget has a limited capacity, and when all the credits and budget measures are aimed at regions other than Quebec, we wonder what is left for Quebec.

We voted against the budget because we saw it contained nothing for forestry, for example. There were lots of things for the auto industry and the oil industry, but nothing much for forestry or aerospace. We could find almost nothing for the environment, and zero, zilch, nada for culture. They do not care about that. And also, coming from a very urban riding in the extreme south of Montreal, I can see that there are needs in terms of social housing and homelessness. For example, we can see that in Canada, in Quebec and in Montreal, women are hit the hardest by poverty.

So there was nothing in this budget. How is it that we can say there was nothing in this budget in terms of what we are experiencing, what we are seeing? Because every year, and I did this last year, we go on a pre-budget tour. We go out and see people. We go out and meet with groups, whether they be community groups, workers, employers or organizations. We go and see everyone and we consider and analyze their expectations.

Last year, during the parliamentary lockout decreed by the Prime Minister, I travelled throughout Quebec. I had just been elected and I visited the whole province. I am going to do the same thing again this year. In the Bloc Québécois, we have made up our minds that we are going to try and seek out, rediscover, and revisit every person and every region, and even go to a place that I was, sadly, unable to visit last year.

• (1120)

As the saying goes, a fault confessed is half redressed. I must admit that last year we ran out of time to visit Abitibi-Témiscamingue. I shall therefore take this opportunity, in this very important speech, to announce to the House that the Bloc Québécois' pre-budget consultations will begin on October 27, 28 and 29. I will obviously be welcomed as only my colleague from this House, the member for Abitibi-Témiscamingue, knows how. I will go and visit him in Rouyn Noranda. It will be a real pleasure to do so. Side by side, we can sharpen our pencils and take up our pens, and our Crayolas if need be, and do the sums right.

There are some positive things about the bill we have before us. There are a few strokes of genius in it. And yes, that does happen. It would seem to confirm the high quality of the officials in the Department of Finance of Canada. I used to be an official in the Quebec finance ministry, and I could see there were some particularly worthwhile people there, too. Therefore, we are likely to pass—rather, we are going to pass—a certain number of things. For example, in the area of benefits for children, the Conservative government has finally got its head around something that families face and has been a social reality in Quebec and throughout Canada for some time, and that is that divorce sometimes—alas, often—happens. Children spend one week at their father's home and the next at their mother's. The tax system was unable to keep up with this. In any event, apparently the tax credits for benefit repayments can be split between the mother's tax return and the father's. We cannot oppose that. And that is why the Bloc Québécois, with the rigour for which it is legend, will continue to support this measure. It is precisely why we will vote in favour of this bill, so that it can be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance for consideration and, hopefully, further improvement.

The bill also includes another measure concerning registered retirement savings plans and registered disability savings plans. Again, it is a bit late, but better late than never. The bill allows the proceeds of an RRSP of a deceased person to be transferred to the registered disability savings plan of a family member. We are also voting in favour of that fine measure.

The bill also addresses the administrative burden on charities. In my riding of Hochelaga, there are a tremendous number of charities. Why? Because there is tremendous need and because these people and small businesses are worn out. They are limited by administrative obstacles and unbelievable administrative work. Sometimes some completely ridiculous things happen. For example, one requirement was that 80% of donations received in a year needed to be spent immediately. They wonder if it is possible to save for the coming years, accumulate some of the donations received during the year and keep them in reserve to build up to a larger operation the following year. That option will now be available. Again, even though this measure came later rather than sooner, at least it came.

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However, these measures do not go far enough. For example, there is still the matter of the tax-free savings accounts and the \$5,000 ceiling. It was said that any interest, capital gains or dividends earned on that \$5,000 in capital would not be taxable.

• (1125)

Three years later, they realized that some shrewd people were depositing much more than \$5,000. Those people had to pay a small penalty, but given that the interest, capital gains and dividends were tax free, it was much smaller than the financial gain. So, they woke up and decided to put a stop to this practice.

Last year, the Bloc Québécois made some very important recommendations regarding wealthy people who have TFSAs. We suggested to the government that the wealthy be taxed at a much higher rate. We proposed that taxpayers with taxable income of between \$150,000 and \$250,000 pay a 2% surtax. That was what we recommended and continue to call for. In addition, we recommended a 3% surtax for those fortunate enough to have taxable income of more than \$250,000. Naturally, the government, with its Conservative policies, rejected our recommendations.

At the same time, we asked for special taxation of the huge bonuses paid to people who sometimes earn a lot of money in a year, not because of the particular circumstances of their professional life, but because they get an enormous bonus from their company. These people find themselves with a few million dollars in their pockets, and we wondered why they were not paying more taxes.

The Bloc Québécois continues to call for these changes, but the Conservative government is not budging. Why are we recommending this? Yesterday, at the Standing Committee on Finance, we discussed the fact that people are worried, and with good reason, about the deficit and debt. People wonder where the money will come from to pay down the deficit, which we would like to do. People wonder where that money will come from. It is called tax room. Is there tax room somewhere? The answer is yes. It is to be found among those who earn more than \$150,000 per year. It is to be found among those who earn more than \$250,000. There is surely a great deal of tax room among those who receive a huge one-time bonus or performance pay.

We also pointed out a certain number of choices that have been made. For example, over the next 20 years, \$490 billion will be injected into the army. That amounts to more than one Olympic stadium for every member of Parliament, in other words, one stadium for every member of the House of Commons and every senator in the Senate. I know. The Olympic stadium is in my own riding of Hochelaga. Just imagine an Olympic stadium in every riding in Canada, not to mention all the additional seats in the Senate. There would even be some money left over. All that is going to arms.

Could we not do something other than this kind of nonsense?

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The bill has a number of particularly intriguing things in it. For example, we certainly did not expect the government to confer new powers on the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions in its proposal on the pension plans of companies that go bankrupt. The Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions of Canada would have a certain number of discretionary powers over pension funds. That is fine for funds under the federal system, but it is not okay for those that are managed under provincial systems.

• (1130)

Quebec and Ontario have their own pension fund management systems. We believe that the federal government has no business interfering with them. Is that surprising? Unfortunately not. I rise regularly in regard to the Autorité des marchés financiers in Quebec, which does a very good job together with all of the provincial securities commissions. There is a Canadian body—the Canadian Securities Administrators—which represents Canada on the international level. Then there is the International Organization of Securities Commissions. Just last week there was a conference in India. Who represented the Canadian Securities Administrators? The president of the Autorité des marchés financiers in Quebec and his colleague from the Ontario Securities Commission. That exists. These people did not go there to talk platitudes. They were discussing systemic risks. These are intelligent people who are dedicated to their jobs, but they are not under the federal thumb. That is why he is trying to take us there.

The bill is silent on a number of issues, such as Hydro-Québec. There is nothing on the \$250 million that was lost to Quebec because of an administrative discrepancy between Hydro-Québec and Hydro One. Once again they are changing the equalization formula without any prior notice to the provinces. We are obviously against that.

There is nothing about relations concerning all the other issues. The government owes us \$2.2 billion for harmonizing the GST and the QST 19 years ago. The government refuses to tax the rich and to abolish the tax havens used by the banks. It refuses to include some points, when we know that it could do things differently.

I invoked Standing Order 31, as we say, and spoke about the vote we had on the firearms registry. The vote was said to be close, but that was not at all the case. It was 153 to 151, but that was not close, because it was not the regions against the cities. How did Quebec members from the Bloc, Liberal Party, NDP and Conservative Party vote? They voted 83% in favour of maintaining the firearms registry and 17% against. In the rest of Canada, 61% of Liberal, Conservative and NDP members voted to abolish the firearms registry. This shows that there are two societies.

Back to the budget. If they want to establish an industrial policy for the oil and automotive industries, abolish the firearms registry, favour the rich and steal from the employment insurance fund, they can go right ahead. That does not reflect our values. That is why I returned to politics. We are here to draw attention to these differences and to say that we want to be good friends and good neighbours, but that it is too bad—we are leaving.

• (1135)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the hon. member's last comments. He is always talking about "us" and "them". There is always this discourse

about exclusion and differences, as though it were impossible to be different, yet equal. He always seems to want things to be mutually exclusive, suggesting that Canadians outside of Quebec think one way, while people in Quebec think another way. Yet we share many values, goals and ideals.

I wonder if my hon. colleague thinks that a federalist Quebecker like me is less of a Quebecker than he is.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I would very much like the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier to join us. He is one of us; he lives in Quebec. He is just as much of a Quebecker as I am, and as those across the floor are.

It is in the Bloc Québécois' nature to include everyone, even the hon. member for Bourassa. I understand he is not here today, since he is replacing Cammalleri tonight. He wants to be everywhere. The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier is included in "us". I say "us"—royal or not—and "them" to distinguish us from the rest of Canada. I respect this country, which is one of the greatest countries in the world, but I cannot identify with it. In order to have the right to be different, I say yes to Quebec. We both have beards, which makes us different from most men in Quebec. We are no less Quebécois than any other Quebeckers because we have facial hair. I want to be very clear: the hon. member is just as much of a Quebecker as I am.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the spirit of the bill, but I will first congratulate my colleague from Hochelaga for his fine presentation, which clearly expressed Quebec's interests, objectives and priorities.

Part 7 of the bill concerns federal-provincial fiscal arrangements and the total transfer protection. Does my colleague not think that compensation for the sales tax harmonization could have been included in this part of the bill, given that we have been talking about it for a number of years? The government says it will not negotiate in public—and I agree on that—but we could have had the tiniest hint of negotiations toward an agreement like that with Ontario and the other provinces.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, with whom I work very effectively on the Standing Committee on Finance.

In terms of tax transfers, I said earlier that this bill is like a chowder, a stew, a dog's breakfast or a bowl of spaghetti. These tax transfers could have been included in the bill. The Government of Quebec, which I respect, and our colleague, Quebec's finance minister, say that Quebec is owed \$2.2 billion. If I were him, I would add "for the last 19 years". What is the current value of the \$2.2 billion that we have been owed for 19 years?

Government Orders

With the modest interest rates over these past 19 years, it would now be worth over \$5 billion, or the same amount that the Canadian government will transfer to Ontario and British Columbia, which harmonized their sales taxes. Those two levels of government had productive discussions. The governments of Ontario and British Columbia have acted responsibly. They are exercising their jurisdiction, just like the Quebec government, but they will receive \$5 billion. I would have thought that Quebec would have been offered at least a hint of a solution, even just the amount it has been owed for 19 years. If the government were honest, it would also pay the accrued interest, which, in this case, is more than the capital.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, would the member address the situation on what I believe was his tacit approval of the bill and the vote to follow. He then described it as a tangled mess, a spaghetti fashion which I think was the terminology he used? I fail to see how he will untangle this mess. What appeals to him the most that would allow him and his party to vote for it?

Second, with regard to the EI solvency issue, the board has been created and \$5 billion has been set aside to put solvency within the way employment insurance is handled. The actuaries, many experts and many papers have stated that in order for this to be solvent, it has to be at \$15 billion. Perhaps some of his amendments could deal with the EI as well as the idea of pensions. Could the hon. member comment on that as well?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, in order to propose amendments, the bill needs to be studied in committee. Therefore, we must vote in favour of it. I do not know what he wants; does he want me to vote for or against it?

Yes, it is like a bowl of spaghetti. The Bloc Québécois is thorough and when we look at something, we are not narrow-minded. We do not vote against a bill because it was introduced by the Conservatives or the Liberals. If a bill is good for Quebec and deserves further analysis, we vote for it. And I would like to invite him to come to the Standing Committee on Finance to study this bill.

I hope that the Liberals will also stand up and all be present in the House if they want to vote against it. As for employment insurance, I believe that the Liberals have nothing to learn from the Conservatives when it comes to shoplifting.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief. I have seldom heard my colleague talk at the Standing Committee on Finance. I sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, so unfortunately I have not had the opportunity to hear a speech as brilliant as the one he just gave. I will be pleased to welcome him to Abitibi-Témiscamingue on October 18, with all due honours.

That said, I have a question for my colleague. I have not heard that there is anything about employment insurance in Bill C-47. Did the government forget to dip into the employment insurance fund, or is there a more devious way of doing so? How is the government going to go about it?

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry I did not visit my colleague's riding last fall. I have never had the chance to sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights or the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, but I probably will one day.

There is nothing about employment insurance in the bill. The budget does allow the government to continue plundering the fund. We introduced a bill last week that would improve employment insurance and give better support to workers who lose their jobs and need employment insurance. Obviously, we voted for this bill, just as some of the Liberals did. Others, including the Liberal leader, did not know whether to vote for or against the bill.

If we had the power to make all our own laws and control all our own tax revenue, we could give the workers of Quebec an employment insurance plan tailor-made for Quebec. That plan would probably be different from Canada's employment insurance plan. That is okay. Canadians are entitled to their own plan, and so are we.

• (1145)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to speak to Bill C-47, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures.

The New Democratic Party does not support the budget policy of the Conservative government. Although we agree with the Bloc that this is bad budget policy, as surprising as this may seem, we are going to vote against it because we are against it.

If I understood my Bloc colleague's comments correctly, he is going to vote for the bill because he is against it. I have not yet grasped all the nuances of his assertion, but if I understood it properly, it is because it is like spaghetti. That is his word, not mine. I imagine he does not know which end of the spaghetti to start at. We see it as a bitter pill, and we will not allow the Conservatives to force their bitter pills down our throats. This comes straight out of the budget policy they have been forcing on us for five years.

Governing means setting priorities. If we take an example from this very day, the FADOQ network was present in Parliament today. Liberal, Bloc and New Democrat members tabled petitions signed by thousands of people calling on us to start looking after the seniors in our country.

What is the Conservative government's priority? It has found \$12 billion for fighter planes, and it has given the poorest seniors, who are receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement, a \$1.50 increase. That is the Conservative government's priority.

[*English*]

The NDP opposes the budgetary policies of the Conservative government, so it is no surprise that we are going to be voting against Bill C-47 which is there to put into force the budget the government brought in last year.

The Conservatives are finishing their fifth year in power this fall.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

Government Orders

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is worth bearing in mind the reasons that we now have, and we will see if they applaud this part, the highest deficit in the history of Canada. I do not hear any applause; I was just checking. They broke the previous Conservative record for the highest deficit in the history of Canada. I am waiting for the applause; it is not there.

How did we get there? It is because of some of the things in this budget bill.

For example, after the Liberals stole \$50 billion from the employment insurance account, transferred it over into general revenue and made that money disappear so it would not be there when the workers needed it when the grave crisis hit in the fall of 2008, the Conservatives in this budget bill, now that the money is gone, are just putting double locks on the door.

Let us look at that, because a lot of people when they hear that will say, "What does it really matter? It was government money before; it was in the EI account. Who cares if Paul Martin and his gang of merry men transferred it over to general revenue? We cannot really say that was stealing money. It was all government money before and it is still government money now". But there is a big difference.

The money that was put into the employment insurance account was put in by every single company and by every single worker. Why is that important? Since the Conservatives arrived, they have been destabilizing the erstwhile balanced economy that we had in this country, that we had built up with painstaking work since the second world war: a strong primary sector with timber and mining, and a strong secondary transformation manufacturing sector, and of course more and more, an important service sector in this country.

When I say they have tilted it, they have skewed that formerly balanced economy, what they have done is this. They have created the fiscal space to hand over \$60 billion in tax decreases to Canada's wealthiest corporations. The argument on the other side often comes back that it is not just to the wealthiest corporations, that all corporations got those tax reductions.

That is a false argument. If a company, especially in mining, forestry or manufacturing, in those areas was not making a profit, of course it did not pay any taxes. If it was losing money and it did not pay taxes. How could it profit from a reduction in taxes? It did not.

Who got the money? Companies like Encana, those that are piling up the poison goo behind the world's longest dikes near the tar sands.

Let us look at what is happening in Europe right now with one dike holding back the poison from one aluminum factory, maybe one one-thousandth the volume of what is behind the longest dikes in the world at the tar sands. Imagine what is going to happen inevitably the day they break, because we have never internalized the cost of the tar sands. As they have their phenomenal profits the reduction in taxes goes to them as more windfall. Hundreds of millions of dollars go to just one company like Encana since these tax reductions have come into place.

How does that connect with the employment insurance account? Easy. Every company, whether it was losing money or making money, was paying into the EI account. That money was brought into general revenue to create the fiscal room to accord those tax

reductions for the richest companies. In effect, that money of the workers in those companies that were losing money in manufacturing in Quebec and Ontario in particular, was being paid over to the people in the tar sands and to Canada's chartered banks. That is what the Conservatives' policy has been all about.

Look at the chartered banks with \$15 billion in profits for the first nine months of this year, but we should not worry as they are planning to share it with each other. They are going to give themselves \$7.5 billion in executive bonuses for the first nine months of this year. You heard that right, Mr. Speaker. That is what the Canadian banks are doing. The government continues to sit on its hands and wants to give them further tax reductions.

Now, every time we hear the Liberals with their new-found conviction that these tax reductions are a bad idea, we should remind the Liberals that they have voted every step of the way for the \$60 billion in tax reductions for Canada's richest corporations.

We should remind the Liberals that they voted on the last budget to scrap the Navigable Waters Protection Act. They voted with the Conservatives to remove a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value. I know that sounds surprising, but that is what the Conservatives put in the prior budget bill. At that time the Liberals actually stood up and voted with them as the Conservatives were scrapping the environmental assessment program and policies and practices in Canada that were competent, that existed. It is a little different this time. The Liberals are doing the snake walk toward the back of the room and they are hiding behind the curtains. They do not even have the courage anymore to say they are backing the Conservatives. They simply absent themselves in sufficiently large numbers to allow the Conservatives' budgets to pass.

The effect of all of this has been to produce the greatest budgetary deficit in Canadian history because when the incredible crisis hit in the fall of 2008, the cupboard was bare with regard to employment insurance. The NDP was there, thank goodness, in the summer of 2009 to demand that the government increase the money available for EI and we got over \$1 billion of that added to what was there. My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst in New Brunswick worked so hard on that file. The leader of the NDP had meetings with the Prime Minister to make sure that the money was there in the toughest times for workers.

Now we are looking at the perfecting of what the Liberals put in place in terms of robbing the employment insurance account. It was a bit rich a couple of weeks ago to hear the Prime Minister accuse the Liberals of having emptied the EI account. All we have to do is read what is in Bill C-47 to realize that now that the Conservatives have taken the money out and closed the door, they are locking the door. They are perfecting the theft that was indeed perpetrated by the Liberals, but the Conservatives are the ones who are completing the job.

Government Orders

There is no way for the Conservatives to avoid that any more than the Conservatives can hide from the HST, the new sales tax that is being added. There are seniors in places like Timmins and Sudbury right now who are realizing that they are going to pay \$50, \$70 or \$80 a month more, stretched out over the whole year, for their heating. What the Conservatives do not understand is that when people are on a fixed income, they do not have another \$80 a month. Yet the Conservative government here in Ottawa with the McGuinty Liberals in Toronto are foisting that tax increase on our poor seniors, especially in the northern areas who are going to pay it as heating oil prices go up as this new tax comes into force.

That is one of the reasons the NDP is proposing that we remove those taxes immediately.

• (1205)

It is also one of the reasons that we look at what the government is doing. It has money for the military. It has tens of billions for military equipment, but it does not have a penny for seniors.

To govern is to establish priorities. The Conservatives have been clear in their priorities. Take care of the banks. Take care of the oil companies. Do not internalize the costs of the tar sands. Let them sell oil artificially low, bringing in an artificially high number of U.S. dollars, pushing our Canadian dollar ever higher and making it increasingly difficult, with the high Canadian dollar, to export our goods, setting up a vicious circle of job losses, especially in the industrial heartland of Ontario and Quebec.

Before the current crisis hit in the fall of 2008, according to Statistics Canada, we had already bled off 300,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector, in those provinces in particular. How did that happen? The policy of allowing the blind, unlimited, uncontrolled, and environmentally dangerous exploitation of the tar sands brought in a large influx of U.S. dollars and pushed the Canadian dollar ever higher. Not only was the government giving them the tax breaks out of the money that had been put aside by those manufacturing firms, it was killing them as it continued to apply those policies.

As for the internalization of costs of the tar sands, it is a simple proposition. It is one of the basic tenets of sustainable development. If someone said that he or she had a factory that was producing widgets for a price far lower than that of other companies, people would want to visit the factory and see why they were doing so well. They would notice that they were pushing a lot of stuff out the back door. They would want to see what they were up to. But the owners would keep putting them off. In this case, people pushed and went to the back door, and they realized that the owners were taking all the garbage from their factory and putting it into the river in the back. They found that this was not the real price of the widgets, because the owners had not been paying the normal cost for disposal of the waste from the factory.

That is exactly what we are doing with the tar sands. We are bequeathing to future generations a \$60-billion debt for next year, and, at the same time, we are bequeathing them the obligation to clean up the mess from the tar sands, which is one of the principal causes of the destabilization of our economy.

Do not get me wrong. Anyone who has looked at the economics realizes that, long-term, the tar sands can and will be one of the

sources of wealth in this country. If exploited correctly, in a manner that is environmentally, economically, and socially responsible, according to the principles of sustainable development, the tar sands can be a source of wealth.

However, what we are doing now is the antithesis of sustainable development. We are behaving like a third world country. We are exploiting the tar sands too rapidly. The Americans have asked us to put in too many pipelines too fast, pipelines with names like Trailbreaker and Southern Lights. These are the pipelines that are being put in. Under the North American Free Trade Agreement, the application of the proportionality rule means that we could not even reduce what we are sending to the Americans through these new pipelines, unless we reduce proportionally the same amount that we are getting from them.

Therefore we continue this unbridled exploitation of the tar sands, but we have never internalized the costs. We have never paid for the garbage we are putting out there, either in greenhouse gas emissions or in what is being held behind those dikes, namely, seas of unimaginable and unnameable poison. This is not being taken care of.

If we had at least said, "From now on, you are going to develop the tar sands, paying the full cost, so that you do not leave it all on the backs of future generations", it would have been sustainable. But we are not doing that. We are leaving it to future generations. We are skewing the balanced economy by killing off the manufacturing sector, because of the high dollar, which is directly related to this policy of the Conservative government.

Bill C-47 is to a large extent a reflection of the Conservative government's tendency to make sure that the military, the oil companies, and the banks are taken care of first and foremost. Meanwhile, seniors are left in the lurch, with new taxes on their heating oil. The government is betraying its essential nature. It is not there for Canadians. It is not there for people. It is there for the institutions, the powerful ones that put it in power and want it to stay there.

That is a difference in policy. That is a difference in priority. But at least it is clear. What is not clear is why members of the Bloc say they are against it, but will vote for it. What is not clear is why the Liberals talk against the tax decreases for the richest corporations when we know that they voted for them every step of the way. It was a shocker to a lot of people in environmental groups to see the Liberals vote with the Conservatives to scrap the Navigable Waters Protection Act, a century-old piece of legislation that was a model of sustainable development and way ahead of its time.

Government Orders

This year the Conservatives are scrapping the process of environmental assessment in Canada. The Conservatives would never get away with it unless the Liberals were complicit. How are the Liberals complicit? They take enough of their people behind the curtains at every vote on the budget to assure that it is passed.

The most disturbing departure from wise social policy is their removal of a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value, something that has always been considered a tenet in our society. The Conservatives provided steep fines for any union that would defend a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value, and the Liberals voted with them.

I am trying to find a synonym, because there are limits to what we can say in Parliament, to describe what the Liberals did when they voted to remove a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value. This is contrary to what they say they represent, but they could have voted against it, preserving this important right.

Soon thereafter, the Liberals presented a private member's bill that is so far down the list it has no chance of ever being adopted. Here we have an example of speaking out of both sides of the mouth. The Liberals vote with the Conservatives to remove a woman's right to pay equity, to equal pay for work of equal value. Then, when they get caught, they table a private member's bill that they point to as proof of their support for pay equity. When it counted, when they could actually have done something about it, they were not there. But when it comes to presenting a private member's bill that will produce no effect, because it will never be adopted, they are there to position themselves.

That is what the Liberals have always been about in this country, positioning themselves. They have a leader whose writings were the source of consolation for the George Bush White House on the use of torture. They termed it "enhanced interrogation techniques". What came out of George Bush's mouth a couple of weeks later? Enhanced interrogation techniques. Who gave him that terminology? The illustrious professor from Harvard who is now the head of the Liberal Party of Canada. He is the same person. He is not somebody else with the same name. He is the same guy who wrote in the *New York Times* that Canadians were a bunch of wusses for not getting involved in this great war that they were planning in Iraq.

That is the Liberal Party. The Liberals are always positioning themselves and posing as people who believe, as their name would tend to suggest, in liberty, in liberalism, in a vision of openness, but every time it counts, they vote with the Conservatives to take away the rights of citizens, to decrease the taxes of the richest corporations.

[*Translation*]

What it comes down to is that every time the Liberals had an opportunity to do something real to stand up for rights and preserve the balanced economy we had built up since the Second World War, they were absent, or even worse, they voted with the Conservatives.

More recently, they have adopted the clever trick of taking turns hiding behind the curtains. We see this, for example, every time a bill is brought forward to prevent the use of scabs in labour relations. Those on the extreme right wing of the Liberals—always the same ones—rise and vote against social legislation to prevent the use of

strikebreakers. That is the sad reality of the Liberal Party these days. It is a good thing that as we see the right wing crumbling in Quebec, the right wing is crumbling in the Liberal Party, and the only social democratic party in Canada, the New Democratic Party, is still here to speak for the people, to talk about social, economic and environmental equity.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question has more to do with the parliamentary secretary or the government than it does with this member's speech. This morning the parliamentary secretary talked about TFSA and the situation the government has found itself in with people making over-contributions. The government is stopping the over-contributions.

The question I have is, what is the government doing about tax havens? We recently discovered that last year 100 people were putting money in tax havens in Liechtenstein, and 1,800 were putting money in Swiss tax havens.

What effort is the government making to recover some of this money? Has it recovered any money at all?

I would also like to know the state of arrears in income tax and GST. Do businesses owe millions or billions of outstanding GST and taxes that are not being collected?

What is the amount of the overdue accounts that finance is dealing with, and what efforts are being made to collect from those accounts and from tax havens?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, the numbers are mind-boggling.

The OECD estimates that \$6 trillion is held in OPEC jurisdictions around the world. The Tax Justice Network in Great Britain calculates it at closer to \$10 trillion. Canada is losing tens of billions of dollars as a result of people hiding their money offshore.

I am happy to announce that my colleague from the Bloc, the member for Hochelaga, made a proposition in the finance committee that we should start hearing from people like Donald J. Johnston, the former head of the OECD. The Conservatives added that they wanted to hear from the OECD itself.

Always ready with a helpful suggestion, we had it adopted that we bring in Michael Wilson, a former Conservative finance minister. Michael Wilson is an interesting name to see. Everyone is talking about the HSBC scandal right now. But in the UBS scandal, which was when people started to realize how widespread all this was, there was an allegation that there was an identical practice going on here in Canada with UBS. Who was the spokesman for UBS in Canada? Michael Wilson.

We are going to have the pleasure of speaking with Michael Wilson in the finance committee. We want to make sure that when Canadians are looking at a \$60-billion deficit everything has been done to collect taxes owing. When we make the simple algorithmic calculation of how many people it takes to do the collecting and how much it brings in, it is disturbing to see that the Conservatives are firing 200 tax collectors who could have been bringing in that money and working on it.

Government Orders

The only country in the OECD to have worked backwards in having people take money out of the country into OPEC jurisdictions is Canada. Which government did that? The Conservative government. Two budgets ago, it actually made it easier for Canadian companies to take money out of the country and leave it in tax-free jurisdictions, the better to bring it back.

When we look at what was done with the income trusts of Canada's richest families, allowing them to take it all offshore and bring it back untaxed, we realize that for too many years what gets decided in this House in respect of taxation has been heavily skewed in favour of the richest. And it always falls on the backs of average Canadians.

Only a few bucks a year can actually be saved with a TFSA. The fact that the government is closing a so-called loophole there shows that once again that, whenever it has to do with the average Canadian, the government is more than willing to act immediately. I am not saying the loophole did not have to be closed, by the way. It is appropriate to do it, because it was aggressive tax planning. It was slipshod public administration. They had made bad calculations, and they did not realize that it was actually going to be cheaper to pay the penalty and over-subscribe.

The government's priority, as usual, is to take care of the richest in our society and let the average Joe pay the price.

• (1210)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, the government's tough approach to white collar crime has not achieved much of a result over the last few years.

The United States has successfully prosecuted and imprisoned 1,200 white collar criminals, whereas in Canada I believe there were two convictions, both against the same person. Since the government is going to spend \$9 billion developing new prisons, it seems like a bit of overkill for that one white collar criminal who has been put in jail.

Certainly, the whole government is dealing with a case of misplaced priorities on a massive scale. I would like to ask the member for his comments.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, since most of the policies of the Conservatives are based on conservative urban legend, it is easy to understand how they can come up with billions for prisons for unreported crime.

The member may remember the press conference with the Minister of Public Safety. He said that there were actually lots of criminals out there. But when asked to prove what he had just said, he said he could not because so many of the crimes were unreported. When asked how he would know the crimes were committed if they were unreported, he said that there must be lots of studies on this. Then he turned beet red and left the press conference. End of story.

It is part of Conservative branding, but their branding is being done with public money. Canada does not need billions of dollars' worth of new prisons. We had a good prison farm program where people could get back to work, learn the value of a day's work, and apply it as part of their rehabilitation.

The Conservatives do not believe in rehabilitation. They want to position themselves as being opposed to rehabilitation, which brings us back to a similar situation in the United States. There is a high rate of recidivism in the United States, because people feel they should go all the way if they are facing stiff time. The Conservatives are bringing us to that.

To stick with one of the themes of our interventions this morning, Canada had a balanced approach. Yes, real time for real crime. Yes, severe mistakes need to be punished. If we want to get people back into society, we have to invest to make sure they do not go back to prison.

The only policy left for the Conservatives is to build prisons for people who commit imaginary crimes for ideological purposes. It is insulting to see the government spending billions of dollars on prisons, almost \$10 billion, when we look at how little they are spending on real things. We see seniors having to pay extra for home heating oil in northern Ontario, and being given \$1.50 extra on their guaranteed income supplement. It is insulting to see billions of dollars going toward prisons and more than \$10 billion for fighter aircraft that were bought without even a public tender process that might have allowed us to get the best bang for our buck.

That is the Conservatives. It is sheer hypocrisy. They talk a good game on public administration. But then they scrap the census to make sure they do not have the information to administer social and other programs correctly. They are always tipping their hand.

For ideological reasons, the Conservatives are poisoning the possibility of good public administration. They simply do not believe in government. They do not believe in applying social and other programs for the public good. They would rather destroy the source of information and have press conferences where they evoke imaginary unreported crime to justify a decision that had already been made, a decision that was totally unjustifiable.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always interested to hear my friends in the NDP bemoan the closure of the prison farms.

I am curious about whether the hon. member can cite a single example of an individual released from prison being employed in the agricultural industry. Would he not admit that most people released from prison end up in cities where farm husbandry skills are of limited value?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, if I wanted to invent such people, I could not have done any better, homoconservatensis. These members stand up and pour out of a series of non sequiturs.

The prison farm program taught the value of a day's work, the value of working as part of a team. For a lot of people who had never been able to integrate into society, we provided them with rails that would guide them back into society through productive work.

Government Orders

I cannot believe the ignorance displayed in the question: to say that they did not learn animal husbandry. Enough said. Let that member get back to the barn.

•(1215)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Kings—Hants for sharing his time with me during this debate on Bill C-47.

This bill gave the Minister of Finance a golden opportunity to present new ideas, better management practices and a true vision for Canada's future. Instead, this bill is a simple administrative process that does not offer any hope when so many Canadian families are having a hard time making ends meet.

Canada's economy shrank because this borrow-and-spend government has failed to stimulate substantial economic growth. The Conservatives refuse to attack the real economic challenges Canadian families are facing, including record-high household debt, the exorbitant cost of post-secondary education and home care, and the insecurity of pension plans for those still working, not to mention the loss of 150,000 full-time jobs.

Statistics Canada indicated that our gross domestic product dropped by 0.1% in July, which translates into an overall contraction of the Canadian economy, while the unemployment rate in our country is 1.9% higher today than it was during the last election.

After a decade of surplus budgets under Liberal governments, the Conservatives put Canada into a deficit even before the recession by increasing government spending by 18% in their first three budgets. Their current record deficit of \$54 billion is expected to get worse.

The Conservatives' wasteful and rather irresponsible spending is the primary reason this record \$54 billion deficit is getting worse.

The Prime Minister's solution seems to be to borrow \$20 billion more to offer a tax break to the most profitable businesses—a gift we can hardly afford to give—while ignoring the needs of Canadian families who are in utter distress.

How have things improved for Canadians since 2006? Have these billions of borrowed dollars really helped restore Canadian families' sense of confidence in the future?

During the last election campaign, this government promised Canadians that it would never go into deficit. Since then, its road map has been littered with waste that keeps piling up.

Here are a few figures that provide a snapshot of out-of-control spending: a record \$130 million on shameless self-aggrandizing publicity; \$1.3 billion for a 72-hour photo shoot at the G8 and G20 summits, money that was used to buy anything and everything from a fake lake to light sticks; \$10 billion to \$13 billion on U.S.-style mega-prisons where all those “unspecified criminals” will be sent—the ones who will never be brought to justice—and this at a time when the crime rate is going down; \$16 billion for a botched agreement to purchase stealth fighter jets involving an untendered contract with no guarantee of jobs for the Canadian industry; and \$6 billion in yearly tax breaks for the country's most profitable companies, a tax cut well beyond our means.

Can anyone deny that this frenzy of waste demonstrates that this government has absolutely no sense of the very real financial concerns of middle-class families that are having an increasingly tough time making ends meet?

Canadians expect their government to use public funds responsibly to provide the services they need to improve their quality of life. I understand that it is difficult to strike a balance between spending and saving in the midst of the current economic uncertainty, but that is what an effective and compassionate government must do.

Bill C-47 is the latest in a long line of opportunities this government has botched.

A look at part I of the bill—which is at the beginning—and at the Universal Child Care Benefit Act, is enough to convince anyone.

What a flagrant example of a missed opportunity. This is the kind of inaction that shows us the extent to which Conservative values fly in the face of good public policy.

The purpose of the proposed amendment in this clause of the bill is to divide the already meagre \$100 benefit given to parents with shared custody, with the result being that each one will receive \$50. May I remind the House that this benefit is also taxed at year's end?

•(1220)

The government had an opportunity to raise this amount to a level that would really have helped Canadian families absorb the cost of child care. Instead, it chose to split it further, thereby forcing families into a Solomon-style dilemma.

The fact of the matter is that this \$100 child care benefit is just one drop in an ocean of ever-increasing expenses weighing our families down. Depending on where you live, the cost of child care can range from \$200 to over \$1,000 per month.

On average, one month's child care fees in Ontario's Chatham region total \$826, while a similar child care service in Winnipeg, Manitoba, costs \$395. I should point out here that the provincial government capped fees in that province.

The cheapest city on the list as far as child care is concerned is Montreal, where average fees total \$205, but let us not forget that this amount is based on a law that caps the cost of child care at \$7 a day in Quebec. In Quebec's case, the province had to intervene in order to make the cost of child care affordable for all families.

Here are the average costs in other cities across Canada: Regina, \$415; Fredericton, \$420; Saint John, \$430; Yellowknife, \$605; London, \$640; Kitchener, \$650; Toronto, \$800; and here, in Ottawa, \$860.

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We must not forget that those are averages, and that in many cases, the costs are much higher. Let us not kid ourselves: there are certainly cheaper places, but as with anything else, you get what you pay for.

With this bill, the government had a chance to increase the amount of the child care benefit, but it did not do so. Instead, it spent \$130 million on brightly coloured signs and flashy ads. That \$130 million could have funded over 21,000 full-time day care spaces for a whole year to help struggling Canadian families, including many single parents who need to provide day care for their children.

The government had a choice: spend money on flashy billboards, or offer real support to families that are struggling with child care issues. We now see this government's fundamentally mean-spirited priorities. It is disappointing to say the least.

[English]

Another clearly missed target in the bill is the complete and utter dismissal of the real and urgent problems affecting the Champlain Bridge, the most travelled bridge in the country and an essential link between Montreal, the South Shore, the Eastern Townships and, lest we forget, the United States.

[Translation]

The Conservative government chose a band-aid solution by investing \$212 million over 10 years to repair the bridge structure. Unfortunately, when I looked into how that money has been spent up until now, I discovered that, as with most other projects undertaken through the Conservative government's economic action plan, the money does not seem to be there.

The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited had planned on spending nearly \$14 million in the first year on "urgent" repairs. But the first year is over, and the corporation does not appear to have spent even \$10 million. If the bridge needs urgent repairs, why is the money being sent over in dribs and drabs?

When I wrote to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in April 2009 to ask about the possibility of repairing the bridge in a way that would allow light rail transport or other forms of public transportation, he replied with the following:

First, I would clarify that provincial, territorial and municipal governments are responsible for the planning and operation of Canada's various public transportation networks. The Government of Canada does not intervene in the planning, management and operation of these networks.

That may be so, but when they are on a bridge managed by a federal corporation, the federal government has to take action.

Allocating money is helpful only if that money is actually spent on the projects for which it was allocated. I suppose the Conservatives have become so good at public relations that they think all investments end at their communications unit.

Who is blocking this important funding? It is obvious that the Conservative government is washing its hands of the Champlain bridge and no longer wants to talk about how the work is progressing. I just learned that a vital study on the future of the bridge or a secondary route is still being held up. Consortium BCDE was awarded a \$1.397 million contract in late September 2009 to study the feasibility of building a new bridge in the Champlain

bridge corridor. The study was supposed to have been completed in 12 months, but now its completion date has been postponed to December 2010.

I was very eager to see the results of this study so that we would finally have a real plan, a real vision for the future of this vital route over the river. Patch jobs are not the answer, as anyone who takes the Champlain bridge regularly knows. The completion of the study has been postponed for three months. Can anyone assure us that there will not be any more delays?

In its annual report for 2008-2009, The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated promised in its objective 8 to "carry out a feasibility study to construct a new bridge along the Champlain Bridge corridor" and said it anticipated awarding the contract for the study in July 2009. The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated awarded the contract two months late, and now it seems we will have to wait three more months for the results. The people on the south shore of Montreal are fed up with the delays with their bridge. I am disappointed to see that it does not seem to be a priority for The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated and even less so for the Conservative government.

A real penchant, though, for finding the silver lining in every cloud led me to examine the bill from stem to stern in the hope of finding a hidden gem. I came across part 4 of the bill, which deals with changes to the Bank Act. When I saw this short section, which is near the end of Bill C-47, I was eager to see whether the Minister of Finance had kept his word and included the changes I had suggested in the House.

On October 7, 2009, I introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-457, which made some important changes to the Insurance Business (Banks and Bank Holding Companies) Regulations to ensure that insurance brokers in small and medium-sized firms benefited from a standardization of the rules of the game. Ironically, on the same day I introduced this bill, the Minister of Finance stated that the government intended to prohibit Canadian banks from using the Internet to promote and sell insurance on their websites. This measure was in one of the four parts of my bill. I saw in it a sign that the government had reacted because I introduced my private member's bill.

I therefore wrote to the Minister of Finance on October 19, 2009, asking him to support my bill so that the regulations could be changed once and for all.

● (1225)

The minister finally replied to my letter on July 29, 2010. I do not wish to dwell on the length of time it took for the minister to reply, but nine months seems excessive, particularly since he stated, on October 7, 2009, that not only would he write to the banks about putting an end to their practice of selling insurance on their websites, but also that his government would adopt a law to that effect.

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In his letter of July 29, 2010, the minister advised me that “draft regulations” would soon be pre-published in the *Canada Gazette* to address the issue of banks using the Internet to promote and sell insurance. We are still waiting for those draft regulations. I had hoped to find these changes in Bill C-47, but, unfortunately, I have been disappointed as they have not been included.

Since the minister did nothing more than offer lip service and make a few verbal threats, the banks have already responded by trying to promote insurance on cell phones and personal digital assistants, or PDAs.

My bill expands the prohibitions against banks selling insurance. It would prohibit banks in Canada from promoting insurance products in their branches and neighbourhoods, or on websites, ATMs, cell phones and PDAs.

Once again, Bill C-47 provided an opportunity to deal with this and other pressing matters. The Conservatives are good at making promises they do not intend to keep, and we are left, once again, trying to squeeze water from a stone.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, this bill is purely administrative. It does not contain a single substantive measure, much less an innovative one.

This was yet another wasted opportunity, another example of the laissez-faire approach adopted by the government which, time and time again, has shown that it is not interested in governing.

• (1230)

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Madam Speaker, in preparation for the 2010 budget, the Bloc Québécois did a pre-budget consultation tour in which 317 organizations participated.

We had the opportunity to speak with the main players in Quebec's development across the entire province. We gathered and studied all of the proposals, which we then submitted to the Conservative government. The Bloc Québécois's budget suggestions were consistent with the expectations of Quebeckers, and if the government had implemented them, they would have ensured that Quebec came out of the crisis prosperous, sustainable and green.

Unfortunately, the government missed the opportunity to properly address Quebec's economic, social, environmental and financial needs. They have shown once again that, as far as Canada is concerned, it is as though Quebec does not exist. The Conservatives, backed by the Liberals, established policies geared to the needs of Ontario and Alberta, to Quebec's disadvantage. Despite all of the wonderful Conservative promises made in 2006 about taking a new approach with Quebec, the Conservative budget has not met needs of Quebec's economy.

Whether we are talking about the forestry or aerospace sectors, the environment or culture, Quebeckers' priorities have been completely ignored.

For example, the automobile industry, concentrated in Ontario, received \$9.7 billion whereas the forestry industry, which is so vital for Quebec's regions, received only \$170 million.

When it comes to the environment, which for all intents and purposes was ignored in the budget, the Conservative government

put \$1 billion towards developing nuclear power, which benefits Ontario, Alberta and oil companies. Do we need to repeat that they already enjoy generous tax benefits?

In addition, no new funding was announced for the cultural sector, which is essential to the development of the Quebec nation and its economy.

What I find the most upsetting in this budget is that it ignores the need to improve employment insurance and the guaranteed income supplement, which is currently keeping our seniors in poverty. It also ignores the need to deal with the issues of social housing and homelessness.

The Bloc Québécois voted against the budget because it was unfair for Quebec, but does not object ideologically to all the measures resulting from it. We would rather look at the merit of each measure included in this bill during discussions in the Standing Committee on Finance and then support those that will help Quebeckers and those that we previously proposed.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of a number of initiatives in this bill. We must admit that some are acceptable, including measures to improve sharing child tax benefits. The government agrees to pay half to each of two parents who have joint custody. The bill also lightens the tax burden on beneficiaries of a registered disability savings plan, a plan designed to ensure the financial security of children with severe disabilities. It also reduces the administrative burden on charities and some small businesses, and it tightens the rules on the TFSA to prevent tax avoidance. What is more, companies will stop benefiting from double deductions for stock options.

That is where the good side of the current bill ends. The Bloc Québécois has many reservations about this bill. It confirms the Conservative government's desire to spare rich taxpayers at all cost and have the workers and the middle class paying off the deficit.

We also see that the government will continue to treat stock options like capital gains for ordinary taxpayers. The Bloc Québécois deplores the fact that only half the income derived from stock options is subject to federal tax.

• (1235)

The Conservative government could show fairness to the workers and collect \$1 billion in tax by cutting off this gift.

Businesses are not being asked to pay their fair share to increase government revenue, except that they have to make source deductions to ensure that employees with stock options pay their taxes.

This bill also attests to the Conservative government's inertia with respect to the environment and the fight against greenhouse gases. Only one environmental measure is included; it encourages the production of clean energy.

The government is ignoring the Bloc Québécois' urgent calls concerning equalization payments and increased transfers for education and social programs. It is also disregarding our recommendations on income security for retirees.

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I would like to go into greater detail about some of the measures in the bill that the Bloc Québécois wants to improve in committee.

First, I want to address the measures regarding income tax on charities, as included in part 1. The government proposes changing the rules on sums that have to be spent on charitable activities by repealing the rule on charitable spending, changing the rules on capital accumulation, and strengthening the rules against tax avoidance.

The Bloc Québécois believes it is vital that charitable organizations be able to focus on their activities, rather than on fundraising. Accordingly, we supported the campaign to eliminate the capital gains tax on donations of publicly listed securities and private equity holdings to charities.

The proposed measures could reduce the amount of administrative red tape that charities have to deal with. However, the issue of funding these organizations remains largely ignored by this government. The survival of these organizations is especially important given that the government has slashed spending on social services.

When it comes to international aid, we cannot help but be concerned by the major withdrawal and the politics of fear imposed on NGOs by this government. This withdrawal is particularly apparent in the case of organizations whose positions do not correspond to the government's viewpoints.

In budget 2010, the federal government announced its plans to cap expenditures for development assistance, thereby confirming that it would not make the effort needed to achieve its target of 0.7% of GDP.

The Bloc Québécois recognizes the important role of charitable organizations in Quebec society and around the world. Child care centres, volunteer organizations, regional recycling depots and NGOs working in international aid all need predictable, long-term funding in order to fulfill their respective mandates.

Prior to budget 2010, the Bloc Québécois demanded that the federal government stop extending certain programs on a temporary basis and stop being so secretive about its intentions regarding the funding of organizations. In doing so, the government creates uncertainty among the most vulnerable, our community groups and the charitable organizations that help them.

The Bloc Québécois is also calling on the federal government to implement a realistic plan to achieve the UN target of 0.7% of GDP for international assistance as quickly as possible. If the federal government does not increase its budget for development assistance, it will greatly impede the vital work that is being done by charitable organizations in the developing world.

● (1240)

Last month, I had the opportunity to participate in a parliamentary mission to two of the poorest countries in Africa—Benin and Burkina Faso. Parliamentarians in these countries told us that they appreciate the quality of Canadian aid. However, they expressed serious misgivings about Canada's recent decision to no longer consider them to be priority countries since they are not included in

the new list of countries that are a priority for our international aid. That is the result of the government's disengagement.

Part 3 of the bill deals with measures pertaining to federal-provincial fiscal arrangements. The purpose of these piecemeal arrangements, made at the behest of the federal government, is to facilitate tax sharing by Canada and Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois believes that it is high time to come up with a vigorous mechanism ensuring that Quebec receives all taxes paid in the province. For that reason, we are asking the federal government to initiate talks with the Government of Quebec in order to create a single tax return in Quebec, on the basis of an agreement similar to that for the GST, for all taxes paid by Quebecers.

Since 1991, the Government of Quebec has collected the goods and services tax for the federal government, which compensates it for this service. The Bloc Québécois believes that Quebec should collect all income tax. Not only would corporations and individuals save considerable sums every year, but the reduced cost of tax collection would lead to recurring savings that, in turn, would lower pressure on public finances. Maintaining two separate structures for tax administration forces Quebecers to pay very high administrative costs. The introduction of a single tax return by the Government of Quebec would save hundreds of millions of dollars by reducing duplication.

Part 7 of the bill, which also deals with federal-provincial fiscal arrangements, addresses total transfers, including equalization payments. The Quebec government is the loser with this bill, as it was with the 2010 budget, because the Conservatives have maintained their decision to unilaterally cap equalization payments.

Since the equalization envelope is now capped, the total amount of equalization will be calculated in line with economic growth, which will mean Quebec will lose several billion dollars over the coming years. Moreover, during this period, Quebec's share may decline. If Ontario's relative wealth drops in relation to Quebec's, Ontario will receive a bigger piece of the pie while Quebec's piece will get smaller.

There is nothing in this bill about the formula affecting a segment of Hydro-Quebec's revenue either, which deprives the Quebec government of \$250 million.

Lastly, there is nothing planned with regard to education and social program transfers. The Bloc Québécois is calling for a substantial increase in investments in these programs to return to the 1994-95 indexed level. Such an increase would mean that Quebec would receive \$800 million more annually for the funding of its social programs.

The government is flatly refusing Quebec's urgent calls for an increase in federal transfer payments, in particular in education. The growth in health and education transfers will be compromised as of 2014-15 since the Federal Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act does not allow for any further growth in these transfers beyond 2014.

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•(1245)

Furthermore, there is no compensation resulting from the harmonization of Quebec's sales tax under Bill C-47. Even though Quebec has been unanimously calling on the government to provide financial compensation of \$2.2 billion for the harmonization of its sales tax, this has been denied. And yet, total compensation of \$6.8 billion was allocated to Ontario, British Columbia and three Atlantic provinces.

As far as the main transfer payments to Quebec are concerned, the federal government must reverse its decision to unilaterally modify the equalization formula, thereby ensuring Quebec receives the money to which it is entitled. The federal government must do away with the equalization cap and treat Quebec's water resources fairly when calculating equalization.

Furthermore, the federal government must increase the Canada Social Transfer. The Bloc Québécois is calling for a substantial increase in investments in these programs in order to return to the 1994-1995 indexed level.

Bill C-47, like the 2010 budget, completely disregards the economic situation Quebecers find themselves in.

Unfortunately, it is clear that the Conservatives continue to fail to make this an opportunity for Quebec. The 2010 budget implementation bill includes several positive initiatives, but it is clearly not a harbinger of any fundamental change in direction on the part of the Conservatives.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned several issues, a mixed bag of all kinds of things, from the forestry sector to the auto sector to EI. However, I would like to ask him specifically about pensions and how we can help. I know he has many workers in his riding who, similar to mine, are currently living on pensions that are in jeopardy. They were called defined benefit pensions. However, because they are unable to recoup a lot of the costs when they wind up, they are not valued the same as they were before. Could he comment on that?

I also want to talk about equalization. Being from Newfoundland and Labrador, we are in a blessed position now where we do not take equalization because we are considered to be a have province, according to the per capita formula. Right now Quebec receives money from the equalization program, of which it wants more. If he truly believes Quebec will become the independent nation he hopes it will be, what will that do to average citizens of Quebec once the province achieves that independence? Will it chose to raise taxes or cut services?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Equalization, which he brought up, refers to the government's redistribution of wealth. Under the principle of equalization, the have provinces give part of their wealth to the have-not provinces. The purpose of this policy is to balance wealth. There are calculations

that have to be done and checked each year to ensure that they are accurate.

My colleague made reference to Quebec independence or sovereignty in his question. I think that if Quebec became a sovereign nation, there would be no more talk about equalization. There would be no more discussions about the amount of money a given province should receive. When a nation is proud of itself, its skills and its wealth, it can govern itself by keeping all its own tax revenue instead of giving half to another government that does not necessarily redistribute it according to the same priorities.

I talked about how a quarter of the taxes paid by Quebecers had been used to help the auto industry. Quebecers wound up subsidizing Ontario's auto industry. We never opposed that because it is important to Canada's overall economy, but it has to be said that Quebec is contributing to all of Canada's spending and wealth.

If Quebec became independent, we feel that by keeping all our own tax revenue instead of redistributing it to suit the majority of Canadians—who never have the same priorities as Quebec—we could strike a budget that would meet the needs of Quebecers.

•(1250)

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, given the comments the member has made on the bill, what do his constituents say about the priorities of the federal government, which would benefit the residents of his province? The federal and provincial governments say all the time that they do not want to be like the United States and have to hand pick and designate the technologies that we choose, that they want to leave it to the market and corporations to choose what to invest in for the future.

The International Energy Agency said very clearly two years ago that the way out of the economic recession and the climate crisis was for governments to make major investments in stimulating the new green economy. The government has chosen to put all its eggs in one basket, carbon capture sequestration. We now hear it is highly questionable whether it can work at all or is affordable.

What do his residents say about where we should put the money? Do they support the idea of perhaps putting more money into furthering our renewable energy and retrofit sectors for homes and small businesses?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent question. When the people of Quebec talk to the Bloc Québécois, we realize that the priorities set by the current government in no way respect their desires and goals. The public needs more direct assistance in terms of social funding, like that provided to seniors, and the current government is ignoring that.

For some years now the Bloc has been introducing a bill in the House that would improve the guaranteed income supplement and it has always been rejected. The Conservatives rejected it, alleging that it would cost too much. Yet, they spend billions of dollars on weapons and fighter jets. Money does not seem to be a problem for the government when it comes to that. The public can make these comparisons right now. People are starting to understand that the government, far off in Ottawa, is not really looking after them.

Government Orders

There is also the issue of social housing, which is inadequate in my own riding of Laval, in Quebec. That is likely the case in many regions of Canada. There is a serious need for social housing in this country. The current government is not responding to this need and is not allocating this money for the public good.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, who has just admitted that the province of Quebec is poor, because it does not have the money it needs to develop. I would like him to explain what the government did when it increased equalization payments and Quebec received over \$8 billion.

How could he, his party or his colleagues in Quebec generate that kind of wealth in Quebec? They have never been able to provide any explanation for that. I would like him to explain how they could.

• (1255)

Mr. Robert Carrier: Madam Speaker, I am hesitant in thanking the member opposite for his question. Saying that equalization shows that Quebec is poor compared to the rest of Canada is not an admission of weakness on the part of Quebec. It is an admission of how poorly things work in the Canadian majority, when it creates poor provinces. Quebec is not poor because it lacks wealth and skills, but because Quebecers do not see an adequate return on the money that they invest in the government.

Earlier I compared the automotive industry, which received billions of dollars in subsidies, to the Canadian forestry industry, which is so important to Quebec, even in the riding of the member opposite. This country does not help the forestry industry. Then it is surprised when calculations show that Quebec is in need of equalization payments to keep up with the Canadian average. Quebec wants out of that situation. We are tired of being poor in a supposedly rich country. We want to conserve our own wealth and use it for our own development, so that we can be proud of our country.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-47, which is part of the budget process of the government.

It is no secret that at this time in the history of Canada we are facing a particularly difficult time. Things are changing very rapidly. We are not out of the recession and people are looking for help. The middle class and the very disadvantaged are looking for help.

Ultimately budgets, including this one, are about choices. Governments make choices, they put them in budgets and eventually they get judged on those choices. It is useful when discussing anything to do with the economy of the country to know what Canadians are thinking about the economy, their own position and the lives of their family.

I want to share a few facts with the House.

From RBC Economics: Today the typical Canadian family must devote 49% of its income to own a standard two-storey home while mortgage rates are at their lowest point. That means people on average are spending half of their income to own their home, and they know if interest rates go up that will only go higher.

From the BMO Financial Group: 64% of parents worry they will not be able to afford the rising cost of post-secondary education. I am sure CASA and CFS would echo that.

From the Canadian Medical Association: 80% of Canadians fear that the quality of their health care will decline over the next three years.

From the Canadian Cancer Society: Canadian families are concerned about the cost of caring for a terminally-ill loved one, which is currently \$1,000 a month, excluding the loss of income from taking time off work to provide care. I will come back to this later.

From the Canadian Institute of Actuaries: 72% of pre-retired Canadians worry about maintaining a reasonable standard of living in retirement and maintaining a reasonable quality of life.

From RBC Economics: 58% of Canadians are concerned with their current level of debt, averaging \$41,470 per person, which is the worst among 20 advanced countries in the OECD.

From the Canadian Payments Association: 59% of Canadians believe they would be in financial difficulty if their paycheque were delayed by a week. Think about that. More than half of all Canadians worry that they would be in financial difficulty if their paycheque were delayed by one week.

This is a country with a lot of people who are very concerned.

I want to share a statistic that was brought to parliamentarians last week, I think, by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, ACCC. This is something that really outlines the challenge that faces this nation and why we need a bold and responsible government that can address this challenge.

Today 44% of Canadians do not participate in the labour force. That includes children, seniors and the unemployed. That 44% will rise to 57% by 2026 and 61% by 2031. In 20 years, 61% of the people in Canada will not be in the labour market.

This is a very telling statistic, which outlines the challenge that faces Canada right now and the absolute need for us to take advantage of the human resource potential of all Canadians. We must do whatever we can as a Parliament, and the government must do what it can to ensure all Canadians have an opportunity to reach the level of education and skills attainment that they should have. The problem is that the recession that is still lingering in Canada has disproportionately affected a group of people.

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A dear friend of mine, the Hon. D. Scott McNutt who passed away just recently, used to have a saying that “A rising tide lifts all boats”, the idea being, in this case, that if an economy gets better everybody benefits. The fact is that not all boats are raised equally, and the poor and the disadvantaged are disproportionately hurt.

We heard this last year from the Citizens for Public Justice, who released a report indicating that during the recession the poverty rate in Canada increased significantly. In fact, the poverty rate in Canada had gone down over the previous couple of decades, particularly among seniors, although there were still many single women who were living in poverty. The poverty rates had gone down due to a decent economy and the fact that we brought in measures like the child tax benefit, guaranteed income supplement and things like that.

However from 2007 to 2009, poverty rates increased from 9.2% to 11.7% in Canada, according to the Citizens for Public Justice and their partner, World Vision. Child poverty went from 9.5% to 12%.

• (1300)

Those are pretty sobering statistics. They are not saying that the most in need in Canada suffered proportionately; they are saying they suffered disproportionately, that they got less than anybody else.

HungerCount, the report of Canada's food banks, last November indicated that the usage of food banks in Canada went up by 18%. That is pretty staggering.

A couple of weeks ago I had a chance to speak to Feed Nova Scotia in my own province, and they are talking about similar statistics. Their annual report says:

Forty thousand Nova Scotians are hungry each month—mothers, fathers, grandparents and, perhaps saddest of all, children and youth. Hunger knows no barriers. It's in every community across our province and its impact is truly profound.

Hunger is going up in this country, and it is going up at a very concerning rate.

Social assistance caseloads for those 900,000 more Canadians who are living in poverty went up.

Food prices went up 5%, and in fact in basic dietary staples over the last couple of years, those things that everybody needs, prices have gone up 10%.

Average household debt is up 5.7%.

Bankruptcies are up 36%.

We do not have the social infrastructure to deal with this, and we particularly did not have the investments from the government at a time of stimulus that we needed. In fact, many economists can validate the fact that the best form of economic stimulus is to give it to people who need it the most, the unemployed, the people who are marginalized, because they actually spend the money. They get it and they spend the money. If there is one thing I would think all Canadians would want to do it is to help those who are most in need.

The good news on the poverty side is that people are getting active on this front. There is a national mobilization. We had the social forum organized by campaign 2000. We had the 20th anniversary,

the unfortunate anniversary, of Parliament saying we would eliminate child poverty by 2000.

Parliament adopted a new motion and hopefully we will do better.

There is a private member's bill from the member for Sault Ste. Marie on anti-poverty. Most notably we have six provinces and a territory that have anti-poverty strategies.

The problem is that the government is not addressing these needs. It is not addressing these needs at all. We have seen that in a number of ways. In the stimulus budget of 2009, those measures that were permanent, things like tax cuts, did not really help people with the lowest incomes. It helped people like the members of this House and myself who make \$150,000 and more. There is an economic argument for doing that, and I do not dispute that. However I think we would all agree that those who are making \$30,000 and less should have gotten more out of a budget for stimulus than members of Parliament and senators.

We do have a federal poverty elimination act brought into this House, but we have no action from the government. In fact in June 2009, in response to the United Nations periodic review, which suggested among other things that Canada should have an anti-poverty strategy, the federal government turned around and said “No, that is not our problem; that is not our jurisdiction”, yet the six provinces and a territory that actually have anti-poverty plans are telling our committee, myself, my colleague from Laval, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook and others that we need the federal government to step up and at least acknowledge that poverty is an issue that affects us all and we all have responsibility for that.

Poverty is not getting the attention it needs. People in Canada are suffering.

I want to talk about education. Let us look at that statistic again, that today 44% of Canadians are not in the labour force and that is going to rise to 61% by 2031.

Canada is a fortunate country. Canada has done very well, in many ways more by accident than design. We have a rich land. We have lots of natural resources. People do not come here and fight on our land. Because of climate change, we have more of the kind of natural disasters that other places do, but we do not have them in the same way other countries do. We do not have the massive tsunamis that have affected parts of the world. Those kinds of tragedies happen less in Canada than in other places.

We have been very fortunate and very blessed as a nation. We have also taken advantage of our wealth to educate our citizens, but we are slipping. We made great strides on research and innovation starting at the turn of the century, investing in CFI and Genome Canada, increasing grants to the granting councils, to NSERC, to SSHRC, to CIHR and to all those organizations. We went a long way.

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However we are starting to taper off, and other countries have started to say, “We can do that here”, not only on research and innovation where they are now investing but even on where their students are choosing to go to school. In fact they are coming to Canada and want our students to go there. That is a good thing.

• (1305)

We want our Canadian students to travel the world. We want other students to come here. We also need to say we have a problem. We need to educate Canadian citizens. We need to take advantage of all the people in Canada we possibly can and make sure they get the education they need not only for their own benefit, which is important, but also for the benefit of the nation.

ABC Life Literacy Canada released a report indicating:

...3.1 million working age Canadians with IALS Level 1 literacy skills, the lowest level of literacy, are employed with an additional 5.8 million working-age Canadians employed with a Level 2 literacy level. These 8.9 million people represent nearly 50% of the entire Canadian labour force...

Many Canadians struggle with literacy. Four out of ten Canadians age 16 to 65 struggle with low literacy. This is a problem. We need to address this issue. We need to make sure that people who are not attaining the level of literacy they want can get that level of literacy.

One of the very sad moments in my career as a parliamentarian was when a gentleman sat down with me and said, “Look Mike, I have never really done very well in my job. I have done my best. I work hard. I was offered a promotion but a literacy test went with it”. He was afraid he would lose his first job if the literacy test showed that he could not attain the level of literacy he needed.

These are the people we need. For their benefit and for the benefit of all of us as a nation, we need to allow them to attain the level of literacy they want.

With regard to aboriginal Canadians, as part of our study on poverty in May, the human resources committee visited the Lac Simon First Nation in Quebec and the Kitcisakik Indian settlement. I want to read to the House some statistics we found out while we were there.

I will mention Lac Simon first. With regard to educational attainment, of the 705 residents age 15 or over, 555 had no certificate, diploma or degree; 40 out of 705 had a high school certificate; 45 had an apprenticeship or trade certificate; 20 had a college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate; and only 35 had a university certificate. I would like members to think about that. Of 705 residents of working age, 555 had no certificate, diploma or degree. The labour force included only 220 individuals of which 175 were employed. The employment rate in Lac Simon is 24.8%.

We then went to Kitcisakik. Let me give the House the numbers from there. In 2006, of the 170 residents age 15 and over, 145 had no certificate, diploma or degree; another 15 had a high school certificate; 10 had college or CEGEP; and 10 had a university certificate. Of the 170 residents, 145 had no certificate. The labour force totalled 85. The employment rate was 31.2%.

I do not say this to try to educate my colleagues in the House. We know there is an issue, but what are we doing about it?

There is both a social justice argument and an economic argument for this country; we cannot allow that to happen in Canada. That should not be the case in a country as rich as Canada. We need to make sure that by 2031 all these people are not part of the 61% who are not in the workforce. They do not want to be part of the 61% who are not in the workforce. They want to be part of the group that is paying its way and making a difference for Canadians. I know we all believe in that. It takes an effort, a commitment and a belief that we can get there in order to make that happen. We are not doing anywhere near enough.

It is about choices. The Conservative government has chosen to spend money on certain things, and we all use those numbers and statistics in different ways.

Let me mention the G8 and G20 summits with a cost of \$1.3 billion. As a comparison I will give the House the costs of hosting other summits. Let me begin with security costs at the G8. In 2009 in Italy security cost \$124 million. The year before it cost \$280 million in Japan, and it cost \$124 million in Germany.

I can recall, as I am sure the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's would recall, the beautiful days of 1995 when we had the G7 in Halifax. The total cost of that summit was \$30 million. Bill Clinton, John Major, Boris Yeltsin and other leaders came to Halifax. It was a very positive experience. I thank former Prime Minister Chrétien and the regional minister at the time, David Dingwall, for their work in bringing that summit to Halifax.

• (1310)

Summits are where things get done and they do work if they are in an environment where things can happen in a positive way and we do not end up being badgered around by spiralling costs for fake lakes, gazebos and all those sorts of things.

A couple of headlines in today's Quorum read, “Commons to probe G8/G20 spending, security”, and “Dance floor, gazebo among stimulus waste...”. For the millions of Canadians watching on CPAC who may not know what Quorum is, it is a summation of headlines in the news today.

We need to decide what Canadians want. Governments, whether they be Liberal, Progressive Conservative or any others that might hope to be a government in this country, need be responsible for their decisions.

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That brings me to the announcement this week made by my own leader, which fits into a discussion of the budget. It is fully costed, fully accountable and it is a clear choice for Canadians about what they would like to spend money on. Their tax money, after all, is what is used to fund the priorities of whatever government they elect. They now have a clear choice with the Liberal family care plan.

I have spoken before in this House about my own circumstance as a family caregiver. Like just about everybody in this House, I have had the opportunity to provide care to loved ones myself. In my case, I had two parents who passed away almost simultaneously, six weeks apart, from cancer. They both died at home and, while it was sad, the circumstances were a lot better than if we had not had the family resources and financial resources to care for them. Many Canadians do not have those choices. Many Canadians who take care of sick relatives, whether it is an autistic child, a disabled adult, a brother or sister, or aging parents, do not have those choices.

I mentioned before that one of the saddest meetings that I have had as a parliamentarian was when a person with low literacy skills came to me and said, "I need the government to step up". That was at a time when the government had cut \$1 million out of literacy programs.

One of my happiest days was a bit unexpected. I, as were many other members, was visited on Tuesday by members from the ALS Society. A woman, who some other members would have met, sat in my office and thanked me. This woman had lost her husband at 45 years old in a very sad passing from ALS. She had 14-year-old twin daughters. She told me that she had visited Parliament last year and that she had been listened to.

The family care plan that our leader introduced is a reflection of what Canadians need. To look at the six month EI benefit and the family care tax benefit, one of the concerns people have had about compassionate care under EI for a long time is that the six weeks are not very useful. It needs to be longer. The other thing it needs to be, not just for ALS but for people dealing with multiple sclerosis, struggling with depression, going for cancer treatments and many other things, is more flexibility so that within that six month period people can choose to take it as they need it.

People are not generally sick for five and a half months and then get better and go on about their life. Quite often they need to the support of their family for a few weeks here and a few weeks there. It also needs to be flexible to allow family members to share that. At six weeks, that is not much of a choice. The family care tax benefit, based on the child tax benefit, is another measure that people struggling with making difficult personal choices have asked for. I have met with people in my riding, as I know all members have, who are dealing with circumstances that we simply wish we could do more for and, in some cases, we cannot. They need that kind of help.

Bill C-47 is part of the budget and budgets are about choices. Are we reflecting the values of Canadians? Are we anticipating the needs of Canadians? Are we going where Canadians need us to go or are we simply going where we think we want to go, either for political or ideological reasons?

In my view, the budget that the government has brought forward does not do enough to help people who need help the most. Middle-

class Canadians and low-income Canadians who, in most cases, through no fault of their own, need the help of a government. They need a government that will be on their side, that will be in their corner and that will provide assistance to them when they need it. We can do better as a country.

● (1315)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his passion toward poor people.

When I look at my riding of Newton—North Delta, it is a very diverse riding. Many immigrants came to this country to try to make a difference. I must agree with the hon. member that if we are to be competitive in the world on the global stage, we need to have a knowledge-based economy. We need to provide the necessary education for our young people. On the other hand, we also need to ensure that in the early days of childhood the children are well fed and are given all the support they need in the first six years of their life.

When I was talking to the firefighters in my riding of Surrey Delta, they told me that there were still a large number of kids going to school hungry and that they were providing them with breakfast to ensure they could focus on their education.

When it comes to all the social justice issues, whether it was the Kelowna accord which affected aboriginal children, or cancelling the landmark child care agreements that we signed with the provinces, the Conservatives have taken them all away. The immigration lineups are growing longer and longer. On the other hand, the deficit is the highest in Canadian history.

Could the hon. member tell me, so I can take it to my constituents, where the government is lacking and what can be done to take care of vulnerable people?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, I visited with my colleague in his riding and I have some of the needs that he talks about and for which he advocates so passionately in the House.

On the issue of child care, I neglected to mention child care because there are so many other needs. However, the fundamental need in the education system is that we have some kind of standardized early learning for children. In terms of the OECD nations, we are tied with another country for last place out of 25 nations in terms of indices for how we are educating our children.

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Children do not start learning magically at the age of six when they go to school. Children start learning before they are even born, but certainly as soon as they are born. In many cases, the parents want to provide all the care for them and, in most cases, these days they probably cannot. We need to ensure again, not only for the individual family or children but for the betterment of our society and for Canada, that we have some kind of a national early learning program for those children that provides those opportunities and gives the foundation. That will impact on things I referred to like rates of literacy and post-secondary attainment.

It all starts when our kids are very young. We know kids do not start learning at age six. They start learning even before they are born. My wife took my daughter to a Céline Dion concert three days before she was born and I think that is why my daughter was colicky eventually when she was born. Children learn at a very early age and, if we get to be the government, we will ensure they get that opportunity.

● (1320)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, we heard a lot from the government in terms of announcements of its vision for spending \$9 billion expanding the prison system in this country, but we have heard very little from the government in terms of the green economy.

Government members should know that Germany is a very advanced country in terms of the green economy. Why does the Canadian government basically ignore best practices and new ideas from countries like Germany and instead concentrate on building prisons as its solution for the future?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, I think that Angela Merkel's government recently decided to look at corporate tax cuts and postpone them in the way that we are proposing here so they can invest in some of those things. We need to ensure we are investing in those things that keep people out of prison. That obviously is child care and schools. Again, it comes to choices. How do we take care of people who may be in trouble? We need to help them not get into trouble before they do, and that means education and schools, not prisons.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague has done a lot of work on the EI file. He talked about the compassionate care program that we announced a short time ago. I know the compassion that he has for the people who are the most vulnerable in our society.

One of the sectors, among many, would be the seasonal worker and how in the past while we have been asking the government to make permanent the best 14 weeks. We started three pilot projects in 2005. One expired back in September and one is about to expire on October 23. That, in and of itself, is a very special program because 55% of what people earn during their time of work is based on the best 14 weeks of earnings. If this program expires people will need to use the last 14 weeks and the employers will be at a disadvantage. It is hard for them to hire people when there is a disincentive to work. It is human nature.

I also would like the member to comment on the fact that over the past while we have not heard a lot about pension securities. Many people are not so much involved in company benefit plans, whether

they be through direct contribution or a defined benefit. What we are seeing now and what we hope to do is have pension plans that allow people the flexibility to move across the country. Perhaps they have a skilled trade that takes them to many places around the world and it would allow the government to help them contribute to their latter years.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor certainly knows this issue much better than I do.

I want to talk about the pilot projects because there has been a lot of misunderstanding about these. They are a double win. Just as education is good individually but also good for the country, these are good for employees and good for employers. These are economically responsible programs that recognize an essential fact of Canadian life, which is that we have seasonal workers. That is how it is, folks, and we need what they do. We need them to contribute to the economy. It is good for them and it is fundamentally good, sound business policy to extend these pilot projects.

As the member said, one of them, the best five weeks, has expired. The best 14 weeks and working on claim, these are important for both employees and employers. They are responsible programs that the government needs to extend and it needs to signal that very soon.

● (1325)

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, I would ask the member one final question.

He touched on another important issue, which is child care. What we have lost sight of along the way is what it takes for early childhood education. I was wondering if the member would like to comment on that as well.

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, child care is very important, not only for all children but there are certain children who would have really benefited from the previous Liberal plan.

For example, autistic children, minority language children, new Canadian children and, in many cases, children in remote areas whose parents are not able to get child care because they get a \$100 cheque taxable in the mailbox. That does not create child care. I am sure it is a program that families need but it does not promote early learning and child care.

If there is one thing Canada really needs to do to catch up with those in the world we consider competitors, the OECD nations, is we need to invest in quality early learning and child care.

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Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased today to speak to Bill C-47, another of the budget implementation bills. In fact, the government wants to call it the Sustaining Canada's Economic Recovery Act.

Certainly that is the difficulty of the situation, because on a macro basis, on a global basis, we are looking at some countries in the world that are having much more difficult times than we are right now. We only have to look at Europe to see what is happening in the country of Iceland, which had to declare bankruptcy in the last two years, and in the countries of Ireland and Portugal. We have to feel sorry for some of the measures that are being taken over there right now, because a lot of the workers in those countries are suffering a lot because of the restraint measures that are being forced upon them by the IMF.

We have not yet had to deal with that situation here, but our economic situation is much, much different in the sense that we are very tied to the American economy. As a matter of fact, it is only in very recent months, and I am not even certain whether we are past that point yet, that there is a recognition that there is \$1.3 trillion in commercial loans coming due in the United States. In the spring, there was a freeze in credit for small business. Banks were classifying commercial loans as risky, so they were very conservative in their lending policies. Manufacturers were having difficulty getting lines of credit.

In 2008, the 400 largest U.S. contractors were doing 80% of their business in the private sector. Now, two years later, the 400 largest U.S. contractors are doing 80% of their work in the public sector, which will be running out, both in the United States and in Canada, over the next few months. The concern will be what will happen when the stimulus packages in both countries run out, what will happen with the unemployment rate. There should potentially be a rise in unemployment and the problems that will come with that.

The recovery is tentative at this point and there is enough concern to be passed around. The question is, how is the government responding to this situation and is it responding correctly? We would argue in our party that its priorities are somewhat displaced.

For example, we only have to look to Germany where Hermann Scheer, a German green politician, has been the catalyst, has been instrumental in propelling Germany into the future with green energy development. A number of examples have been covered in the press over the last year of the great advancements that have been made in Germany in terms of green energy development.

Here in Canada, we have a much more tentative approach to that. There was a company in Canada that was making solar panels. I believe it was called ARISE Technologies, based in Waterloo. The owner of the company, Ian MacLellan, was not receiving much encouragement in Canada, so he responded to the German government's offer to build a plant in East Germany. At this point, his plant cannot produce enough solar panels for the German market. I believe it is several years behind in its production. It is expanding so quickly, and I believe they are building more than one plant there to keep up with the demand. This is yet another opportunity lost, because now Germany has an advantage over Canada and will only increase that advantage over time.

• (1330)

In Canada, the discussion over the east-west power grid has been raging now for probably 20 years, or maybe even longer. The concept is to build an east-west power grid so that we can transfer clean hydroelectric power from Manitoba, for example, which has only developed 50% of its hydroelectric capacity. Rather than sending that power to the United States, as is the case now because all the lines are running north-south, we want to be able to send it east-west so that we can help Ontario stop using its coal-fired plants and prevent the need for nuclear power plants to be developed in the next few years.

Once again, where is the initiative on the part of the federal government? Ten of the 14 members of Parliament in Manitoba are Conservatives. In fact, only one of them has spoken on this issue over the last year. The Minister of State (Democratic Reform) has spoken about this issue. Saskatchewan has 14 out of 14 Conservative members. The question is where they are on this issue. The 14 members in Saskatchewan and 10 members in Manitoba should be leading the charge to try to force the government to put a plan together so that an east-west power grid can be developed.

It is their predecessor, John A. Macdonald, who had a national dream for this country. The national dream was to build a railway from east to west uniting the country, as opposed to developing it on a north-south basis. In fact, if the railway had not developed, the Americans would have probably taken over the parts of the country that we now know as Canada.

If we fast forward to where we are now, where is that Conservative vision of John A. Macdonald? The government still follows the ideology that whatever the economics dictate, whatever is the cheapest and fastest, is what it is going to do, and if it means building all the pipelines and hydro transmission lines north-south, then so be it and forget about looking at a common national vision of an east-west power grid.

An east-west power grid would provide a lot of jobs in the economy that are certainly going to be needed after the stimulus package money runs out. I still hold out hope that the members in the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Conservative caucuses will actually get motivated to come onboard with this idea and push it along a little further.

We look to wind power as a good example of an activity that should be encouraged, but where are the initiatives for wind power by the government? I remember 20 years ago, in 1992, in Pincher Creek, Alberta there was a lot of development of wind turbines in that area. As a matter of fact, I went out to look at them at one time. Of course, today the wind turbines and their technology have changed. If one were to go there, it would seem almost like a museum, because one sees the little turbines from 1992 and then the progression to the huge turbines now.

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Canada, once again, has squandered an opportunity at economic development, because there are a lot of jobs to be had in the manufacture of the turbines. We have seen that industry grow in Scandinavian countries. The companies that make the turbines are from Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and have only gotten bigger and better with time. We have looked at the construction of wind turbines, but to no avail.

● (1335)

We have looked into it in Manitoba. We are at the point where it just did not proceed, for one reason or another.

As a matter of fact, North Dakota and South Dakota have manufacturing set up there.

We are once again playing catch-up. We are not really even in the game. We had wind farm developments in Saskatchewan, at Gull Lake. There was 99 megawatts of power at Gull Lake. That was about 10 years ago or so. However, since then, we have seen the focus change to other parts of the country, and other parts of the country are taking up some of the slack in this area. That is another very big area that the government should be concentrating on.

What is the government's vision? The government's vision does not seem to be in these areas at all. As matter of fact, its answer so far for economic development seems to be developing more prisons. It has announced \$9 billion for the expansion of our prison system.

As a matter of fact, in this bill the government has suggested that it is going to crack down on the TFSA program, the tax-free savings accounts that were set up in the last couple of years. Evidently a problem has developed where a number of organized individuals, I think higher-income individuals would be more to the truth, have been overcontributing to the TFSA program. The government, rightly so, is cracking down in that area. However, when will it be cracking down on all the people who are investing in tax havens?

Only last year we had a situation where an employee of a bank in Liechtenstein left that bank with computer diskettes. He actually sold the information on the diskettes to the German government. As a result, the German government has recovered quite a huge amount of back taxes from the people who were investing in the tax havens. Out of that, 100 names were given to Revenue Canada. We have yet to hear whether Revenue Canada has collected any back taxes from these people.

We know Revenue Canada offers an amnesty to people. The question is whether these 100 people whose names were turned over by the authorities were given amnesty. For all we know, Revenue Canada let them off with just paying whatever taxes they owed and the amnesty was applied to them too.

Just in the last few weeks there was another example of an employee from, in this case, a Swiss bank, who made off with I think it was 4,500 names on diskettes and turned them over to the French government. Out of that, Revenue Canada got its hands on the names of another 1,800 Canadians who are investing in tax havens. Once again I would like to know what the government is doing to track these people down. Is it going to offer them amnesty to get them to file their up-to-date returns, or is it going to actually charge them for tax evasion, which is the proper way to proceed in this case?

We are getting no follow-up from the government as to the situation with uncollected taxes. Out of all the people who are putting money into tax havens in Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Panama and other countries, there are probably thousands of Canadians in those situations and the government does not seem to be too concerned about catching them. If the government can catch these people and collect a half billion dollars here or a half a billion dollars there of taxes owed, it would help a lot in terms of balancing the books here in Canada and paying for the roads and hospitals that we need.

● (1340)

Where is the interest? We have such lax laws in Canada for white collar crime. It is absolutely laughable. This is from a government that talks about being tough on crime.

This is the record of the tough on crime government on white collar crime. Over the last few years, the United States has successfully prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned 1,200 white collar criminals, including Conrad Black who committed his crimes in Canada. The record of the tough on crime Conservative government is two convictions against the same guy. The government does not have to pay \$9 billion for prisons to house one person.

These are examples of the mixed messages we get from the government. On the very day the story broke in the *Globe and Mail*, in the Greg McArthur article regarding the 1,800 Canadians, the Prime Minister was being questioned in the House about that very issue. On that very day, the government's bill on the order paper for debate was a free trade deal with Panama.

In the case of Panama, we have 350,000 foreign companies hiding money there because it is a tax haven. The Panamanian government is making little, if any, effort to share the tax information.

As a precursor to signing on to these agreements, one would think the government would use some common sense and require that the Panamanian government sign on and honour the OECD rules and protocols on sharing tax information, not go ahead and reward it with a free trade deal. That is the backwards approach of the government.

In addition to regular companies doing business in Panama and hiding their money there, we have Mexican drug cartels laundering money through the Panamanian system. The government is only too willing to ignore that. It forgets the fact that Manuel Noriega, the former president of Panama, is doing time in a Florida jail because the Americans captured him for aiding and abetting money launderers.

Clearly the government has a very questionable set of priorities when it comes to dealing with economic development in our country.

One of the members opposite introduced a bill earlier this year to support a national hunting day, which is a great idea, and we supported the bill. In fact, Manitoba passed a similar bill just two years ago. I was at its annual meeting a couple of weeks ago. One of the reasons given for introducing the bill in the House was to encourage American tourism, to encourage Americans to come to Canada to hunt and fish and to help our economy.

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The recognition by the Conservative member was that tourism was down. Partly as a result of my talks with him in the spring, and support in speaking to his bill, I was able to introduce a resolution to a legislators conference this summer, one I have been at now four or five years. This group includes 11 border states, from Illinois to North Dakota, and 3 provinces, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I think Alberta is on the verge of joining that organization.

The legislators meet every summer. There is a western conference and a southern conference as well, but this is the Midwestern legislators conference. This group has met now for 65 years. At that conference, I was able to introduce a resolution, which they passed unanimously. I will not read the resolution at this time, but I will if I get asked about it in a question.

• (1345)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, so the hon. member can finish his resolution, I will pare down my question as much as I can.

I want to paint a scenario about what is happening now with the economic action plan. My home community is for the most part rural. A town in that community wanted to fix its hockey arena for the coming year. It wanted to delay the fixing of the boards around the rink because it had used some of the money from the RInC program, the recreational infrastructure for communities. It wanted the delay it so the kids could play hockey right now. Unfortunately, because of the deadline of March 31, the kids will be unable hockey this winter.

Could the member comment on that narrative and on how these deadlines are perhaps a little too stringent? Perhaps he would like to finish his resolution as well.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, clearly the government has to apply a certain measure of common sense, which is sometimes lacking over there. Perhaps the member will see, as the deadline approaches, some extensions given on some of these projects, whether the government does it on its own or is forced to do it.

I want to finish the resolution that the legislative conference in the United States, the 11 border states and 3 provinces, passed. It states:

RESOLVED, that the...Conference calls on President Barack Obama and [the] Prime Minister...to immediately examine a reduced fee for passports to facilitate cross-border tourism;

...we encourage the governments to examine the idea of a limited time two-for-one passport renewal or new application...

Half of Canadians have passports and one-quarter of Americans have passports. When it comes to multi-member families, the fees can be around \$500 for passports, which is quite high, for Americans to come to Canada.

I believe letters have already gone to the President and the Prime Minister. We expect action in the future, starting negotiations on some sort of a reduction in passport fees for people on both sides of the border.

• (1350)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. He is pointing out what I think many Canadians are beginning to realize.

When it comes to economic policy, the Conservative government and its finance minister are like the little old man in *The Wizard of Oz*. They throw around a lot of fear about coalitions, prisons and Russians flying by. Yet when we get behind the curtain, we see this ideological bitter little man with no vision. What we also see, when we start to look at the numbers, is how wasteful the Conservative government is and how much money it is blowing.

For example, the present industry minister racked up a lot of the \$1 billion. He put in a fake lake in Toronto and drained a real lake in Muskoka. He shut down real lighthouses in the Maritimes and put a lighthouse in land-locked Muskoka. He even put heated sheets in the arena for his constituents.

The government uses federal dollars to heat the derrieres of Conservative voters, yet it tells our senior citizens in northern Ontario that the cupboard is bare, but this is not fiscal prudence.

What does the hon. member think about the derrieres of Muskoka Conservatives being warmed, while my senior citizens are living in the cold this winter because they are paying the HST?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, that would be a great question for question period. I would love to hear it again.

The fact is the government favours private businesses. We have seen it with the corporate tax cuts. In 2009 the banks made a profit of \$15 billion. I think people would be shocked if they knew how much the CEOs of these banks made. For example, the CEO of CIBC, Gerald McCaughey, made \$6.2 million in a year. This is in a recession when people have lost their jobs and there have been cutbacks. This is the kind of money the CEOs are making.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two questions on the member's rare intervention in Parliament. They are related to the power.

First, he talked about the north-south and east-west grids. I agree with him in a lot of cases, but in our particular case in Yukon, the north-south grid is not completed yet. We would love federal government support to increase the B.C. grid north so it would join the Yukon grid and perhaps one day join the Alaska grid. It is the same with the Internet. We have been cut off a number of times in the last few weeks because there is only one access. If the pipeline for the Internet could be extended to join the Alaska grid, that would give us some redundancy. Could he comment on that?

Statements by Members

Second is the issue of wind energy, which the member brought up. In the north we need an extra subsidy for wind energy. It used to be a great program at 1¢ per kilowatt hour. It was all used by southern Canada, because 1¢, when energy is 8¢, is a big proportion. However, in the north, if energy is 40¢, 50¢ or 60¢ per kilowatt hour, 1¢ does not mean anything. When we asked the government to increase the subsidy, it cancelled the entire wind energy program.

Would the member agree to support me in the campaign I have had for the last couple of years, of trying to have a special wind energy program in the north with a larger subsidy than in the south? In fact, that would apply to all renewable energies because the cost is higher in the north.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, the member raises a very good point. With regard to the east-west power grid, voters in Manitoba and Saskatchewan wonder why they supported Conservatives. In Saskatchewan they voted for 14 out of 14. In Manitoba they voted for 10 out of 14, and only one, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, even brings up the idea with his caucus that we should have an east-west power grid. That is not very good service from those members.

• (1355)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not want to interrupt my hon. colleague's dissertation, but I know he is a stickler for accuracy and he is wrong. In Saskatchewan we only have 13 out of 14. We are working on the 14th—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. That is clearly a matter of debate.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, Bill C-9 is a very interesting bill in that there are some things in it that the government says it never does. Specifically I am talking about raising taxes.

I will not ask my friend from Winnipeg about raising the export tax on softwood lumber products by 10%. We will not count that as a tax. We have talked many times in the House about the HST and the government contribution to it.

However, let me ask about a tax in the bill about which my colleague knows quite a bit. I am talking about the airline tax that increases, by 50%, the security fees paid for in flights. Could he comment on that?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, this is just one of many measures that the government put into the 880-page omnibus bill it brought in with its budget. It brought in the issue of post office remailers, which have absolutely nothing to do with the budget. This is just another example of the government adding on different charges.

In terms of the taxation on air tickets, Canadian airlines already had a competitive disadvantage to American airlines because our airline taxes were higher in Canada than in the states in the first place. The government has now raised them another 50% to make them even higher than the American—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate, the hon. member Scarborough Centre. I can see by the clock that he can begin his comments but I will have to interrupt him.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I get up again after question period, I will pick up on where the member left off. The Conservatives talk about raising taxes. On EI, for example, they say they will not raise the premium a certain amount, but then turn around and raise it less than that amount. That is the same as a store that offers a special 50% discount, but it jacks up the price by 100% and then lowers it by 50%, and says that it is giving a 50% discount. That is what the Conservatives did with EI. Later on I will point out what they have done. The Conservatives have tried to pass it on to Canadians as a tax break, but in essence it is a tax hike.

We cannot support these initiatives. It boils down to a matter of trust. We simply cannot trust what the government says. The Conservatives say one thing but do another. For example, the Prime Minister promised in writing not to tax income trusts. He used that in his campaign. One of the first things he did when elected to office was to renege on that promise. I cannot use the word “lie” because that is unparliamentary language, but I can use the word “renege”. He reneged on his agreement. It boils down to a matter of trust.

With respect to EI premiums, I have a quote from the finance minister who said, “It's one of those job-killing taxes, a direct tax on employers and employees”.

An hon. member: Who said that?

Mr. John Cannis: The current finance minister said that, Mr. Speaker. What has he done? Again, I cannot use the word “lie”, but he has reneged on his commitment. He said his government would increase it by \$90 but then said it would only be increased by \$30. He then told Canadians that it was a tax decrease. I do not know where the finance minister learned his math.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continuing my speech after question period.

The Speaker: The hon. member will have about 18 minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks when debate on this matter resumes.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

COMMONWEALTH GAMES

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we speak, the 19th Commonwealth Games are moving into day four in Delhi, India.

Statements by Members

Already, Canadians have been winning medals in events. Among them, in the men's team artistic gymnastics, Robert Watson and Jason Scott, both members of the Richmond Gymnastics Association, were part of a five member Canadian team that won the bronze medal. Congratulations to them. Richmond is proud of them.

Other athletes from Richmond include: athletics, Evan Dunfee; field hockey, Amanda Stone; gymnastics, Demetra Mantcheva; rugby sevens, Nathan Hirayama; table tennis, Andre Ho and Mo Zhang; and wrestling, Arjan Bhullar.

Richmond is supporting all of them and the whole national team. Go Canada go.

* * *

DIANE WHALEN

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burn—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Hon. Diane Whalen, a former colleague in the legislature of Newfoundland and Labrador, who passed away on October 3 after a courageous battle with cancer. She is being laid to rest today.

As colleagues in the provincial legislature, I saw Diane work diligently as a member of the House of Assembly and a cabinet minister. She was a woman of strength, tremendous integrity and an individual who garnered the respect of everyone for her work ethic. Although we served on opposite sides of the house, we shared the same objective of wanting to make a difference and there was a mutual respect for how we achieved that goal.

Whether as mayor of Paradise, MHA for Conception Bay East—Bell Island, or as a minister in three government departments, Diane's priority was always to do her best for those she represented and for our province.

All in Newfoundland and Labrador who were fortunate enough to work with Diane can attest to the positive attitude she brought to every task. Even through her battle with cancer, she continued to work when she could, determined to fulfill her responsibilities.

I ask all members of the House to join me in passing along our sincere condolences to Diane's family and friends as we salute this remarkable woman.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during his recent—and first ever—visit to my riding, the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada said that Abitibi needed a voice, not a ghost. And he is right. That is why we cannot understand why he and about 20 of his party colleagues dematerialized in Parliament last Wednesday during the vote on Bill C-308.

The goal of that bill was to improve the lives of the unemployed. So what is the Liberal leader's real plan? Does he hope his party returns to power so it can start diverting money from the employment insurance fund, as it did in the past?

Even with Halloween just around the corner, Abitibi does not need any ghosts, just as unemployed workers do not need any vampires draining their EI fund. In Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, as in the rest of Quebec, the Bloc Québécois has always defended the interests of the unemployed, and we will continue to do so.

* * *

[*English*]

IMAM ZIJAD DELIC

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute to a great Canadian leader, Imam Zijad Delic.

Imam Delic is the former imam of the Masjid al-Salaam and Education Centre in Burnaby. He has taught at the B.C. Muslim School and earned a doctorate in education at Simon Fraser University. I was honoured to be present at his convocation. He has worked for the B.C. Muslim Association and currently works for the Canadian Islamic Congress.

Imam Delic is known here at home and internationally for his commitment to interfaith dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. Like many people in Burnaby, I attended his Islam 101 lectures at the Burnaby mosque. Imam Delic has encouraged women and men, young people and recent immigrants in the Muslim community to take their place in Canadian society.

This week, the Minister of National Defence and the government tarnished the reputation of this good man. The minister must offer a full apology.

Imam Delic is known as “the people's imam”. I am proud to know him, to work with him and to call him “my imam”.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families will be gathering this Thanksgiving weekend and there is no doubt the economy will be weighing on their minds. They are reading media stories and watching economic indicators that show the economic recovery remains fragile. They are feeling uneasy. The last thing they can afford right now is a tax increase.

That is why I am pleased that the Minister of Finance has led the way at home and abroad to keep a lid on taxes.

I want to congratulate the Prime Minister and the finance minister for working so hard at the G20 and on the international stage this summer to stop the global bank tax. It would place a crushing and unnecessary burden on our economic recovery.

Statements by Members

I am also pleased that the minister announced last week that we will limit potential increases in EI premiums next year; this, despite how badly the EI surplus was raided by the previous government for its pet political projects.

Taxpayers across the land have an advocate in the finance minister, and this government and people in my riding are thankful for it.

* * *

• (1405)

BILL BARBER SPORTS COMPLEX

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, September 25, the Municipality of Callander in my riding celebrated the official opening of the Bill Barber Sports Complex.

The municipality's newest recreational facility has been named in honour of Hockey Hall of Famer Bill Barber, a Callander native who maintains close family ties to the community.

The multi-use facility is a roof structure which spans an existing rink surface and will allow for four seasons of sport, leisure and community events on the site.

Callander Mayor Hec Lavigne and council members were joined by Bill Barber at the unveiling ceremony, which included a celebrity ball hockey game with the two-time Stanley Cup winner and several other special guests.

The Bill Barber Sports Complex is an impressive structure and a facility that everyone in the community can take great pride in.

On behalf of all hon. members, I would like to congratulate the Municipality of Callander on the completion and dedication of the Bill Barber Sports Complex. May it bring enjoyment and pleasure to the people of the community for generations to come.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is ensuring Canada's economic recovery by limiting the increase in employment insurance premiums. The increase for 2011 will be limited to 5¢ per \$100 of insurable earnings and 10¢ for subsequent years.

To help Canadian workers and employers overcome the 2008 global crisis, we froze EI premiums for 2009 and 2010 at their lowest level since 1982. To maintain Canada's economic recovery, we are now reducing the EI rate increase by two-thirds.

Every dollar counts to families, and this could mean almost \$75 extra for the average Canadian family next year.

Our Conservative government is consulting with Canadian individuals and businesses to improve on how the EI rate is set going forward to ensure more stable and predictable rates.

We are working with business and we are working with labour to save and create jobs and help Canadians prosper.

[*Translation*]

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OCTOBER CRISIS

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, more than 450 people were arrested when the government invoked the War Measures Act in October 1970. Today we know that all the known members of the FLQ and all those who were suspected of being members were released in the hope that they would lead the police to the places where Mr. Cross and Mr. Laporte were being held.

These people, who were arrested without warrant, usually in the middle of the night, kept in the dark about the new crimes that had just been created, and held incommunicado until they were questioned, were all finally released without charge. Some were let go several days after being arrested, while others were not released until months later.

It is disturbing to think that these measures were taken by politicians who had always claimed to stand up for human rights and workers' rights.

Events such as these show us how very fragile our lofty principles and our institutions can be.

Let us learn from such events. After all, Quebec's motto is “Je me souviens”, I remember.

* * *

COMMENTS BY THE ASSISTANT TO THE HON. MEMBER FOR ABITIBI—BAIE-JAMES—NUNAVIK—EYYOU

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an assistant to the Bloc member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has posted some disturbing comments on her Facebook page. This House of Commons employee has the nerve to compare the October Crisis to the French Revolution where, I quote, “heads rolled” and she brags about having contact, in 2010, with the Front de libération du Québec.

I would like to remind Bloc members that René Lévesque himself unequivocally condemned the FLQ, which is a terrorist movement.

However, this Bloc Québécois staffer goes even further. She makes fun of the constituents and complains that they speak only English, one of our two official languages.

These statements are totally unacceptable, and I am calling on the leader of the Bloc and the hon. member to condemn these comments and to distance themselves from these unacceptable remarks.

* * *

• (1410)

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this day and age, when equality and freedom of speech should not be an issue in Canada, this Conservative government is again showing us that equality is a meaningless term.

Last week, in a job posting for the position of Auditor General of Canada published in national newspapers, the government specifically stated that it is looking for a chartered accountant.

Statements by Members

I would like to say that CGAs and CMAs are recognized for their integrity, ethics and educational qualifications, including their audit capabilities.

It is unfortunate that these qualifications have not been included in this job posting, and that the Government of Canada has adopted this hiring policy that discriminates against 75,000 CGAs and 50,000 CMAs.

It should be noted that all accountants are accredited by provincial accounting organizations.

It is disconcerting that the Conservative government is ignoring three accounting designations recognized across Canada.

* * *

[English]

CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRES

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting victims of crime, particularly the most vulnerable among us: our children.

Today the Minister of Justice, along with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, announced funding of \$5.25 million for the creation and enhancement of child advocacy centres to help better serve young victims and witnesses of crime.

Child advocacy centres aim to minimize the trauma of being a child victim of crime. These advocacy centres are a collaborative team of professionals who work in a child-friendly setting to help a child victim or witness navigate the criminal justice system.

The work of the advocacy centre staff greatly reduces the emotional and mental harm to the child, and their approach often improves the quality of evidence brought forward in trials. Better evidence can lead to more charges laid, a higher rate of guilty pleas and convictions, and more appropriate sentences.

I would like my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating our government for this encouraging announcement.

* * *

THANKSGIVING

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Thanksgiving I want to express my gratitude for the diverse, creative and caring community I represent: churches such as St. John the Divine working to alleviate homelessness; the talented students at the Canadian College of Performing Arts; the University of Victoria's NEPTUNE Canada and its pioneering research under the ocean; as well as the Dogwood Initiative fighting tanker traffic.

This being harvest time, I want to offer special recognition to Victoria's strong local food movement: dedicated organic farmers, chefs and co-ops, local food advocates such as Lee Fuge, and groups such as LifeCycles and CR-FAIR. Sadly, Canadian agriculture policy as it stands is biased against small producers.

In addition to giving thanks, let us adopt a new policy for food security, sovereignty and sustainability, and let us back Bill C-579 to make every Friday before Thanksgiving a national local food day.

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the economic recovery still fragile, hard-working men and women in Canada's aerospace sector can rest assured that our government is on their side. Thanks to our government's investment in the F-35 program, Canada's aerospace industry will benefit from highly skilled and well-paying jobs for years to come.

Already, world-class aerospace companies from across Canada are benefiting from our investment. Companies such as Avcorp, Magellan-Bristol, Héroux-Devtek, Handling Speciality, and Pratt & Whitney are already providing expertise to the F-35 program and creating jobs for Canadians. These benefits will only increase. As experts have said, this investment will create jobs and benefits for decades to come.

Shockingly, the opposition coalition is vowing to cancel this important investment and put in jeopardy hundreds of thousands of jobs in our aerospace sector. The coalition should put the country first, put the economy first, put jobs for Canadians first and get behind this win-win investment.

* * *

[Translation]

OCTOBER CRISIS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the following is an excerpt from a column written by René Lévesque the day after the death of Pierre Laporte on October 17, 1970:

The death of Pierre Laporte has devastated us all. This waste of a life is barbaric and atrocious.... We cannot imagine the distress his family members have experienced this past week, and the kind of pain they are feeling now.... They can be assured that all of Quebec shares in their grief.... Now, we must all do our best to erase this stain as quickly as possible.... It will be to Quebec's credit to draw from this ordeal a thirst for real progress so that we can eliminate any excuses for active or would-be terrorists, which we unfortunately have just as many of as any civilized society.... We must be strong in speaking out against what happened; we must take responsibility, but refuse to get caught up in the games of those who may try to use this situation to control us.

* * *

● (1415)

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that we are dealing with a government for which lack of transparency and excuses are the norm, an analysis of speeches made in the House was quite telling.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

After eliminating words common to all, openparliament.ca reveals that the word most commonly used by the member for Edmonton East is “war”. While we might understand the finance minister’s overuse of the word “tax”, why the ministers for seniors and immigration favour “tax” too is beyond me.

[Translation]

Instead of having a global perspective, our Minister of Foreign Affairs is more than a little obsessed with the Bloc.

[English]

Among the words that Liberals prefer that do not appear from Conservatives are “development”, “respect”, “care”, “jobs”, “children”, “change”, and my own word, “young”, but the most telling contrast is that while our Leader of the Opposition is most focused on the interests of the public, the Conservative Prime Minister is instead obsessed with opposing Liberals.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal public safety critic continues to advocate for his soft on crime agenda. Yesterday, he went one step further and called the failed prison farm program one of the most successful programs for rehabilitation. We could not disagree more.

Here are the facts: Over the last five years, less than 1% of offenders released into the community actually found work in the agricultural sector, and this 1% success rate cost taxpayers over \$4 million every year.

When will the member for Ajax—Pickering put public safety first? Does he think rehabilitation does not require ensuring marketable job skills post-incarceration? Does he think law-abiding Canadians do not deserve to feel safe in their homes and streets? After all, this is the member who proudly mused about reducing criminal sentences.

It has never been clearer that the Liberals and the public safety critic are not in it for law-abiding Canadians; they are just in it for themselves.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families are painfully familiar with the pressures of caring for sick or aging family members at home. Eighty per cent of home care services in Canada are provided by family members, three-quarters of whom are women, and two-thirds have household incomes under \$45,000. Their home care work is unpaid, often at the expense of their day jobs. But it is a labour of love, with very little help.

Why does the current government put tax cuts for the most privileged corporations ahead of family care?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we put the well-being of Canadians first and foremost among our priorities. We pursued an aggressive agenda to create jobs and seek economic growth so that the government has the resources it needs to provide important services to Canadians.

One of the most important services to Canadian families when a relative becomes sick is a good health care system. That is why this government has made health care one of the biggest priorities for public spending. That is why we have honoured our transfer to the provinces and increased health care spending some 30% in just five short years.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that increase was budgeted in 2004.

The total cost of tangible help for more than 600,000 family caregivers would be less than one-half of 1% of the current government’s annual spending, to which Conservatives are now adding \$16 billion for untended stealth fighter aircraft. They provide no justification for this being the airplane Canada needs, no competition, no regional industrial plan, and no job guarantees.

Why is there a \$16 billion blank cheque for that and nothing for caregivers?

● (1420)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government’s priority is to ensure that we do the right thing for Canadians, and protecting our sovereignty and giving the men and women in uniform the best equipment we can to support them in their important work to keep Canada safe is something that is incredibly important. We do not apologize, after the decade of darkness, for standing up for our men and women in uniform to ensure that they have the tools to do their job. The planes we have will be more than 40 years old by the time they reach the end of their life. We need to ensure that the air force has new planes to keep Canadians safe after 2020.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, technology problems plague the F-35 program, commitments from some other countries are wobbly, even the U.S. Pentagon says the program is two years behind schedule, there is a cost overrun of 65%, the accounting system at Lockheed Martin is a total mess, and the Canadian government has no guarantees, not on price, jobs, quality, or value for money. Talk about reckless. The government is flying by the seat of its pants. Why is it gambling 16 billion tax dollars on stealth airplanes but will not invest a cent in caregivers?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just do not accept the premise of the member opposite’s question.

Oral Questions

It was this government that made a fundamental commitment to health care, whether that is cancer care, whether it is home care, which is provided by many provinces, whether it is services such as nurses and doctors, to ensure that Canadians and their families get the appropriate health care. It was not always so. At another time, at another recession, we saw members of the Liberal Party, including the member for Wascana, stand in their places and vote to cut health care by \$25 billion. I can remember the member for Toronto Centre speaking very eloquently of the devastating effect of these cuts.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nine months ago I asked the now Minister of Natural Resources whether any rules had been broken in the awarding of the contract on the north tower of the West Block. He tried to slough off my questions as fictional stories and said next we would ask him to start searching for Elvis in his department.

Will the minister now come clean on exactly who was involved in his “internal...staff matters” that he was so evasive and arrogant about last December?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of Liberal scandals, it was our government whose first priority when we were elected to this place was to bring in the Federal Accountability Act. As the highest ethical standards ever brought into this House as legislative reform, it was quickly adopted and it imposes obligations on every Canadian when it comes to ethics. Anyone who breaks the rules will face the full force of the law.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, so why are they not accountable?

[*Translation*]

They can try all they like to distance themselves from this scandal, but it will end up swallowing them whole.

Gilles Varin, a long-time Conservative organizer, had dinner with Bernard Côté, the assistant to the former public works minister, before the contract was awarded. Gilles Varin helped organize a cocktail fundraiser with the Minister of Natural Resources after the contract was awarded. Senator Nolin's assistant, Hubert Pichet, says Varin talked to him about Public Works, and Varin walked away with \$140,000.

Who in the Conservative government had their palms greased?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly there are rules, laws and guidelines that govern the contracting policy for the Government of Canada. If any of those rules, guidelines or laws have been broken, we expect that they will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government told us that Mr. Varin was no longer a member of the Conservative Party and was not a lobbyist. Yet Mr. Varin did lobby the government, most notably for the contract to

renovate the Parliament buildings, and he twice contributed to the party's coffers, in 2007 and 2009. Mr. Varin was even photographed in 2008 with Conservative senators and Mr. Bourgon, the former Conservative candidate in Repentigny.

Will the government finally admit that Mr. Varin is an unregistered lobbyist and a non-card-carrying member of the Conservative Party?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. The individual the Bloc leader is talking about is not and has never been a member of the Conservative Party. He was formerly an advisor to the Conservative Party, but he is neither a Conservative Party member nor an organizer. Those are the facts.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he is neither a member nor an organizer, but he is a big party backer.

In other disturbing developments, the contractor who won the \$9 million contract to renovate the Parliament buildings, Mr. Sauvé, held a cocktail fundraiser that was attended by not only the Minister of Natural Resources, but a number of other people who worked on the renovation.

Does the Conservative government not feel that this is starting to look like a system where contracts are handed out in exchange for partisan financing?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after years of Liberal scandals, our government's first priority after the 2006 election was to bring in the Federal Accountability Act. We are very proud that this initiative sets the highest ethical standards in Canadian history. There are many acts and regulations in place, and every Canadian must obey them. Anyone who breaks the rules will face the full force of the law.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the members will recall, Alfonso Gagliano once had two responsibilities: looking after the interests of the Liberal Party of Quebec and handing out government contracts. The same is true of Michael Fortier and the current Quebec lieutenant, who have both been public works ministers and fundraisers for the Conservative Party of Quebec.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that by delegating responsibility for handing out contracts and raising funds for the Conservative Party to the same individual—on two separate occasions—he is setting his government morally adrift?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly, no minister in our government has ever been responsible for party fundraising.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the contractor who won the contract to renovate West Block organized a cocktail fundraiser for the Conservatives because, and I quote: “It was the thing to do...a small thank you of sorts”. In other words, he was happy with the work his Conservative lobbyist did with his “very close friends”.

Will the Prime Minister admit that when someone decides to return a favour, it usually means he is happy with what he got?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. This government has always acted with high ethical standards.

Our first priority when we were elected to government was to bring in the Federal Accountability Act, the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canadian history. That also eliminated the influence of big money in politics. That is perhaps the best thing that this Prime Minister or any prime minister has ever done to clean up the way Ottawa works.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, veterans are still coming forward to tell us that after they had criticized the government their health records were raided and put before ministers of the government. The Privacy Commissioner has now made it very clear that the laws of this land have been broken by the government in these actions.

What does the government do? It blames the bureaucrats, as usual, refuses to take responsibility, and then says that some insider will somehow fix things up. That does not cut it.

When will the government announce a public inquiry to get some accountability into Veterans Affairs?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our country and every Canadian owes a great debt to our veterans. They served Canadians bravely in world wars and peace missions around the world. They are serving Canadians very well in Afghanistan right now as we speak.

I want to be very clear. Protecting the privacy and the dignity of Canadian veterans is a significant priority for this government. No effort will be spared. Any violation of the law will not be tolerated anywhere in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner's report on the Department of Veterans Affairs is devastating.

The minister says he plans to make some changes. We already know what he will do: dismiss two or three staff members to appease the critics.

That is not enough. An apology is needed. Many are calling on the government to apologize and allow independent authorities to investigate.

When will they call a public inquiry to determine who broke the law, as well as why and how?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two things to say.

First, the independent Privacy Commissioner has looked into this matter. We appreciate the fine work that she has done and every recommendation in her report will be listened to.

Second, veterans in this country can count on the Minister of Veterans Affairs to forcefully advocate for their interests and to ensure that their privacy and dignity is respected. That is a solemn pledge. The minister has delivered more for veterans in the last few months than in Canadian history.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if that were the case, we would be hearing an apology on the floor of the House today given that we have heard that the law has been broken. This is completely unacceptable.

We need to remember what these veterans have done. These veterans stepped forward to say that adequate health care was not being provided to veterans. They stepped forward to say that pensions were being clawed back when they should not be. They stepped forward to point out that veterans have to go to food banks in this country. That is what they have stood up to say. What do they get? They get their health records spread around in the ministries of the government. It is unacceptable.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will stand by our veterans and we will do everything that is humanely possible to ensure their privacy is respected.

Our government has stepped up to the table with record investments to support our veterans and our men and women in uniform. We are showing the greatest respect possible for those who serve and who have served our country.

Regrettably, far too often when we bring an issue to the floor in this regard it is the NDP that stands up and votes against it.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to cover its tracks as the stench of corruption wafts around a well-connected lobbyist's role in a \$9 million construction contract.

Yesterday, the government House leader tried to snow the media when he claimed that Gilles Varin did not have any involvement in the "new Conservative Party". Again today, he is at it.

Well, the Conservative Party knew Varin well enough to cash his big donation cheques in 2007 and 2009.

Why is the Prime Minister's Office trying to mislead Canadians about the Varin connection? What else are the Conservatives covering up?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the individual is not a member of the Conservative Party of Canada. He has never been a member of the Conservative Party of Canada. He has never been an organizer for the Conservative Party of Canada. He has never been an adviser to the Conservative Party of Canada.

I do understand that a few donations have been made but, of course, they could not be big donations thanks to the Federal Accountability Act.

Oral Questions

Maybe the member opposite should check his party's own records. I understand that the individual has also donated money to the member for Bourassa.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he is a well-known, long-established Conservative and the minister knows it.

Yesterday, the Minister of Public Works said that no member of the government was being investigated by the RCMP. How could she know that? Has the RCMP briefed the Prime Minister?

The government House leader's parliamentary secretary says that they mean that the Mounties have not contacted any ministers. It is not the same thing.

Why did the Prime Minister not say that? Why could he not be straight with Canadians? Are the Conservatives in this deeper than they wish to admit?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, no members of this government are part of this inquiry.

There are rules, guidelines and laws that govern the Government of Canada's contracting policy. If there are any individuals or contractors who have broken these rules, they will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Natural Resources admitted that he attended a cocktail fundraiser hosted by Mr. Sauvé. Mr. Sauvé candidly said it was the thing to do to please the government.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources and the Quebec lieutenant tell us who organized this?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have asked questions about giving big campaign contributions to the Conservative Party caucus. In fact, it is our Prime Minister who eliminated the influence of big money from politics. There are no more \$5,000 cocktail parties and no more evenings where a couple of million bucks are raised in a night. That is something the Prime Minister can be very proud of.

Still, small, modest donations can be made to political parties, just as I understand one of these individuals made to the member for Bourassa.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not hand out \$140,000 contracts. My question is clear. Since yesterday the Prime Minister has been saying that no members of the government are part of the RCMP inquiry. Since when does a Prime Minister get involved in RCMP matters?

Since the minister responsible for Quebec attended, as a political minister, a cocktail fundraiser hosted by Paul Sauvé, who is under investigation by the RCMP, there are two possibilities. Did the Prime

Minister mislead the House or is he getting involved in RCMP matters?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Bourassa says that he does not give out large contracts, but there was a time when he held a very powerful position in the Government of Canada, not only being a senior minister in the Chrétien government, but in the Martin government he was the president of the Privy Council. Of course the Privy Council is the central operating agency of the government. I wonder when that cheque was dated. Was it when this government was in power or was it when he was sitting around the cabinet table?

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government plans on spending \$2 billion over the next five years to expand the prison system. The Minister of Public Safety believes that Quebec and the provinces should deal with the additional costs incurred as a result of its repressive approach.

Does the minister not find it irresponsible to inflict the negative consequences of his approach to crime on others?

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do apologize but there was so much noise in the House that I could not hear the question.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government plans on spending \$2 billion over the next five years to expand the prison system. The Minister of Public Safety believes that Quebec and the provinces should deal with the additional costs incurred as a result of its repressive approach.

Does the minister not find it irresponsible to inflict the negative consequences of his approach to crime on others?

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will invest in the prison system of Canada. As a matter of fact, many of the changes that are occurring were as a result of the provincial ministers asking for those changes, and as we go forward, we expect they will support them.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the brief filed by Quebec in the Court of Appeal clearly shows that not only would a federal securities commission be a violation of provincial jurisdictions, but it would also give banks and major issuers the upper hand to the detriment of the public investor.

Oral Questions

Will the Minister of Finance admit that his plans to establish a single regulator show that he has meekly bowed to the pressure of his Bay Street buddies?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we sought the court's approval to ensure that it was federal jurisdiction, but we put in place a process that is voluntary, that all provinces can join a common Canadian securities regulator, and most provinces have accepted that. Most provinces are working proactively to protect their investors in their provinces. I would encourage him to go back to his province and encourage them to do that same thing to protect their investors.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in view of the decisions of the Chambers of Commerce in Quebec and western Canada, such as the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce decided, at its general annual meeting, to withdraw its support for the creation of a single securities regulator.

This is more proof that the minister's predatory project is harmful for investors, the economy as a whole and small and medium-sized businesses.

The Chambers of Commerce are no longer behind them. If they look back they will see that there is no one left supporting them.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a whole list of people who are supportive of this.

As for the main people we are trying to protect, let me quote someone who is very passionate about this. Joey Davis is a victim of the Earl Jones scam and supports the idea of a national regulatory body overseeing financial organizations. He said that they definitely support the Canadian securities regulator initiative and that Ottawa has been far more responsive to their plight.

Apparently, he considers the Bloc to have been less responsive.

* * *

• (1440)

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, incoming chief of staff Nigel Wright currently sits on the boards of two aerospace companies, and we know that in 18 to 24 months, he will be returning to business.

The conflict of interest code dictates that he would not be able to participate in any aerospace meetings, because of a business involvement.

Here is a conflict. The Prime Minister is meeting with two aerospace companies today. How will the Conservatives work around this glaring conflict of interest? Will they have the chief of staff sit in the hallway?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is quite the question.

We think it is tremendous that someone who has been incredibly successful outside politics and government has agreed to take a leave from his career and come to Ottawa, our nation's capital, to make a contribution to public life.

Thank goodness that in the past successful business people like Paul Martin and Belinda Stronach were prepared to make that same sacrifice in support of our country.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about Nigel Wright; this is about the Prime Minister's judgment. We are raising legitimate concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest as a result of Mr. Wright's business relationships.

Even Brian Mulroney's former chief of staff said how common the conflicts of interest would be and expressed skepticism that the rules would be able to deal with such a complex situation.

What is the plan to ensure there are no conflicts of interest, and when will the Conservatives share it with Canadians? Even the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is asking them to do so.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Wright has consulted and sought the counsel of the independent Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and he will follow all of the counsel she gives him.

This individual will be required to establish a blind trust. In respect of that blind trust, he will not be regularly briefed on the success or failures of his financial holdings. That happened under a previous Liberal government, and it was known as a "Venetian blind trust".

* * *

[*Translation*]

CENSUS

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the census, the Commissioner of Official Languages believes that their decision will be detrimental to the vitality of French outside Quebec.

The CSQ says this is an utter waste of the taxpayers' money. The Minister of Education says that it will hurt the education network. Even the National Assembly is unanimously opposed to the Conservative decision.

The only explanation for the Prime Minister's stubbornness is that he wants to hide his mediocre socio-economic record.

Is that not the truth?

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the federal government is doing is standing up for Canadians' freedom, for their rights.

We have said that the information surely is important, but that in gathering that information we will no longer threaten Canadians with fines and jail time because they do not want to tell the government what their religion is.

Oral Questions

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we also learned of the fervent opposition by several groups, including the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, to the Conservatives' ideologically based decision, taken without consultation.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, the CJC has demanded a policy reversal. They believe that without a long form census the cultural, social, health care, educational, housing, recreational, and spiritual needs of their community will be ignored. They know that if we are not counted, we do not count.

When will the government count these people in and restore the long form census?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has introduced a private member's bill that would threaten Canadians with fines of \$500 because they do not want to answer questions like what their religion is, how much yardwork they did last week, or how much time they spend with their kids.

We believe that Canadians should be treated like adults, and that we can work with the experts at Statistics Canada to find a way to get the information we need without threatening people.

* * *

• (1445)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, veterans across Canada are concerned that the Department of Veterans Affairs has mishandled their confidential files. One veteran approached the Privacy Commissioner to investigate how his file was handled. Today, the Privacy Commissioner tabled her report.

Can the Minister of Veterans Affairs please inform the House of the steps that he will take to ensure that the recommendations contained in that report will be implemented, so that our nation's greatest heroes will have their private information properly protected?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that we must respect the privacy and dignity of our veterans.

I can tell the House that all of the recommendations in the commissioner's report will be implemented. All of them. Beyond that, we have already started to review our discipline procedures, and people who commit serious violations, for example, releasing private information, will certainly be disciplined, or even dismissed.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Natural Resources must have gone to the Karlheinz Schreiber school of government relations. People should not have to grease the palm of a Conservative lobbyist to bid for a government

contract. It is not okay for a minister of public works to shake down contractors at a so-called fundraiser. Nobody should have to tell a minister that.

We now know that renovation slush-fund money found its way into the coffers of the Conservative Party. Are the Conservatives going to give that money back? Are they going to make room in the hall of shame over there and fire that minister?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no members of this government are part of this inquiry. There are rules, laws, policies, and guidelines that govern the Government of Canada's contracting policies. If it is found that anyone broke those rules, the person will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and taxpayer money will be recovered.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives think they have a good defence in saying that they are not so bad, because the Liberals were just as corrupt as they are. That is pathetic.

But this time, the Conservatives' Quebec lieutenant must be held personally accountable. Does he not understand the ethical problem with the Varin case? His wilful blindness in letting a notoriously crooked bagman organize his fundraising shows that either he has no ethics or he does not care.

When will he be ready to resign?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no members of this government, including the Minister of Natural Resources, are part of this inquiry. As I have said repeatedly, there are rules, there are guidelines, and there are laws that govern the Government of Canada's contracting policies.

If it is found that any individuals or contractors have broken any rules or guidelines, they will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and we will recover taxpayer money.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has signed agreements with Newfoundland and Nova Scotia on the St. Lawrence seabed. Quebec is trying to get a similar agreement, but nothing is happening. The Government of Quebec would like to have an agreement in place this fall.

How can the Minister of Natural Resources account for the fact that it was so easy to reach agreement with Newfoundland and Nova Scotia 25 years ago and it is so difficult to do justice to Quebec?

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is surprising to hear the Bloc talk blithely about an agreement with Quebec today. We have been working with the provinces for a long time on agreements to develop our natural resources in a responsible manner. Quebec has now shown interest, and as I said yesterday, talks are under way with our provincial counterparts.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources always has time for Conservative Party cocktail fundraisers attended by people who get lucrative contracts from his government. But when it comes time to address the legitimate aspirations of Quebec, which is calling for an agreement on the St. Lawrence seabed, the minister drags his feet.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources promise to settle this matter this fall?

• (1450)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has never shied away from practically spitting on fossil fuels. Now, suddenly, its head office says that this is a perfect opportunity to drive a wedge between the government and Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. That is what they want to do: be divisive.

That is not how we work. Our counterparts in Quebec are interested in settling this matter, and as I said, talks in good faith are under way as we speak.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today there are 370,000 more unemployed Canadians than there were on the day of the last federal election.

Yet the Conservatives are looking at cancelling five important EI programs, programs like best 14 weeks and working while on claim. These are programs that have helped those most in need during these tough economic times. They have benefited the most vulnerable: youth, women, low-skilled workers, and low-income families.

Why are the Conservatives turning their backs on the most vulnerable Canadians in the time of their greatest need?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we helped people through the recession by keeping those programs going. In fact, we added to them, bringing in the five weeks supplementary benefits, raising the maximum benefits that were allowed. We also brought in support for long-tenured workers, who were particularly hard hit by the recession.

As for the pilot projects, they are just that. They are pilots. We are reviewing them. Any decision about their future will be based primarily on what is best for Canadian workers and for Canadian job creators.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a yes in that response. It is the business operators in the regions of this country who want and need these programs: tourism,

agriculture, fishing, forestry. When those businesses lose that pool of labour, they lose their operations.

We know the attitude of the government and the Prime Minister toward the unemployed. They think they are defeatists; they think they are a no-good bunch of so-and-sos receiving generous benefits. We know the contempt they have for unemployed workers.

If the government will not do it for the workers, the government should do it for the businesses. It should just do it.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member could not hear me over the bellowing. I said that any decisions about the future of these pilot projects will be made in accordance with the best interests of Canadian workers and job creators.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Alberta energy minister cast cold water on the federal and provincial governments' multibillion dollar gifts of taxpayers' money to the fossil fuel industry to subsidize carbon capture and storage.

The minister said, "The strategy is questionable and likely not economically feasible". NASA's top scientists agree.

Will the government wake up, end the billion dollar tax giveaway for coal and oil sands, reinstate the eco-energy retrofit program, and help struggling seniors, students, and small businesses?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my hon. friend's question. I think she is fully aware that the only abatement technology to actually reduce carbon emissions from, for example, coal-fired electricity plants is carbon capture and storage.

She would surely be aware that over 40% of the carbon in the atmosphere today actually came from burning coal. This is the only technology that holds the promise of reducing these emissions. Canada leads the world. We are spending more per capita on these investments than any other country. This has been acknowledged by the International Energy Agency and many other agencies.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the House should know that coal gasification is the only proven technology right now.

What is happening in Hungary right now is devastating. Our hearts go out to this community, which was struck by a sea of toxic red sludge that broke through the industrial berm.

Oral Questions

I feel a visceral connection with them, having been affected by the devastating oil spill at Lake Wabamun. This disaster should be a wake-up call for government, a call for action on the unanimous response by the House to ensure federal readiness to deal with similar disasters.

When will the government act?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have all had a visceral reaction to what we have seen in Hungary, but I think that we should be responsible in what we say to Canadians.

First, there were clear indications of long-term instability in the dam that broke. In Canada, facilities are designed and constructed to a much higher standard, the Canadian Dam Association's dam safety guidelines of 1999.

They demand long-term stability. They take into consideration seismic conditions and worst-perceived local conditions. In Canada, these kinds of facilities are safe and we do not have the problems that others have experienced elsewhere.

* * *

• (1455)

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during Monday's meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, some committee members expressed their displeasure with the actions of the NDP member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Could the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security please inform the House of these antics and update the members on future committee business?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were all very disappointed with what transpired at that Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security meeting.

The opposition moved a motion to conduct future business in camera. Before the two hour meeting was over, it would appear the New Democratic Party member was issuing a press release of the very items that took place within that meeting.

If we are going to build goodwill in committees and in the House, we must honour the parliamentary rules. The public safety committee has several pieces of legislation before it, important legislation which Canadians, victims and law enforcement—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Brantford Municipal Council received praise from the Chamber of Commerce when it applied for an economically driven roads project over the political glitz of an arena. However, the Conservatives preferred the photo op. They forced Brantford to rush ill-prepared into the arena and now, with arenas proliferating in its region, Brantford faces a bidding war for labour and has already gone at least \$1 million over budget.

Why do the Conservatives show such contempt for the money of hard-working taxpayers?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I saw that the hon. member raised this yesterday in his wacky news release.

What happened in the area of Brantford was a good number of infrastructure dollars went into Route 16 for rehabilitation of that country road. There was a substantial investment in the Wayne Gretsky sports complex, which was much demanded. Then there was the new community centre in Brant county.

Which one of these projects does the member think was so bad for the people of Brant and Brantford? Those applications came in from the district and we funded them. Could the member identify which one of those he wishes we had never invested in?

* * *

[Translation]

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, responding to FADOQ's initiative, thousands of seniors have signed a petition calling for this heartless government to improve the guaranteed income supplement. This government claims, with a straight face, to have done everything for seniors.

Can the minister tell us if she will heed this call for improvements to the GIS and increase the monthly benefits by \$110 in order help the tens of thousands of seniors living below the low-income cutoff?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she should know that our government has done a great deal for seniors, especially those with low incomes.

One of our accomplishments is our plan to increase the tax exemption on revenue from the GIS by \$500, and another is a subsidy that has increased from \$500 million to \$3.5 billion, which has helped 1.6 million seniors. In addition, we have made access to the guaranteed income supplement automatic when a request is made and when they continue—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

* * *

[English]

CENSUS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week a Vanier Institute report has shown that life is getting harder and tougher for Canadian families. Students are graduating with crushing debt. Families are struggling to care for the elderly. Parents have no affordable child care.

Not only are the Conservatives ignoring Canadian families, they are trying to make their struggles disappear by scrapping the long form census. When will the government do the right thing and reinstate the long form census?

• (1500)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have answered this question several times. The fact is the government has not scrapped anything. We have moved to a national household survey. We have decided to treat Canadians as adults.

We think the information is important. We think, when properly educated, Canadians will give that information to the government. We just think it is inappropriate for the government to threaten Canadians with fines because they do not want to tell the government how much yard work they do or what their religion is.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal public safety critic again showed his true colours and got soft on crime. The member for Ajax—Pickering claimed our investments to keep criminals behind bars would not make us any safer. Instead he championed the failed prison farm program. A program that lost millions of dollars a year with a 1% success rate is something any Liberal can be proud of.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety please remind the Liberal public safety critic what it actually takes to keep our communities safe?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his hard work on this file. Unlike the Liberal public safety critic, our Conservative government believes investments that keep dangerous criminals behind bars make Canada a safer place to live and raise a family.

We do not agree with the member for Ajax—Pickering who considers a program with a 1% success rate to be the most successful in the country. We think law-abiding Canadians deserve better than 1% and they deserve to feel safe. I wish the Liberal Party did as well.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of funding for much needed road projects, the town of Brantford was handed fancy photo ops and platitudes by the member for Brant.

In terms of the minister's comments, he might be interested to know that very soon a Brantford councillor will be appearing before the transport committee and he will tell the whole sad tale of misplaced federal government priorities and waste. I encourage the minister to at least read the transcripts of that testimony, which will respond in great detail to his questions.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the late show as I am sure the member will be a star.

Oral Questions

This is the situation. We work together with the local MPPs from the area. They are both Liberals and they work together with the government. They put forward proposals along with the district. There was a project that did not meet the environmental standards. There were environmental problems that could not be approved in time.

As for the Wayne Gretzky sports complex, the new community centre in Brant county and the rehabilitation of roads, those sorts of projects were the ones given to us that we could approve in time, and they are being built.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the end of the employment insurance pilot projects will be devastating for seasonal workers, especially those in eastern Quebec where forestry, agriculture, fishing and tourism are the basis of the economy. Furthermore, the government has closed the door on the possibility of comprehensive employment insurance reform.

Basically, is the government trying to tell seasonal workers that they should find another job or two to make ends meet, as the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup said?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we are the ones who helped unemployed workers during the recession by giving five weeks of supplementary EI benefits and creating several other initiatives. As for the pilot projects, we are reviewing them. Any decisions taken will be based on what is best for Canadian workers and for Canadian job creators.

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[English]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Speaker: Before I call upon the hon. member for Ottawa South to ask his question, I would like to take a moment to provide some information to the House regarding the management of private members' business.

As members know, after the order of precedence is replenished, the Chair reviews the new items so as to alert the House to bills which at first glance appear to impinge on the financial prerogative of the Crown. This allows members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion and present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Business of the House

[Translation]

Accordingly, following the October 1 replenishment of the order of precedence with 15 new items, I wish to inform the House that there are four bills that give the Chair some concern as to the pending provisions they contemplate. They are: Bill C-449, An Act regarding free public transit for seniors, standing in the name of the member for Hull—Aylmer; Bill C-507, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act (federal spending power), standing in the name of the member for Saint-Lambert.

● (1505)

[English]

There are also Bill C-530, An Act to amend the Northwest Territories Act (borrowing limits), standing in the name of the hon. member for Western Arctic, and Bill C-572, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Budget Officer), standing in the name of the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation to accompany these bills or any of the other bills now on the order paper to do so at an early opportunity.

[Translation]

I thank honourable members for their attention.

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[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, the government House leader, in anticipation of the business this week and the business of the week that is forthcoming after the break week when we are back in our constituency offices. I would like him to address at the same time a few elements in that answer, if he could.

In the spirit of the motion for question period reform and decorum put forward by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills and passed last night, I wonder if the House leader can help us understand two elements as we go forward in terms of the business we are pursuing. First, will the minister continue to be answering the preponderance of questions put to the government going forward during question period? Second, will he actually work with other parties in the House to get a number of his caucus colleagues under control with respect to decorum?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the questions from my friend, the member for Ottawa South. I do have to admit from time to time that I am called upon to respond to certain questions that are asked by the opposition. There are not as many as there used to be, thanks to the appointment of the new Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, who I think is doing a fine job. The new Minister of Transport has a big challenge to tidy up the department. The only minister who has a bigger challenge to deal with is the new Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

On the issue of decorum, I think there has been some degree of success. I will congratulate the Liberal House Leader. He has perhaps been more successful than I have in reining in the number of interjections during question period, and I undertake to him and to the House to continue to work in that regard. I think there has been a considerable reduction in interjections. Sometimes the members of the government or members of the opposition will bring out those types of interjections, but I will commit to continue to work with him and with our colleagues in the Bloc and the NDP on reducing them. I think we have met with some success. We do have more room to grow, but I will commit to continue to work in that regard. In many respects, that was a big part of the motion the House adopted last night, the motion standing in the name of the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, and I see him smiling at me now.

Much work has been accomplished, but much work remains to be done in that regard.

When government orders resumes after my statement, we will call Bill C-36, the consumer product safety bill. We have an agreement to send it to committee after one speaker per party, and I will be moving the appropriate motion in a few minutes.

I should point out that if we cannot come together to try to protect children and keep them safe, we do not have any place here. I am very pleased with the consultations with all parties on that. I think they will be welcomed, particularly by Environmental Defence, which has been championing these issues for some time.

Following Bill C-36, we will resume the debate which began this morning on Bill C-47, sustaining Canada's economic recovery act. Other bills scheduled for today, if necessary, are Bill S-9, tackling auto theft and property crime, and Bill C-39, ending early release for criminals.

Tomorrow, we will continue with the business before us today.

Next week, as the member noted, is a constituency week.

When we return we will continue, if necessary, with Bill C-47. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement is also on the agenda.

Thursday, October 21 shall be an allotted day, as I have told our friends in the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, with respect to Bill C-36, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

[Translation]

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, a member from each recognized party may speak for not more than 20 minutes on the second reading motion of Bill C-36, An Act respecting the safety of consumer products, following which the said bill shall be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

● (1510)

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

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Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

* * *

CANADA CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY ACT

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC) moved that Bill C-36, An Act respecting the safety of consumer products, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to start debate on this timely piece of legislation.

Almost every day my department has asked companies to recall unsafe products. Sometimes it takes days and even weeks. Sadly, we have fallen behind most of the modern world with the current legislation.

Bill C-36, the Canada consumer product safety act, would replace the 40-year-old, outdated legislation that puts us way behind our trading partners and other countries.

By modernizing our consumer product safety law, we are seeking to better protect the public by addressing and preventing dangers to human health or safety posed by substandard or faulty consumer products.

As my fellow members are well aware, the marketplace of 40 years ago was far different from the one we know today. Forty years ago the vast majority of products on our store shelves were likely manufactured by a few companies and were much easier to monitor. Supply chains were short and simple, and the tools available to regulators were appropriate for that time. In today's global economy, there are thousands of companies and millions of products. Supply chains are long, complicated and cross multiple borders.

Right now, part I of the Hazardous Products Act is used to regulate consumer products. Any consumer product that is not specifically prohibited or regulated can be sold according to this act.

This dated legislation lacks the necessary tools to address today's challenges, and does not permit us to be on the same footing with our trading partners. It does not allow government to respond rapidly to unregulated products or hazards, and it does not provide the ability for government to recall unsafe products when a company is not co-operating with us or is slow in doing so.

We recognize the limits of our current legislation because in recent years we have seen an increasing number of dangerous consumer products. We have listened to the concerns of consumers and parents alike. Take for example the drop-side cribs, something on which my department is consulting with the industry right now.

Over the past several months I have spoken to many parents, stakeholders and industry representatives, and I have met with my colleagues from foreign governments. We have talked about our shared concerns for the safety of children's products. We have talked about the need to respond quickly to emerging dangers from consumer products. We have discussed our shared goal of building an improved product safety regime that is targeted, efficient and effective. We have worked on improving our international partnerships.

That is why we tabled the Canada consumer product safety act, to help keep Canadians safe from dangerous consumer products. The safety and security of Canadian families is a priority for us.

The proposed act would modernize and strengthen Canada's product safety legislation. It would put Canada in step with modern times. It would also bring us into step with our major trading partners like the United States and the European Union.

I think my fellow members will agree that all Canadians deserve to benefit from a level of protection comparable to that of our American and European neighbours, and this is exactly what the Canada consumer product safety act seeks to provide.

It would give the government more effective tools to identify risks and act quickly to remove unsafe consumer products from store shelves. It would introduce a general prohibition against the manufacture, importation, advertisement or sale of any consumer products that pose an unreasonable danger to human health or safety. It would require companies to report all serious incidents and defects that could lead to injury or death, including near misses.

This would provide our government with the intelligence needed to assess and take action on identified risks more quickly, more strategically and more comprehensively.

Bill C-36 would give authority for the government to order mandatory recalls.

● (1515)

As things stand now, upon determining that a consumer product is unsafe, and I am talking about household items such as toys and cribs, we are limited in what actions we can take. While the United States and the European Union can act fast to recall such products on their own, in Canada, we are generally limited to negotiating and gaining co-operation from companies before products are pulled from store shelves on a voluntary basis.

In many cases, companies agree to a voluntary approach. Often after further testing their products, they are proactive and inform their consumers of the details. In other cases, they are informed of incidents related to their products and offer to recall the items on their own, but in cases where they do not, we are often very limited to issuing warnings and advisories to the public to alert them of the problem.

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I find it completely unacceptable that companies are allowed to get away with this, and Canadians deserve better. Under the proposed Canada consumer product safety act, the government would be able to order mandatory recalls when companies fail to cooperate. Reputable producers rightly and realistically see themselves as accountable for the safety of their products. They are conscientious and rightfully aim to safeguard their reputations. We expect they would continue to act quickly and voluntarily when a safety problem is identified with their products. This legislation seeks to make all producers accountable for the safety of their products by providing the government with the necessary tools to quickly remedy safety problems.

Compliance with the legislation would be strengthened through maximum fines of up to \$5 million for serious offences, or more for offences committed knowingly or recklessly. That is a big step up from the current maximum penalty of \$1 million. These fines would no longer be the cost of doing business.

In the months since the bill was last before my fellow members, we have had the opportunity to reflect upon the input we have received both in parliamentary hearings and directly from stakeholders. As a result, targeted improvements have been made to the proposed legislation. I would like to stress that these changes, while important, do not compromise the spirit of the bill, nor do they lower the level of protection it would provide to Canadians.

The first is a change to authorities for recall and other orders. Previously, these authorities would have been assigned to inspectors. Now the ministry is expressly accountable for ordering product recalls and taking other measures.

We have also made two changes to the wording around inspector powers. For example, the meaning of the word "store" has been clarified by specifying that it does not apply to goods stored for personal use. For example, the myth that an inspector could go to someone's house and take a two-year-old's favourite toy from him is just not true. We have also removed a clause for inspectors to pass over property so that the provision no longer includes the phrase "and they are not liable for doing so".

The fourth change, having listened to the committee during previous hearings on this legislation and on others, is an improvement to the wording on the provisions for an advisory body that clarifies what was meant by public advice.

Fifth, we responded to concerns on the review of orders so that the bill now sets out a 30-day review period.

Sixth, a prohibition of bisphenol A in baby bottles has been added, ensuring an ongoing high level of protection for consumers.

There are many reasons why we are seeing this legislation for the third time in this House. Throughout the history of this important bill, there have been a few important constants. One constant has been the support of my government. We have always known how important it was to update our product safety legislation.

I sincerely thank the members of the House for their past support for this legislation. I would also like to thank our stakeholders who have worked tirelessly along with me. Our work with the public listening to the concerns about product safety and discussing their

desire for a modernized safety regime underlines the importance of what we are doing with this bill. It also portrays the many ways it will benefit Canadians.

• (1520)

Another constant has been our commitment to continuous improvement. Essentially, before this bill is passed by the House and the Senate, we are working with the 40-year old legislation we currently have. Still, improvements have been made, and we are very proud of them.

We have prohibited BPA in baby bottles.

We are building on the excellent work already done to make cribs and cradles in Canada among the safest in the world. This includes our recent proposal to ban traditional drop-side cribs.

We continue to advance implementation of increasingly stringent and comprehensive limits on lead in various products.

We have finished the pre-consultation on an initiative to eliminate exposure to phthalates in chewable children's toys.

In addition, we continue to apply strategic compliance and enforcement approaches to our existing regulations and prohibitions. We are proposing that these regulations and prohibitions be transferred to Bill C-36 in such a way that there will be no gaps in protection, no time lags in the transfer, and no reduction in the existing level of protection that they provide.

With respect to Bill C-36 in particular, we have worked closely with stakeholders at every stage of development. When we have had opportunities to revisit the bill, we have seized them and worked to make better legislation. That is why we have made the important improvements that members see today.

That is why we have developed policy proposals for consultation and why we have invited comment since the summer, to make the best possible legislation for industry, for stakeholders, and for individual Canadians.

We are currently consulting on four elements of Bill C-36. We are also consulting on the provisions for mandatory reporting.

There is another constant that has driven our commitment to this legislation. That is the constant reminder that we need this legislation. It is the reminder that the Hazardous Products Act must be replaced by modernized authorities and that the potential hazards posed by consumer products surface daily and in ways that are increasingly difficult to predict.

My colleagues need only think of the recent Fisher-Price voluntary recall. Fisher-Price recalled more than 10 million products. I would not be surprised to learn that colleagues here in this chamber were affected by that recall, and if not the Fisher-Price recall, then perhaps it was one of the more than 245 products we have managed since the beginning of this year.

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That brings us to another constant. That is our frequent dependence upon the United States for information that it receives through its system of mandatory reporting of consumer incidents. It is in part as a result of the intelligence it has gathered through that system that the Fisher-Price recall was developed. We have no such system in Canada, but this legislation would give us the authority to implement it.

We will always work closely with our neighbours to the south, and we will continue to develop and support close relations with our other major trading partners. I was pleased, for example, to be able to expand our memorandum of agreement with China when I travelled to Asia last month.

In this system of rapidly changing, globally modernized markets, such co-operation and coordination is essential. An international safety net is a smart use of resources.

But we must have the authorities that will allow us to be equal partners in these important relationships.

Bill C-36 proposes new powers requiring manufacturers and importers to provide safety test and study results for their products, for verification by Health Canada. This supports targeted oversight while keeping the accountability for safe products with industry.

If we look to the experience in the United States, where it has established similar legislation to what we are proposing today, we know that it is reasonable to expect that a voluntary approach will continue to be the preferred approach when responding to product safety incidents. In other words, we know that most industry players value their reputation.

• (1525)

We know and we respect the investments they have made in safety and consumer service. We want to support those in industry who put a premium on safety and are proactive to ensure their customers have the information they need to make the right product choices. But in those few cases where it falls to government to take action to protect consumers, Bill C-36 would give us the authority to do so.

I believe my colleagues will agree that we should take the same transparent and comprehensive approach to product safety whether we are dealing with a large multinational corporation or a home-based business. The issue fundamentally is one of fairness and it is also an issue of consumer expectation.

Today I have discussed many of the details of Bill C-36 and they all add up to three key elements: active prevention, targeted oversight, and rapid response. These are our goals. Canadians deserve nothing less.

This legislation offers certainty and transparency for industry. By supporting the bill, every member of the House can act to improve product safety and strengthen our ability to protect Canadians. As a mother, I can only feel comfortable knowing that our country is equipped to keep the products on our shelves safe.

I hope to count on the support of hon. members of the House for this important piece of legislation.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, survey results show that the vast majority of Canadians believe that a

product is safe simply because it is available on the market. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily the case as children are particularly vulnerable to product-related injuries. In fact, there are more than 18,000 annual emergency room visits for children as a result of product-related injuries.

As well, recalls on child products have significantly increased in recent years from 28 voluntary recalls in 2006 to 118 in 2008. That is a 235% increase over just three years. Just this last week, one company recalled more than 10 million tricycles, high chairs and toys over safety concerns. The trikes have a protruding key that has caused 10 reported injuries. The high chairs have seven reports of children hurt on pegs on the chairs' rear legs. The infant toys have faulty parts that pose a choking hazard.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to support Bill C-36, formerly Bill C-6, the Canada consumer product safety act, on which our health committee worked collegially for extended hours. We heard testimony from consumer product organizations, environmental defence organizations, and toy manufacturers. We struggled through challenging issues for both consumer health and well-being and for industry.

Reducing risk to human health has been a preoccupation of people, physicians and politicians for the last 5,000 years. Virtually every major advance in public health has involved the reduction or elimination of risk, with the result being that the world is a safer place today. It is safer from accidents and deadly or incurable diseases and safer from hazardous consumer goods.

Therefore, it is government's duty to do all it reasonably can to accurately assess and reduce risks, such as making sure that food, medicines and other products are safe. Although government can rarely hope to reduce risks to zero, it can aim to lower them to a more acceptable level and it should openly and transparently communicate risk and risk reduction strategies to the public.

Bill C-36 is needed as the laws on consumer safety have not been thoroughly reviewed in over 40 years, and chemicals, technology, and trade have all changed significantly.

Canadians could question why the government was slow on this bill, a bill to improve Canada's out-of-date product safety laws, given that consumer safety was to be a top priority and the bill was first introduced a few years ago. Every time there is a high-profile recall and questions arise over Health Canada's reactivity, we hear the message: if only we had our consumer product safety bill in place.

However, parents need to be confident that the products they buy will be safe for them and their children.

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It is important to note that the government has been in power for four years, has tabled the bill three times, and enjoys unanimous support from opposition parties, as well as strong support of major Canadian children's organizations, consumer advocacy groups, and other key stakeholders who share the conviction that Canadians need better protection from unsafe consumer products.

The bill overhauls existing legislation that proved inadequate to deal with high-profile safety scandals in 2007 and 2008 involving lead paint in children's toys and melamine in infant formula. The new proposed Canada consumer product safety act would improve consumer product safety with actions that would include the following.

It would prohibit the manufacturing, importing, marketing, or selling of any consumer product deemed or proven unsafe to human health or safety.

It would require industries to quickly inform the government when they discover one of their products is linked to a serious incident, death, or product safety issue.

It would require manufacturers and importers to provide test or study results on products when asked.

It would empower Health Canada to recall unreasonably dangerous consumer products.

As well, it would make it an offence to package or label consumer products that make false or deceptive health or safety claims.

● (1530)

The proposed Canada consumer products safety act builds on Bill C-6, which the government previously introduced, and takes into account concerns raised by stakeholders and parliamentarians through specific amendments.

The amendments include the following. The term "storing" has been defined in order to clarify that Health Canada inspectors' authorities would not extend to products that individuals store for their personal use.

The original bill stated that product safety inspectors could pass through or over private property while carrying out their functions without being liable for doing so. The amendment to the trespass provision addresses concerns by removing the phrase and they are not liable for doing so.

An amendment has been made so that the Minister of Health and not a product safety inspector would be accountable for ordering product recalls and other related measures.

An amendment has also been made to further define the timeframe for the review of orders. Under the previous bill, a review officer was required to complete the review within a reasonable time. This has now been further defined to say "no later than 30 days after the day on which the request is provided to the minister".

I think it is important to mention a concern raised by one of Canada's leading law firms this week, namely, that the proposed legislation would place a major burden on Canadian businesses and is likely to lead to a surge in class action lawsuits.

One law partner warns that, "while the proposals have the support of consumer groups and political parties, they are likely to have a dramatic impact on many players in the chain, including suppliers, importers and retailers".

"Bill C-36 will introduce a revolutionary upheaval in product regulation in Canada", the partner reports. "For the first 140 years of Canadian history, these things have not existed from a regulatory perspective".

It would give Health Canada the power to order a recall or carry out a recall itself, as well as dole out penalties. These include a fine of up to \$5 million, two years in prison or both for indictable offences. This is up from \$1 million. It would no longer be the cost of doing business. The partner warns that this could result in more litigation, including class action lawsuits that tend to follow recalls.

Suppliers and manufacturers may need to start thinking about organizing their businesses to ensure that people responsible for dealing with safety monitoring reporting to Health Canada and offering legal advice.

The legislation is important and has backing across Canada. We are, however, once again at the early stages of the parliamentary approval process and we must hope that this does not fall by the wayside as was the case when Parliament was prorogued.

Finally, Bill C-36 would significantly improve the product safety regime in Canada which would translate into improved health and safety for Canadians. Product safety is in everyone's best interest and everyone has a role to play: Canadians, government and industry.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as most hon. members here know, when a government bill is introduced, the same member cannot deliver a speech more than once at each stage. Therefore, at second reading stage, like today, it would normally not be possible to speak more than once to this bill, an act respecting the safety of consumer products. In the present case, it will be possible because this is the third time this bill is being introduced by this same government. Why is this so? Because the Prime Minister said so. He decided, through various manoeuvres, to draw out the debate on this much anticipated and necessary bill.

That is why, when I read the Minister of Health's press release that was printed and distributed on June 7, 2010, I could not help but laugh. I will read an excerpt:

"The safety and well-being of Canadian families and children remain a top priority for our government," said [the Minister of Health]. "Canada's current product safety law is now over 40 years old and we need to do more to update and improve this law to help protect our families from harmful products."

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About four years ago today, the Auditor General pointed out the problem and emphasized that we should redouble our efforts to modernize this old legislation going back 40 years. She submitted a report in November 2006 that showed the Government of Canada was aware of the risks that consumers were running as a result of the lack of funding for the product safety program and knew that managers could not comply with their mandates. That was in November 2006. So what happened after that? Let me summarize the period of time since November 2006.

In the summer of 2007, thousands of toys made in China were recalled by their manufacturers because of the lead they contained. The Bloc Québécois said at the time that the minister should act without delay to tighten the safety requirements for dangerous products in order to prohibit the manufacture, promotion and marketing of any product entailing an unacceptable risk of harmful effects to health.

Although the Auditor General made her determination in November 2006, it was not until December 2007 that the government announced—not that a bill was being introduced—but that an action plan had been created to ensure the safety of food and consumer products. The government promised a bill in the days or weeks or months to come. It finally appeared in April 2008. A year and a half had passed, therefore, between the Auditor General's findings and Bill C-52.

You know something about this, Mr. Speaker, because you were affected like all of us. The bill was prevented from continuing through all the stages of the legislative process and becoming much-needed legislation because in September 2008—despite the fine fixed-date election bill the Prime Minister had decided to introduce and get passed—he decided, because he was the Prime Minister and could use his prerogative, to call a general election and slam the doors on Parliament. Never mind the very necessary and important bills that are pending, let us have an election. That was in September 2008. So the process for passing this bill on the safety of consumer products was dragged out even longer.

In January 2009, once the election campaign and the Christmas holidays were over, C-6, essentially a carbon copy of Bill C-52, was introduced.

● (1540)

The only thing that happened at the end of January was that the bill was introduced. Actual debate began only in April 2009. Once again, there were delays. I can tell you that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health was not where the process was dragged out, because in five meetings we were able to hear all the people involved and all the people with an interest in the issue. Amendments were presented and we managed to find common ground among all the parliamentarians on the committee. However, we did not make it to the end of the legislative process for the bill, because in December 2009, Parliament was prorogued. The Prime Minister, again because he is the Prime Minister and he has the power to do it, decided to shut down Parliament, to leave us in our constituencies and not to allow the House of Commons to complete the entire legislative process then underway, and in particular the process of passing the consumer products safety bill, a bill that, I repeat, is necessary and one that people are waiting for.

In March 2010, Parliament returned. But did the government introduce the bill? No, it waited a few months. In June 2010, Bill C-36 was introduced, the one we have before us and that we will be debating today and in the days that follow. And since June, have we been debating this bill, a bill that is needed and that people are waiting for? No, we have been waiting, we let the summer go by, and here we are on October 7, debating it at second reading.

It is somewhat odd that we had to wait four years and still not have passed it, and be starting, once again, to consider passing the bill, a bill that has, in general, the agreement of the parliamentarians in this House. This is cause for concern, to say the least. That is why I smiled a little when I read this paragraph from the minister. A little farther on in the same news release, the minister tells us that she looks forward to speaking with us about the bill in greater detail in the coming days. We have had to wait until October for her to address the subject in this House.

Furthermore, we are falling behind, and everyone knows it. Earlier, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons had to rise and ask for unanimous consent to have only one round of speeches. Everyone knows that we are behind, but if the government, headed by the Prime Minister, truly—

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: The Prime Minister is stubborn.

Mr. Luc Malo: Yes, as the member for Outremont said, the Prime Minister is quite stubborn. He always wants his own way, and does not want to get to the bottom of things or find an efficient way of adopting bills that are deemed important, as the minister herself said in her speech earlier today.

Now we have Bill C-36. As I said earlier, this bill is essentially a carbon copy of Bill C-6, but they have already incorporated—and it would have been silly not to—the amendments already made in parliamentary committee when Bill C-6 was being studied. Members will recall that Bill C-6 was itself a carbon copy of Bill C-52. The only difference—people will perhaps remember—was that when the government introduced Bill C-52, a number of our constituents had a problem with the fact that natural health products would be subject to this bill.

● (1545)

However, there was a proposal to amend and modify the bill so that natural health products would be exempt. I would like to read subclause 4(3) of the bill:

For greater certainty, this Act does not apply to natural health products as defined in subsection 1(1) of the Natural Health Products Regulations made under the Food and Drugs Act.

This clarification having been made, I would, for the benefit of the House, like to raise some questions and ideas that would be interesting to study during the meetings of the Standing Committee on Health that will be dedicated to studying Bill C-36.

First of all, the preamble to the bill proposes a definition that approaches the precautionary principle:

Whereas
the Parliament of Canada recognizes...

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that a lack of full scientific certainty is not to be used as a reason for postponing measures that prevent adverse effects on human health if those effects could be serious or irreversible;

After having read the preamble, we would really like to study compliance with this bill in more detail. What does the government mean by this statement? That is the question we will try to answer during the committee meetings that focus on studying Bill C-36.

The second point I would like to make is about the complementary system regarding the environment. The preamble also gives an overview of consumer products and the environment:

...recognizes that, given the impact activities with respect to consumer products may have on the environment, there is a need to create a regulatory system regarding consumer products that is complementary to the regulatory system regarding the environment;

That is only found in clauses 16 and 17. The Fertilizers Act and the Seeds Act are excluded from this bill. There is one link with the environment in this bill and it deals with disclosure of personal information. We could ask the government if it intends to develop environmental requirements as part of the regulations.

The third aspect, which is fundamental, is self-regulation of the industry. Following the many cases of unsafe food products on our supermarket shelves, the media have exposed some worrisome phenomena, namely the lack of quality control and insufficient labelling on food products imported into Canada. On April 1, a number of newspaper articles reported that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was inspecting barely 2% to 5% of food products and that this low percentage represented nearly 98% of the risk. These statements opened the debate on deficiencies in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's tracking system and on the labelling and food inspection regulations.

When Canada's new food and consumer safety action plan is being reviewed, the Bloc Québécois will ensure that the federal government does not delegate food inspection entirely to the industry and that the federal government fulfils its mandate to ensure the safety of food, therapeutic and consumer products.

The recent listeriosis outbreak that has shaken consumer confidence is another example. We have to rectify this immediately for everyone's sake. The Bloc Québécois is urging the federal government to implement stricter food safety standards in order to restore people's confidence in the food they eat. The same standards should apply to consumer product safety.

●(1550)

We completely reject the notion that the industry should regulate itself entirely when it comes to food inspection, as we saw last summer with the listeriosis crisis that resulted from a self-regulation pilot project. We do not want the industry to be wholly in charge of consumer product safety. That goes without saying. Health Canada must continue playing a role in ensuring public health, for instance, by making sure it has enough inspectors to fulfill its mandate.

On that last point, back in 2006, the Auditor General indicated that Health Canada did not have sufficient financial and human resources to carry out its inspection duties. We can have the best possible bill, the best legislation to prevent the public from purchasing products that could be unsafe for themselves or their loved ones, but we still need to take every possible action to ensure that the law is obeyed.

We must not allow the industry to be both purveyor and inspector of the same goods. That would be absurd, although, I must admit, no company wants to see its name in huge bold letters splashed across the front pages of newspapers, saying that it put unsafe products on store shelves.

Clearly, all stakeholders know that for everyone's sake, consumer products that pose a risk to public health must not find their way onto our store shelves. The fact remains that we need ways to ensure compliance with the law and to make sure that the industry does not put the people who provide consumer products to the public in charge of overseeing the safety and security of those products.

The fourth point I would like to discuss, and which we will address in committee, pertains to the regulations. Bill C-36 frequently refers to measures that the minister may take with respect to regulations. Broad regulatory powers are also mentioned in clause 6, as well as clause 37. The Bloc Québécois has questions about several aspects of the regulations provided for in the bill.

We must ask some important questions. Given the minister's discretionary power, how would the recall be carried out and for what reasons could she decide to not recall a product in certain cases? How will the minister decide that a product is dangerous? It is a matter of common sense, and we must have an answer before the bill is brought into force. On a few occasions when considering a bill, the members of the Standing Committee on Health agreed that the minister would have to provide a certain number of regulations to convey how she intended to interpret, through the regulations, the bill to be passed by Parliament.

Also, what parameters would the minister use in deciding to recall one product but not another? In this regard, we still have questions, and we hope that the minister or the officials will explain their intentions to the committee, and that the officials will also be able to provide more information about the pending regulations.

It is clear that this bill will receive quick passage through second reading since we have unanimously agreed to it. My colleagues on the Standing Committee on Health and I are looking forward to a more in-depth study of Bill C-36 in the days to come.

●(1555)

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to this legislation at second reading.

My colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes mentioned that this was the third time he was able to speak to this bill in the House. I have to say I am just so happy to be able to speak to a bill that is not about locking people up and putting them in jail for crimes that have been unreported.

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We have been waiting a long time for this bill, as we have heard. As we have also heard, previous versions of this bill have been killed twice by prorogation. Frankly there has been an inordinate delay getting it through first and second reading here in the House since we returned from prorogation in March.

Considering it is the government's own legislation, one has to ask why we have waited so long. Again this week, yet again, we saw another recall of children's products, this time a recall of 11 million toys by Mattel. This follows recalls on children's drugs, cribs and drinking glasses, and the list goes on and on.

Each time this happens, consumer advocates call for reliable product safety information and a law that gets these unsafe products off the shelves. Ideally, dangerous products would not actually get on the shelves in the first place.

My colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes mentioned that the minister has been silent on this issue, not even speaking about this issue in the House until October, but actually I would like to correct that record because we have been asking questions in question period, waiting, asking when this will happen, asking when we will get to actually move this forward to committee. She has answered those questions, although I do not think she said the words “Bill C-36”.

We are happy we are here. Finally we are here. I do think it also needs mentioning that the Liberals have been asleep at the switch for 12 years on this issue. By 2005-06, at the end of the Liberals' decade of missed opportunity to improve product safety in Canada, more than 40% of recalls were ordered as a direct result not of us but of U. S.-initiated action. The Liberals were happy to promote and applaud corporate trade but not to police it.

The legislation this bill replaces is part I of the Hazardous Products Act that was enacted in 1969. I will say that again, 1969. To say that this bill is a long time in coming is an understatement. In 41 years technologies have of course changed. The nature of business has changed. The ethics of production have advanced. We need legislation that reflects the realities of a globalized world, which aims to be health conscious and also to establish a more equitable society.

It goes without saying that dangerous products touch the lives of people who are socio-economically disadvantaged more than the rest of society. Cheap products rely on cheaper manufacturing processes, and they are wreaking havoc in the lives of people who cannot afford to make better choices, who are poorly positioned to deal with the health consequences and potentially the lost wages that are due to time off work to care for loved ones who are hurt.

Product safety should not be the right of the rich. It goes very much to equality principles and it is a central piece of moving towards economic justice.

Unsurprisingly, plans to revamp product safety legislation have developed some resistance from industry and from importers due to high costs and the perceived intrusion into their design and manufacturing processes. However, the onus should be on them. Consumer product safety is the cost of doing business in Canada.

The safety of Canadians and particularly the safety of children cannot be balanced against corporate costs. Manufacturers and

importers must prove that their products are safe. It is unacceptable to allow products to be negligently introduced onto the market in the absence of much-needed and precise enforcement tools.

We cannot allow tort law to be the enforcement tool, because court remedies may come too late, as consumers or their family members will have already been injured. There may not be an adequate compensation system through tort law that is available for the injuries suffered, and certainly not for the emotional trauma that arises in the worst case scenarios.

We need to catch things before they happen. In reality, strong product safety laws are good for companies because they dissuade them from going down a path that may have widespread consequences to them later.

● (1600)

Product safety laws protect both the health of the nation and the economy. Therefore, I am happy to note that Bill C-36 in its current form contains many of the amendments the NDP pushed for in its predecessor, Bill C-6. For example, the bill would exempt natural health products from its purview. The NDP was proud to support the natural health product industry by advocating for an exemption with Bill C-6. Natural health products contribute to the health and well-being of Canadians and play an important role in Canada's health care system.

I note that other NDP concerns have been addressed. For example, a clause that indicated inspectors were not liable for entering private property has been removed and the inspectors can no longer order a person to take measures for non-compliance. Only the minister can do that.

There are some improvements that can be made to this bill and the NDP looks forward to addressing these concerns at committee. The NDP consumer advocate, the member for Sudbury, has been working hard to identify potential improvements to product safety in Canada and I will outline some of these proposals for the House.

It is worth mentioning that protection is given to tobacco products under Bill C-36. These products have been given a permanent statutory exemption and only the propensity for ignition is included in the act's regulatory framework.

Many stakeholders, including the Canadian Cancer Society and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, have pointed out that this is a major failing in the legislation. In April 2009, when the bill was known as Bill C-6, the Canadian Cancer Society submitted a formal request that the permanent exclusion of tobacco products from the act be deleted in order to improve the overall health of Canadians.

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There is also an issue of whether there will be adequate resources to enforce the legislation. We cannot allow the bill to exist without the adequate tools for enforcement. The bill implies a more proactive and aggressive approach to product safety, which is completely out of character with past government performance. Therefore, the NDP is considering an amendment to the bill to hold the government responsible for maintaining an adequate inspection capacity and staff to process, investigate and respond to complaints.

Tied to this is the need for stiffer punitive financial penalties. Industry monitoring shows that stiffer penalties improve product safety. Unfortunately, while the Hazardous Products Safety Act already contains fines of up to \$1 million for violating its provisions, these fines are rarely imposed, something that we really need to work on at the enforcement end. It is essential that the government change this trend and adequately and consistently enforce the act.

The government also has to get serious about establishing clear and consistent rules for what constitutes a danger. This cannot be allowed to remain as a subjective judgment. We really need a test about what is a danger and how we will decide what is a danger. It is important not just for consumers, but for the industry as well. We need to ensure that industry understands what its obligations are.

Also in the world of enforcement, we need a better system for filing public complaints and the creation of a database that will track product safety issues. This is what the U.S. is moving toward and we need to follow suit. We have an opportunity now not just to make the Hazardous Products Safety Act better, but to be bold, visionary and move forward, not just catch up to our friends around world but maybe even surpass them when it comes to product safety. Right now a product can sometimes be on the market for more than 10 years before a recall happens.

As an example of that kind of delay, the most recent Fisher-Price recall involves products that were on the market for five years. The longer the delay, the less these products will be able to be recalled. In fact, only 10% to 15% of recalled products are ever recovered. That is a shockingly low statistic. This means we need to ensure that the public gets the information when a product poses a danger to people's health through regular announcements that a recall is in effect and to the widest possible audience.

Bill C-36 also focuses on the back end of production, mostly manufacturing, but the vast majority of product safety issues are at the front end with design. Product safety issues result because of design flaws. We need the tools that will catch these flaws before a product goes to a manufacturing plant. Design is so important. Better design leads to fewer accidents and fewer injuries. One way to improve the entire production process is to ensure that third party testing is mandatory, that it is consistent and that it is utilized throughout the entire production process.

● (1605)

We have also heard concerns that Bill C-36 lacks a formal independent review board. An appeal to the board of review under the hazardous products safety act is like an appeal to court. Bill C-36 does not have a review board and these kinds of procedural safeguards.

Currently the wording of the act suggests that reviews of decisions would be made by other Health Canada officers who were not part of the original investigation. Frankly, that is not quite far enough removed. There needs to be some indication of independence. The reviews really need to be done by third parties when a property owner asks for a review of an inspector's order. However, that review is not conducted by a board of review with court powers to ensure a fair hearing. It is only fair to think about it that way and to have those sorts of arm's-length procedures put in place.

In summary, we are pleased that the government has finally introduced this bill. I am getting some smiles from my colleagues on this side of the House. We are pleased that it has been moved for debate, I will note finally. We are also very happy to support it so it gets to committee. The NDP is very much looking forward to discussion of the bill at committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no questions and comments, pursuant to an order made earlier today, Bill C-36, An Act respecting the safety of consumer products is deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

● (1610)

SUSTAINING CANADA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-47, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before question period the hon. member for Scarborough Centre had started his speech. He has 18 minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I started saying before question period, for me and my constituents, and I believe many Canadians, this boils down to a matter of trust in the government, trust in what it says it will do.

For example, during an election period, we make certain commitments. People either vote for us based on those commitments or they do not. In this specific case, the Prime Minister, at that time a candidate for prime minister, campaigned in Newfoundland and Labrador. Some of his campaign literature and the Conservative Party campaign literature made several commitments. One of those commitments was not to touch income trusts.

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Many people, especially seniors, believed that commitment and they voted in support of the Prime Minister because they trusted him. The key words are “believed” and “trusted” him. Seniors believed he would not touch income trusts. Decades ago these people invested in a certain venue, so come retirement they could assure themselves of an X amount of money on a monthly basis for their golden years.

The Prime Minister has won two minority governments. This shows that Canadians were not fully comfortable with electing a Conservative government. In fact, three out of five Canadians did not vote for the Conservatives. Nevertheless, they had enough numbers to form a minority government.

What was one of the first things the Prime Minister did? He reneged. He went back on his word. He chose to go after income trusts and increase taxes 31.5%, the highest in Canadian history. These people were disillusioned. They were going to lose income.

We have to understand that seniors are not income generators. They are income dependents. They depend on the fixed income they had planned decades ago. All of a sudden, that income became less by x%. They had to adjust their lifestyle downward, and that was totally unfair. That was the result of the Prime Minister going back on a commitment he made. The Prime Minister's literature stated “There is no greater fraud than a promise not kept”. In the Prime Minister's own words, he committed, in essence, fraud, because he did not keep his promise.

Commenting on the Prime Minister's words about no greater fraud than a promise not kept, Progressive Conservative, and I emphasize those words, Premier Danny Williams of the beautiful province of Newfoundland said in one of his speeches:

He used these words as he successfully attempted to woo voters from this province to not vote for the opposing party. Naively we trusted him. He rewarded that trust with a broken promise. According to his own brochure—he is a fraud.

The theme of my presentation is all about trust. Canadians trusted the Prime Minister to keep his word, and he did not.

I will quote again from the speech of Danny Williams. He said:

His own candidates and MPs admit that the promise was broken, but we should forgive and forget. Well folks, forgiveness may be a virtue; but forgetting is just plain fool hardy.

A year ago the Prime Minister's own candidate in St. John's East said, “Given his handling of equalization, who can trust the Prime Minister anyway?” Again, this is what I have been saying all along. It is a matter of trust.

● (1615)

The Conservatives stand and give us different figures. All Canadians need to do is look at the records. They can google things. The technology of today permits people to do research and come up with stats for themselves. The Conservatives have neglected, over and over, to point out that when they took office in 2006, they were left with a surplus of \$13.2 billion and there was a zero deficit. The unemployment rate was at 6.1% or 6.2%. Today we all know where it is. It has skyrocketed, according to the national figures, and when we plug in youth unemployment and the unofficial numbers, I believe it is well over 12%.

I will refer to the government's own action plan, “Leading the Way on Jobs and Growth” and use the figures from its budget book,

because if I were to say something, the Conservatives would say that I was a bit biased and that I will say it the way I want to.

On employment insurance, the figures in its own graph, going back to 2000 and right up to 2010, show is that under a Liberal government, we started lowering the EI premiums going back to 1997. After we balanced the books, year after year, EI premiums were being lowered. At the time when we took office, it was \$3.05 per \$100. When we left office, it was \$1.75 or \$1.76, and then it was frozen.

I will use a quote, as I did earlier, from the current finance minister who said, “It's one of those job-killing taxes, a direct tax on employers and employees”. We agree with him. What happened pre-1993 is that employers told us that they would like to hire and if payroll taxes were lower they would invest in hiring. We listened very carefully, we implemented such a program and we saw job creation unfold.

I would point out that these figures are Liberal figures, not Conservative figures. What was one of the first things the Conservatives did when they took over government? They started to jack up the payroll taxes. As a matter of fact, technically speaking, they were going to jack them up so much and then they lowered them and said that they were lowering taxes. For example, instead of paying \$90, people will pay \$30, but that is still a tax increase. Instead of hitting them with a \$17 billion increase, the government will only hit them with a \$6.5 billion increase. Nevertheless, it is still an increase.

I would just like to quote some comments here on payroll taxes that the Prime Minister and the finance minister have said. For example, in January of 2009, the finance minister said, “For many businesses, an increase in payroll taxes would make it harder to sustain existing jobs”. We agree with him. The question is: why is he increasing taxes?

On March 29, 2009, in the *Toronto Star*, the Prime Minister said:

So there is no need in Canada to raise taxes. We have not got the structural budgetary deficit that exists in the United States and obviously limits the administration's options.

Here is another declaration from the Conservative election policy declaration of 2008:

We believe that payroll taxes should not exceed the amount necessary to properly fund Employment Insurance because unnecessarily high payroll taxes are a tax on job creation. Lower payroll taxes encourage hiring and business expansion.

We agree, and that is why, if we look at the Liberal record, year after year after year, those payroll taxes were consistently coming down, until of course now, where it is a repeat of what Brian Mulroney did. When unemployment was going up, he was increasing the payroll taxes.

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●(1620)

Twenty years down the road and we are back to the future. The Conservatives are now repeating exactly what the Brian Mulroney administration did. We are encouraging them not to do it.

The business community has made some positive statements. Of course, when they were going to jack it up by 15% and now they are lowering it down and saying that they are not increasing it by yea much, that they are giving us a break, of course the business community is happy. That is why some statements are coming back from the business community sounding positive.

They talk about research and development and investing in the economy. We agree. When we took office, one of the areas that we invested in was in the knowledge-based economy. However, in order to move ahead in that new area, we need to make investments.

On page 86 of the Conservatives' own book, it states:

Canada invests more directly in public R and D than any other G7 country.

What figures are they using? The figures end in 2006, which has Canada, indeed, first. That was from our budget of 2005-06. It states here that the data is for 2007, which is the latest year for which they are available for all G7 countries. What happened after 2007? We have become the lowest.

China, for example, as was mentioned earlier by the critic for finance, the member for Kings—Hants, has invested much more than we have. The United States has done so as well and it is moving forward with the green economy and bringing forth new jobs.

On the debt side, there is an interesting graph on page 167 of their literature which shows the debt to GDP ratio in 2004-05 and then their projection of 2013-14 brings it back to the same level as it was in 2004-05. That is taking us a decade back, according to their figures.

The graph very clearly outlines the debt to GDP ratio. It starts from 2008. I will admit that when they took office they took all that surplus money that was left over from our government and just plunged it into debt retirement. Was that a good move? As it turns out today, it was not a good move because, if members will recall, at that time we also had a contingency plan of \$3 billion. If we did not use that money for an emergency, it went right to debt retirement.

I have often used the finances of the nation to draw a parallel with the average home. When the paycheque comes home every week, we do not put it all toward the mortgage. We need to put some toward groceries, some toward gas, some toward clothes, some toward the mortgage and maybe a little aside for a rainy day. At the end of the year, if we do not use that money, it is wise to pay down that mortgage as quickly as possible, as the Liberal administration did. Slowly, we ended up saving, according to the figures then, almost \$3 billion in interest payments. So, Canadians were benefiting from that \$3 billion because the money was going into programs such as health care, post-secondary education, the military, et cetera.

In this graph, I would like to point out that the debt to GDP ratio in 2008-09 was 29%. It goes up to 33.9% and 35.4%. Then, in 2012-13, it starts to decline to 35.2% and levels off. Hopefully, in 2014-15 it will drop to 31.9%.

●(1625)

However, we cannot trust those figures because, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the finance department is quoting one figure and the Parliamentary Budget Officer is quoting different figures.

We all know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is Mr. Kevin Page and that he is not someone we Liberals appointed. He is an appointee of the Prime Minister and the Conservative government. He was supposed to be someone who would be kind. He is a fair person and he called it as he saw it.

The moment he made statements about these figures I am about to bring forth, the Prime Minister and the Conservative government were not happy so they started to eliminate his budget. They started to take away the tools that he needed to do his work and, of course, he was not able to bring forth the information, not that we needed to have but that Canadians needed to have.

For example, "Budget predictions for 2012-13, \$17.5 billion deficit". The Parliamentary Budget Officer's prediction was a \$20.6 billion deficit. For 2013-14, the government says that it will be a \$8.5 billion deficit. The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that it will be a \$16.3 billion deficit. For 2014-15, the current government says that it will be a \$1.8 billion deficit. The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that it will be a \$12.3 billion deficit. It goes on, which is why I keep referring to the word "trust". It is a matter of trust.

Given the statement I made, which I chose not to repeat during the campaign, we cannot trust the Prime Minister and the government. We cannot trust their figures. It is not something that we are saying. It is something the figures show.

When I am out there speaking to my constituents, they tell me that they have great concerns because of what is happening in the world economy. Earlier today, government members were comparing the crisis in different countries. I was shocked to learn that the average debt-load per household in Canada is about \$42,000. We know Greece is having some difficulties and the average debt-load there is just over \$30,000. Who is worse off, I ask?

The Conservatives have mortgaged our future, our children's future and our grandchildren's future. All I am saying is that if they want to recapture the trust of Canadians, they need to come out with figures that can be substantiated, figures that are accurate and figures that we can talk about and realistically work with the international community. The OECD, for example, this is their figures, not ours. It is an embarrassment for us to go on the international stage and say how wonderful we are when, in essence, beneath that thin membrane things are not looking good.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go on to questions and comments, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Sydney Harbour; the hon. member for Malpeque, The Economy.

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Questions and comments. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments regarding Bill C-47. However, I think he neglected to point out that in terms of debt to GDP, which is a very important measure in terms of debt to GDP, Canada is in a much better position than the other countries he is talking about in Europe, such as Greece, Ireland and Spain, regardless of the fact that their household debt figures, which he mentioned, are somewhat comparable.

I have a question for him. As far as e-government is concerned, the g-tech annual conference just finished up today here in Ottawa. Since the new Conservative government came into office five years ago, we have found a dumbing down of government online programs. When Reg Alcock was in this House and Paul Martin was the prime minister, we saw a lot of activity in the federal government in those days trying to get government programs online, transactional and usable to the citizens of Canada. This was particularly helpful for people in far-flung rural areas who had to drive or fly into cities to do their government business. Now they can simply do it online with a credit card.

There was some sort of a vision, some sort of a direction that was similar to what they have in England, the United States and Australia. However, since the present government came to office five and a half years ago, there has been absolutely no talk of any government online programs or any sort of measurement of any kind of success, no targets in fact. One would think that for a government that prides itself on wanting to make itself more efficient and provide its services to the public online and transactional, that would be one of the areas that it would prioritize and put some effort toward.

Why does the member think the government has not seized on this opportunity to make services more broadly available to the taxpayers of Canada and, in fact, save the government money in the process by making the government more efficient? Why would it be neglecting that area?

• (1630)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that most important question.

I do not think he was looking at my notes, but I will refer to page 8 again of the action plan. The Conservative government states that it will invest \$1.9 billion to create the economy of tomorrow. That is a drop in the bucket compared to what other nations are investing.

I can compare that to a decade before, when we invested \$2 billion in research chairs, for example. I remember at that time I had the honour and the privilege of being Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, John Manley, and then Brian Tobin.

We rolled out this program and not only were we investing in the new economy, the new tools, but we were retaining and attracting brains for Canada, which allowed us to not just make our government an e-government or make our country more efficient but we made our country more competitive. In addition, we had created an export product for Canada.

We invested \$2 billion then and the Conservatives, 12 years later, were so kind as to invest \$1.9 billion. That is really progress.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Scarborough Centre for a most compelling speech from history.

There was not a lot in his speech that talked about where Canada is going or the direction we are taking Canada in. The fact is that the member spent most of his speech talking down Canada, talking down our economy. Perhaps he should cheer up.

We are in the best position in the G7, fiscally and financially far ahead of many of the other countries. It is because of the leadership we had in place that paid down debt to put us in a good, solid position.

I have two questions. The member was suggesting that we were actually not helping unemployed Canadians when we changed what was recommended and reduced the recommended increase in EI for workers, to encourage our employers to hire more Canadians, when the day before that announcement was made, the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP actually stood in the House and voted to raise EI premiums by 35% at a cost of \$7 billion per year.

Then the member criticizes our prudent measure of making sure that we did not hurt industries.

Also could the member enlighten us as to where he was in government when the \$58 billion that was in the EI fund disappeared into general revenues? I wonder if he could give a little insight into whether he had any idea where that went.

• (1635)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I will be very glad to.

My good friend misunderstood. I was not talking down the country. I was pointing out facts.

I would like to point out one other fact, but before I do that, I want to say that we voted as we did the other day to provide immediate relief to those in need today. When a family is hurting, that is when we have to be there. When a person is unemployed, he needs to put food on the table. We have to support that.

On the accumulated federal debt, it is not my words; it is the Conservatives graph here that I will point out. I first of all acknowledge that they retired a portion of the debt with a tremendous payment. I personally think it was wrong to do it the way they did it. They could have done it gradually.

However in 2008-09, after that lump sum payment, it was \$463 billion. We had brought it down to just over \$500 billion, and it had been over \$600 billion when we took over. In 2014-15 it continues to rise. It will be \$622.1 billion of debt. That is \$122 billion, according to their figures, not ours. And we left them a clean slate.

Tell me then how our country is better off.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to again highlight some of the points that were brought up by my hon. colleague.

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What I find most alarming is the household debt at record levels. The average Canadian owes almost \$42,000, which is among the highest levels in the OECD.

Some of the other issues we addressed earlier regarded measures in the budget for EI and pensions.

I brought up pensions first thing this morning and I would like to leave with it as well. One of the options that is being discussed here, and I remember it being discussed in the U.K. some time ago, is the idea of having a supplemental CPP. That would allow Canadians to increase their contributions to the Canada pension plan and get a defined contribution plan that is portable.

I say portable because there are so many people, especially from my neck of the woods in Newfoundland and Labrador, who are travelling, and they are the skilled workforce at that. They are travelling to the west and to many areas around the world as well as to Labrador in the mining and technical sector. This would allow them to have the savings, have the money available, at pension time and to get close to their income just before they retire.

I was wondering if my colleague could comment on some of those options that seemingly are not within this particular discussion.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, that is what I call forward Liberal thinking. That is what I call Liberal compassion. As years go by we have to make changes to our pension system, health system, et cetera. We have to find the means and the ways to provide that portability for the security of each and every Canadian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois about Bill C-47, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures.

The Bloc Québécois voted against the budget, and rightly so, because this budget left an entire segment of the economy, the forestry sector, to fend for itself. This sector is currently going through a very tough time. This is why the Bloc Québécois once again voted against the budget.

However, members must understand that when the time comes to implement the measures in the budget, this is done through certain bills. One of these budget implementation bills is before us today.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of sending Bill C-47, which implements certain measures in the budget, to committee to be studied. We are giving our approval because we analyzed each of these measures one by one. We often need additional information to get the government to move on these measures and show some openness—a quality that the Conservatives have yet to show. But we are in favour of several of the provisions being proposed today. I will mention the measures we support.

First, to improve the allocation of child benefits, the government agrees to pay half to each parent who shares custody. Parents who have shared custody can now divide the income from these benefits in half, which makes sense.

Also, the government is proposing to ease the tax burden of beneficiaries of a registered disability savings plan, a plan that was designed to ensure the financial security of severely disabled children. This is an interesting measure that is worth adopting.

The government is also cutting red tape for charitable organizations and some small businesses. Red tape has always put a huge burden on corporations, small companies, not-for-profit organizations and charities, which often lack the administrative staff to handle paperwork. This bill would lighten that load, and that is worthwhile.

The bill tightens the rules around TFSA's to prevent tax avoidance. TFSA's were brought in previously, but it did not take long for some people to see them as a way of avoiding and evading taxes. I think it is a good idea to ensure that measures such as the TFSA are not used to avoid taxes.

Lastly, businesses will stop benefiting from double deductions for stock options. Even though we feel that this does not go far enough, we will see what happens in committee. These measures are worth sending to committee for discussion.

But we have to be careful. We are concerned about pension plan reform, because the bill gives the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions discretionary authority in the case of pension plans that are subject to the legislation of more than one jurisdiction.

This measure must be studied, because it pertains to private pension funds and it can encroach on the provinces' jurisdiction. The pension funds can be partly under federal authority and partly under the authority of Quebec and the other provinces. We feel it is important to ensure that Quebecers' interests will always be protected and that Quebec law will always apply.

At the same time, this is a good opportunity to talk again about the whole pension system and how the government could help. The government likes to brag that it came out of the recent economic crisis in the best shape, but one reason is that our banks were smaller than the U.S. banks.

• (1640)

When I arrived here as a member in 2000, the first lobbyists who came to meet me were from the banks. They wanted permission to merge so that they could buy other banks outside the country, for example, large American banks.

By fighting tooth and nail to block those mergers, we saved those banks. Canadian banks had fewer investments in American banks. They were less contaminated than the other banks. This is the reason Canada has weathered the crisis better. Our banking system was smaller, less concentrated and less at risk because it had fewer interests in the United States. That is why Canada has weathered the crisis better than other countries.

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At that time, the Conservatives were in favour of bank mergers. The Liberals caused quite an uproar. Then there was an election and the mergers were blocked. I was the one who was the most surprised to see Paul Demarais Sr. admit to the media, three or four weeks ago, that his one mistake in life was supporting the merger of Canadian banks. Paul Demarais was not born yesterday. He has met all the heads of state. He was one of the biggest advocates of bank mergers. He regrets it bitterly because the fact that we blocked bank mergers is the reason that Canada weathered the crisis the best. It has nothing to do with the Conservative government, which was in favour of bank mergers, and it has nothing to do with the Liberals either because they were also in favour of bank mergers but decided to oppose them at the last minute—because of the election, I suppose.

We were always against those mergers, from start to finish. Once again, we stood up for Quebec. That allowed Canada to weather the crisis. Once again, Quebecers came to Canada's rescue. That happens quite often. Some might say too often, since Quebec does not get the rewards it deserves.

There is also the important question of pension funds. This morning I had the chance—or the sad duty, as I told the people who invited me—of attending a march with former Fraser employees. They were all retired workers who saw their August and September pension cheques cut by 40% on average. One worker came to see me and told me that his retirement pension had been cut by 58%. What a difficult situation.

For the past five years here in Ottawa, we have been calling for programs to help the forestry industry. That industry was the first to be affected, even before the big crisis. The government started to react when Ontario was affected by the automotive crisis, but the forestry crisis had already been going on for three years before the recent financial and banking crisis. This was not important to the government, since it was happening primarily in Quebec and in the northern areas of some provinces. The fact remains that this bad financial situation led to losses for many companies.

Now the government is telling us that it is a question of markets, or lack thereof, even though what the big forestry companies wanted was loan guarantees, which are allowed by the WTO. We have proven that in this House. Was the problem in the automobile sector not a market problem? Cars were not selling. Yet the Conservatives still gave the auto industry \$10 billion to help it through the crisis, which was causing a drop in the market. They did not do the same thing for the forestry industry. In fact, that is why the Bloc voted against the most recent budget.

Let us go back to pension funds. Today, 200 Fraser workers and their families organized a march. Approximately 300 pensioners have been affected. They were there to try to make sense of the situation. The owner of Fraser is the majority owner of Brookfield Renewable Power. This corporation made more than \$900 million in profits for the period ending December 31, 2009. The majority shareholder is a multi-billion dollar corporation that posted huge profits even during the economic downturn. The employees have difficulty understanding why governments allow a rich multinational to close its subsidiaries, to place them in bankruptcy, when the unfunded liabilities of their pension fund total \$175 million.

● (1645)

Considering Brookfield's profit of almost \$980 billion at the end of the 2009 fiscal year, this amount would have been acceptable had the company been nudged by governments to cover the liability, given that it was very rich. I am putting myself in the shoes of these workers and their families, who are wondering how this can be permitted. How can governments allow a multi-billion dollar corporation, through its subsidiary, to go bankrupt with the result that the workers, who have worked all their lives for the company, have their income cut by 40%?

In the La Lièvre and La Petite-Nation area, that amounts to \$470,000 less per month and \$5 million less per year in the local economy. Some will say that it is a small business and that 300 employees are not very many. However, the same thing has happened with other companies such as Nortel and AbitibiBowater. Once again, I was reading the Nortel agreement in which the employees instructed the government to make risky investments in order to not lose their pension income. They instructed the government, which is now managing their pension fund, to make risky investments. Is there someone somewhere who will stand by these investments in these times? It is suicide, but that is the decision they made in order to not lose their monthly income. We shall see what happens in the medium and the long term.

As for AbitibiBowater, the corporation negotiated a secret agreement. All we know is that governments allowed it, and that the union consented. Governments will say that the union said yes. But what choice did it have? When the time comes to renegotiate an agreement allowing a corporation to forego making up the pension shortfall, the choices are approve it or watch the company close its doors. The reality is that the employees are doomed and governments give their approval. But afterwards, governments take no responsibility. They say yes to the company and give it five to ten years to make up the pension shortfall. In the case of AbitibiBowater, rumour has it that it may even have up to fifteen years. Once again, if the company does not make it and declares bankruptcy, the employees have the most to lose. Governments do not have a plan because the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act does not protect the unfunded liabilities of pension funds, even if they were approved by governments. The government does not want to change the law.

The Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-270, which would create a refundable tax credit to cover such losses. The government is not interested. The Liberals and the Conservatives oppose it. They say we must not spend money.

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That is how it starts, with 300 Fraser employees losing 40% of their income. It will happen with other companies. In this region, many people are employed by the government, with good pension plans. But one day, a political party will get elected by promising a 35% cut in pension plans for public servants, to save money or to invest it elsewhere. As was mentioned earlier, the Liberals pillaged \$54 billion from the employment insurance fund surplus to spend on their budget. The Conservatives keep telling us here that the Liberals pillaged \$54 billion and spent it. But when the Conservatives were bringing in \$17 billion a year, they never offered to pay back the money taken from the employment insurance fund. Now, when we want to improve the plan, the government says that we need to increase premiums. The government would never tell us to take the \$54 billion that was originally pillaged to try to cover other expenses. No, it will blame the Liberals, but it would never do that. Inevitably, it is always the worker who pays.

In the case of the Fraser employees, it is the workers who pay. Their income has dropped by 40%. They are between 64 and 75, and 75 and 80 years of age, and they cannot find a new job, because now is not a good time to try to find one. So they have to cut expenses and are forced to pinch pennies after spending their whole lives working.

Let us all think about it. One day, we will be pensioners ourselves. If our governments decided to cut our pension fund by 40%, I do not think that we would be happy about it. This will happen because we will have allowed multi-billion dollar companies like Brookfield to cut employee pension funds, claiming that it was just that one company. Then, there will be another. In the end, all pension funds will be cut by 25% to 30%. Will federal, provincial and municipal public servants be able to protect their pension funds? No. One day, the majority will say that the government must cut all pension funds. I thought that the bill before us would address this situation.

• (1650)

So it must be understood that in committee the Bloc Québécois will do everything it can to make the government understand that it could show some interest in jurisdictional issues. Should Ottawa, Quebec or the provinces be managing this? We also need to discuss the real problem. When the plans post actuarial losses and governments have covered those losses, how will the people be compensated? Often, because we do not want companies to close, these losses are authorized and this has happened on a medium, large and extra-large scale.

So we can try to reduce these losses for the people. I am not talking about eliminating them. But the 200 families that I saw today were resigned. They knew they were going to lose money. But when it is that much, it starts to hurt. At first, they thought it was a bad joke, but now they are not finding it so funny.

Often, these people are not the most educated, but, once again, they dig around and try to find out who the shareholders, the owners, are. For example, the majority shareholder of Brookfield is a multibillionaire who is still making billions of dollars in profit annually. This is paid out in dividends to dozens or hundreds or thousands of shareholders, but no more. There are not hundreds of thousands of shareholders, just tens of thousands. At some point, governments need to think about that.

Inevitably, one day the people will have the power and will try to put everything back in order. And you wonder why the Bloc Québécois does so well. It is because we are close to people and because, as I did this morning, we walk with the retirees to try and understand their situation, to try and sympathize with them but, above all, to try and see if we can find solutions. We were elected to represent them and to help them understand why they have lost 40% of their pension funds, of their life's work, and that, every month, that 40% will be lost.

Meanwhile, here in Parliament, we see Conservative government misspending, we see contracts going to friends of the party, we see all sorts of things going on. People wonder why politicians do not sit down with them to work out solutions. As I said, they are willing to make sacrifices. They know they are going to lose money, but is 40% a norm we should hope for or accept? It is unacceptable. We are going to have to sit down very soon to discuss the future of all the pension funds of all the companies.

Government employees often watch us and listen to us. One day, political parties will get elected by promising to cut pension funds by 35%, because that is the only way to get money back. That will happen because the government allowed private companies to cut their pension funds and stood by while banks made bad investments. The bank managers were not put in prison; they were given bonuses. That is what happened.

People see that and they realize that the bank managers, who were often paid to give talks, all lost money during the recent crisis, like sheep. It always amazed me that a chamber of commerce or some other organization would pay a bank manager to come and give a talk. They may have had all the staff they needed, but they all got caught with risky investments. They all lost money, and not one went to jail. I find that shocking. What is more, they are protected by all of us here, and we allow them to get outrageous bonuses, because the practice of paying bonuses is starting to take off again. Bank managers are getting bonuses because the banks are restructuring. They have laid off employees, yet they are entitled to bonuses.

No one ever thought they might lose everything because they had lost 25%, 30% or 40% of people's pension funds. No one ever thought that. Once again, it is time to stop standing up for the wealthy and start looking after the people with problems.

I would say that pension funds are a real problem. All of us need to use our position here in the House of Commons to stand up for our workers who pay taxes and who pay our salaries. If there were no workers and no pensioners who still pay taxes—because pensioners do pay taxes—we would be out of a job.

•(1655)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the parliamentary secretary rose to talk about one of the benefits of this bill, which is to change the rules on tax-free savings accounts. Evidently, there has been some abuse in the past year on the part of some high-level taxpayers who were over-contributing to TFSA's. Clearly, the government is on top of some of the abuse, but the parliamentary secretary did not say how many people are involved, how much money the government is trying to collect, or whether the government is even trying to collect it.

In addition, we know that between \$6 trillion and \$10 trillion is stashed away in tax havens around the world, and we are wondering what the government is doing to collect from some of the people who have been investing in tax havens. There were 100 people identified last year in the Liechtenstein bank situation. We know there were 1,800 Canadians identified with the recent Swiss bank information, which has been shared with Revenue Canada.

The question is, why is it only Germany and France, so far, that seem to have any interest in trying to track down these tax cheats, collect some of the money, and put up some figures to show how much they collected. We have heard nothing from the government over the last year and a half. They have said they have an amnesty in place, but there is no indication that they have collected one dime from any of the people investing in tax havens.

•(1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question.

My colleague is quite right about the TFSA. Canada's major banks were surveyed and earlier this week I heard that barely 30% of taxpayers old enough or otherwise eligible are using a TFSA. Once again, this measure helps only a few privileged people in society. This program has not been very popular.

On the other hand, it was a way for the government to further its election cause. It was more a election promise or commitment than something the people were really wishing for. Now we realize that there have been some abuses. It is quite likely that among the 30% who are benefiting from a TFSA, some are abusing the program.

We have heard nothing. My colleague is quite right. I heard a news report with the individual responsible for the investigation in France. He said he was surprised that some countries, including Canada, were not making any requests regarding the tax evasions, because he had a list of the individuals involved.

Is the Conservative government afraid of seeing who is on the list, because they might be friends of the Conservative Party? I do not know. There is a problem here. I am a member of Parliament and I was astounded to hear the person responsible for the investigation in France say that he was surprised that no one had contacted him. Canada has not requested any information about Canada.

I must thank Radio-Canada for going to interview that individual, but it is still a harsh reality to face. The government could be recovering money owed by some of the wealthiest people, yet it does

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nothing. However, when the time comes to crush my 300 Fraser workers and take away 40% of their pension, the government does absolutely nothing to protect them. This is hard to take.

[English]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Bloc friend has quite rightly concentrated his remarks on the impact that the economic cycles have on working Canadians.

He says that Canadians who are not working are not able to contribute to pension plans. He also makes the point that the actuarial costs of multinational corporations are paying a large dividend, and that the actuarial costs with respect to corporate pensions are not in keeping with the draw required for retirement. It is much less. Corporations are going out of business and leaving workers high and dry.

The Bloc and the opposition parties looked at amendments to EI that would tap into the many billions of dollars that are in the EI fund. That is a fund that has been set up by workers and contributors to be used not only as insurance but also as an investment in workers.

We have been castigated by the government because they say the draw is going to be \$10 billion on a fund that is now over \$50 billion.

My question to the member is, are the criticisms of his comments and the government's principles fair or unfair?

Does the member see the ability to use the employment insurance fund for protecting workers and investing in key corporations?

I have to take exception to his criticism of the payments to the automobile industry, given the spinoffs and multipliers generated by that industry, particularly in the province of Quebec.

I would like the member to respond to the criticisms having to do with using the fund for investment in workers, in light of the objectives that he has outlined.

•(1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I would point out to my colleague that the forestry industry creates two and half times as many jobs as the automobile industry. The economic spinoffs from the forestry industry are two and a half times greater than those of the automobile industry. A choice was made. I am aware that his party supported that choice, but he could acknowledge that roughly 35% of Quebec's economy is based on the forestry sector. It is a very important industry in Quebec.

When it comes to employment insurance, he only has it half right. Just last week, the Bloc Québécois called for a vote on a bill to improve the employment insurance system. The majority of Liberal members voted in favour of the bill, but the Leader of the Liberal Party left before the vote; I remember that quite clearly. He was criticized by the Conservatives and reminded of precisely what the parliamentary secretary was saying earlier, that this would cost \$7 billion and create a deficit.

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It is true that because of the current economic crisis, if we wanted to improve the employment insurance system, premiums would need to go up. How soon we forget that the EI fund contributed to reducing some of Canada's debt with the \$54 billion it had accumulated over the years. I take issue with the fact that the Liberal Party and its leader are not speaking out and telling the government to stop saying foolish things. It is true that the Liberal Party used money from the employment insurance fund for other purposes. However, today, it is time to use that money to help the unemployed, who deserve it. The Liberal leader should have put the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party in their place.

When we ask for improvements to the system, the Conservatives tell us they will have to raise the premiums for all workers. They do not need to raise workers' premiums. They need to take money out of the consolidated revenue fund, which is where the surpluses ended up. That is what we need to do to help the unemployed. It is as simple as that.

[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak briefly on what Bill C-47 means to most Canadians.

In general, this budget means very little to ordinary Canadians. It has little positive impact on them. Instead, it provides a road map for the large corporations to use in reaping greater profits and for the average working Canadian to lose faith in their government. What this budget bill does not do is provide any relief for the unemployed or any hope to those who are in imminent danger of losing their employment.

Let us look at the record of the finance minister. He has wasted away a \$13 billion surplus that was left to him as a legacy to protect for the Canadian people. This was left to him by the prudent and excellent fiscal managers, the previous Liberal governments, under the leadership of Prime Minister Chrétien and Prime Minister Martin. What did the minister do? In good economic times, he wasted away the surplus and has now turned the \$13 billion surplus into a \$53 billion deficit. This is in good economic times, and he wishes Canadians to believe that he can manage their money in bad economic times.

Canadians need to be told how the finance minister intends to add further to this deficit by borrowing more money to pay for unneeded tax cuts for big businesses to the tune of approximately \$6 billion, another \$16 billion on new fighter jets, and untold billions wasted through mismanagement of the economic stimulus package. Why is it that the Conservatives preach fiscal responsibility but practice the complete opposite? The minister is the brains behind the biggest-spending government in the nation's history.

The current finance minister has a history in Ontario of destroying finances. He did it in Ontario by borrowing money to give tax breaks. He cut hospital funding, which led to the closure of 26 hospitals and layoffs for some 16,000 nurses. He left Ontario in a huge deficit, which Ontario is still reeling from. In many economic and financial circles, the finance minister has been labelled the architect of deficit.

The Conservatives and the finance minister take credit for Canada's being able to do better than others during the economic

crisis. But let us look at the facts. Canada was able to buffer the economic crisis because the Liberals did not allow bank mergers and put in strict financial controls, so that we would not have a sub-prime mortgage scenario. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Prime Minister Paul Martin also ensured that the CPP was funded for 75 years.

What did the current finance minister do? Remember the introduction of a 40-year mortgage with no down payment? It smells like a sub-prime mortgage. Remember trying to create or dip into the CPP to pay for boutique tax cuts? Is that really economic sense?

The opposition stopped him. Instead of taking credit for fiscal management, it is high time that the Conservatives took a hard look in the mirror and realized that they have been the biggest spenders since Confederation, turning a \$13 billion surplus into a \$54 billion deficit, and overspending by \$70 billion. And for what? They have nothing to show for it except a huge, growing deficit. And to compound their economic incompetence, guess what else has been done?

● (1710)

The Conservatives have the temerity to give, through EDC, a loan to a foreign company to the tune of \$1 billion. This foreign company is Vale, a Brazilian company. For those who do not know it, it was Vale Inco that created a hostile environment for workers at the Sudbury mine and then shut them out for a year.

Is this how Canadian taxpayers are treated by the government? Their hard-earned money is being given away to foreign corporations that have no intention of fulfilling their obligations to give work to Canadians, and to boot, the Canadian workers have to foot the bill. How do they foot the bill for this economic incompetence?

Canadian workers will have to fork out higher EI premiums. The effect of this tax on small and medium-sized enterprises and hard-working Canadians will be to the tune of \$13 billion.

This pattern of Conservatives taxing the middle and lower income people and giving breaks to their friends in large corporations, both domestic and foreign, is a very similar pattern that we have seen recently.

The government is spending \$16 billion on untendered contracts for jets, which will not create any jobs for Canada or benefit any regions and which even the Pentagon thinks is a wrong choice. Members should think this through: \$16 billion has nine zeroes after 16. What could be done with this money if invested in a Canadian company, in Canada, or if a Canadian company could bid? The multiplier effects are tremendous. There would be millions of good-paying professional jobs.

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It is simply unfortunate that, every day, working Canadians will be paying more as they worry about keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table. These decent Canadians will have to pay through their noses while the corporate friends of the Conservative government get to boast to their international colleagues about paying the lowest rates of tax in the industrialized world. I need to emphasize that the large corporations do not create jobs. In fact, they drain jobs away. It is the small and medium-sized enterprises that need the benefit.

How does the government then have the temerity to show such utter contempt for the vast majority of working Canadians while giving money to those who least need it?

In the past, some governments have talked of a trickle-down theory in which the wealth of the rich would somehow trickle down to those with much less. The Conservative government seems to favour the flooding-up theory, in which they take desperately needed funds from the average worker and small businesses and just dump it on those who will use it to buy toys, a second Mercedes, et cetera. Canadians want and deserve better.

I would like to give a few examples of the government's economic mismanagement. Let us look at the stimulus package.

The government's stimulus plan created photo opportunities for ministers and Conservative backbenchers to pose with oversized cheques with Conservative Party logos on them. The real truth is that it has yet to be revealed where these billions of dollars have been spent.

We have found some examples. In Kitimat, B.C., \$2,316 was used to purchase a portable dance floor. In Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, a group received \$404,416 to build a floating gazebo. In Maniwaki, Quebec, the owners of Auberge du draveur received a \$212,500 federal grant to install a glass dome over their terrace pool.

We now know that rather than wanting results that would benefit unemployed Canadians and those in danger of losing their jobs, the government's priority was to situate signs on every piece of wall and fence and it demanded that 8,500 public workers would go and do that job for it.

● (1715)

If the Prime Minister and his colleagues were a little more interested in running the government for the benefit of all Canadians rather than changing government websites to Tory blue colour schemes, I might be a little less critical. Unfortunately, there is little good I can say about the budget and the government, except to say it has finally done something that I thought almost impossible. It makes Brian Mulroney look good.

Aside from a feel good campaign in the stimulus area, what jobs have actually been created?

The minister responsible for infrastructure and his officials are still unable to show how many jobs have really been created or have been saved by these stimulus funds. In fact, they have made a conscious effort or decision not to track these numbers. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has complained that the government is frustrating his efforts in getting the real numbers and what exactly this expenditure created.

Let us look at some of the areas where I think there is incomprehensible economic thinking.

One wonders why the government, between 2009 and 2014, is planning to borrow about \$156 billion which would then cost the taxpayer \$10 billion in interest payments each and every year for decades to come. Borrow \$156 billion and add another \$10 billion every year. Does that make economic sense, especially when the government is trying to state that it wants to create a recovery? There is no recovery when the government keeps digging the hole deeper and deeper.

To boot, the government is going to spend \$13 billion on constructing jails for unreported crime. One wonders what the purpose is. We need to get to the bottom of economic thinking.

When it comes to giving prisoners an opportunity to work, the government says no and gives us no rationale for killing the prison farm system. The farm system has been proven to be beneficial not only to the prisoners, but to the system itself by providing low-cost food. It also provides many prisoners the first responsible job that they have had in their lives.

The government would rather have prisoners locked in their cells wasting away than learn a viable work ethic. The government will feign surprise when the recidivism rate climbs up to the 70% figure of our neighbours to the south.

What could have been done with the money? What are the alternatives? We can talk about the mismanagement, the bad spending, et cetera, but what is the issue here? The issue is Canadians who are dying to get a job, Canadians who are struggling to pay their mortgages, Canadians who are struggling to put food on the table.

What could the government do? It could do a lot of things. For example, the \$1.2 billion that it wasted on a 72-hour photo op could have been utilized to give relief to caregivers. There are many caregivers in Canada. There are approximately three million caregivers who look after their elderly parents or their sick children. It is important for this sandwich generation to be given some relief.

● (1720)

There are so many other areas in which the government could have worked to help Canadians. Instead, it reduces the corporate tax, thereby reducing its revenue by \$6 billion, which it could ill afford, and for corporations that really do not create jobs. Small and medium-sized enterprises create one job in eight.

What could the government have done? What can the government do with the \$13 billion that it is planning to spend on building prisons for unreported crime?

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We could use that money to address the deterrents of crime. We could use the money to alleviate poverty and illiteracy. There could be money for mental health and affordable housing. There are so many things the government can do that are positive for Canadians in general. It is important that the government listen.

As I review this I just cannot believe that the government keeps on increasing taxes. It created a payroll tax and it will increase the EI premiums in 2011 for both employees and employers. This will have a negative impact.

A lot of small and medium-sized enterprises are run by women. Women, who form 50% of the population, will get a double whammy. They are there as sole proprietors and they will have to fork out more in EI premiums. They work individually or as a collective and they employ people. The problem they are facing is that they do not only look after the economics of their business, but they also look after the family. Sometimes they have to bear the burden of caregiving.

With this double whammy, I would ask the government, why does it not change its thinking and not focus on ideology but on investing in Canadians? It is important to invest in Canadians.

In conclusion, if the Finance Minister and the Prime Minister stay the course they are following, they will not have any economic recovery. They will crash and the economy will go into a tailspin. There are issues around the environment and issues around programs, and it is important that these be fixed.

The budget reinforces my belief that the Conservatives are not here for the average Canadian, and unless they change their minds, they are only here for their friends in big business.

• (1725)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to address this bill, the second budget implementation act. I did not actually hear the member address any of the contents of the bill in her speech. I would like to perhaps highlight three sections of the bill.

This bill allows for the sharing of the Canada child tax benefit, the universal child care benefit, and the goods and services tax or harmonized sales tax credit for eligible shared-custody parents. That certainly seems like a good idea.

It allows registered retirement savings plan proceeds to be transferred to a registered disability savings plan on a tax-deferred basis, which is a very popular measure.

The third item I want to highlight is that it expands the availability of accelerated capital cost allowance, which is depreciation, for clean energy generation.

These items are on the first page of the bill.

Can the member address these three items and inform the House as to whether she and the Liberal Party support these three measures in Bill C-47?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, my biggest consternation is that the government has no money in its kitty. The government is saying that it will give from one hand, but it takes from the other.

The government has taken away research and innovation. It has killed programs and then reinvented them. Why does the government talk from both sides of its mouth?

I want to see what is there for the average Canadian, the Canadian who is trying to put food on the table, the Canadian family that is trying to send its kids to school, the Canadian family that is trying to get its kids to university. Where is it?

Canadian firms need technology, but the government kills research and development, kills what the scientists present, and then it claims that it is doing something wonderful. That is not valid.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over and over again I have heard Liberal speakers in the House criticizing the budget implementation process, with Bill C-9 and Bill C-47. With Bill C-9, they complained about the airline tax increases that would raise airline tax fees 50%, bringing them much higher than competing American airlines from which Canadian airlines were trying to draw business. They criticized the provisions of the omnibus budget bill of 880 pages that threw in things like the privatization of the remailers with Canada Post. Then when all was said and done, the Liberals ended up supporting the government, keeping the government in power by making certain that 30 of their members walked out just before the vote.

Are the Liberals going to continue this practice of keeping the government in power, or this time are they going to vote with other members in the opposition and defeat the government on this budget bill? If they are so opposed to the budget, then why do they not vote against it?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I do not need to take lessons from a party that killed Kelowna, that killed Kyoto, that killed child care and that killed the cities agenda. NDP members had absolutely no principles when they went to bed with the Conservatives.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for loss of retirement income), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 98 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 20, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Is it the will of the House that we see the clock at 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

SYDNEY HARBOUR

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand and bring forward once again on the floor of the House the situation with the Sydney Harbour dredging project.

To recount, this question was asked back in May when there was an opportunity that presented itself to realize something for which the people in the broader Cape Breton area had been advocating for a number of years, and that was the dredging of the mouth of Sydney Harbour.

At that time, a contractor was in a position where he was able to book time and schedule the dredging. Hence, missing that window of opportunity would further drive up the cost of this project. The attributes of this project are well-documented and have been discussed in the House before.

I think the project will get done, but the cost will rise if the government continues to drag its feet on this. With the municipality on board and the province now committed to this project, I hope this project will get done.

More specific, what concerns the people in Cape Breton is this. We worked for a great number of years to have the tar ponds cleaned up. We had a legacy of steelmaking in Sydney, which had an incredibly negative impact on the environment. Therefore, we worked hard to get the money set aside so we could get the tar ponds

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cleaned up. That project is moving along, but still there are a number of years left.

The talk now is that the government might look at taking money out of that project and putting it into the dredging project, which would be a terrible mistake. We are this close to cleaning up the tar ponds. It would be terrible to mess with that money now. I ask the government today to make that commitment not to dip into the tar ponds fund for the cleanup, because the cleanup will happen.

The second issue is this. I recognize my hon. colleague from Restigouche and the great work he did as the ACOA critic. I would like the government respond as well to a piece of information he received under an ATIP, which indicated that the government had made \$174 million in announcements through the Atlantic Gateway program. To date \$788,000 have been spent, a fairly significant discrepancy.

Could the government explain the commitment to the dredging, without dipping into the tar ponds fund, and could it explain the discrepancy between the \$174 million announced and the \$788,000 spent?

• (1735)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do have to say that I am a little surprised that the member would raise this issue this evening. I am also surprised that it even made it to the late show because, of course, the late show is supposed to be for questions that were not answered in the House, and this question was very clearly answered in the House. The minister answered it very clearly and the hon. member decided not to hear the answer.

At the risk of repeating myself, I will answer it again. However, one question needs to be asked here, and the question specifically was on the dredging of Sydney Harbour, so the question does need to be asked, since the member got off on the tar ponds. I will say that it was a Conservative government that finally started the process of cleaning up the tar ponds.

However, with regard to the dredging of Sydney Harbour, one need only look at the 13 years that the member's government was in power to see that it never even considered dredging Sydney Harbour. If it ever gets dredged, I am sure it will be a Conservative government that does that as well.

I do thank the member for his question because it gives me an opportunity to come here tonight and perhaps straighten out some of the misunderstanding around this issue. The government recognizes there is a lot of interest. I have met with a number of individuals from Cape Breton on Sydney Harbour, so we recognize that there is a lot of interest around dredging Sydney Harbour. We also know that it is a complex and costly undertaking that requires the involvement of all levels of government, municipal, provincial and federal, as well as the private sector.

The Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has had a very productive meeting with representatives from the province, and he will continue to work with them and any other stakeholders involved.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would remind the member opposite, however, that our government has made historic and unprecedented investments in Cape Breton, and this is outside of the tar ponds, which was our government's initiative. We have 14 projects through the community adjustment fund worth \$6 million, 41 projects through the recreational infrastructure Canada fund worth \$2.9 million, 64 projects in the innovative community fund worth \$22.2 million and \$2.6 million investment through the Atlantic innovation fund. When leveraged with other levels of government and private investment, this becomes \$4.5 million. I could go on and on.

What should be clear to the member opposite is that while the Liberals are busy playing politics with this issue, on this side of the House we are trying to get things done.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I received the same response from the member that I received from the minister that day, which is a total misrepresentation of history. In 2003, the money was allocated for the Sydney tar ponds. We went into a full panel review and the review came out bulletproof.

All those guys did was announce it. It would be like my paper boy coming and delivering the *Cape Breton Post* and taking credit for the editorial. Those guys cut a ribbon. The work was done, the money was booked and it was not borrowed money. It was budgeted money, the money that those guys have spent. It will be our children and our grandchildren who will be paying.

All I want to know is whether the Conservatives will clean this up. It must be cleaned up. They know it will be cleaned up. We will certainly clean it up. However, they should not be doing it with tar ponds money.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Again, Mr. Speaker, I cannot quite understand for the life of me where the hon. member is coming from, where he gets all his information, where the tinfoil is too thin and the conspiracy theories are flying left, right and centre.

I want to be totally respectful because we do share a common interest. We are both Leafs fans and he made an analogy to that in his question. I do not want to continue this on too long because the season opener is tonight. They are playing the Habs and no one would want to miss that, so I will bring this to a close.

I can honestly say that the member's new-found interest in dredging Sydney Harbour quite amazes me. The member's party sat in government for 13 years and refused to even consider dredging Sydney Harbour. He did not sit there for 13 years but his government did. I have been here since 1997 and during that time the only consistent advocate for the dredging of Sydney Harbour has been the MLA for Cape Breton North, Cecil Clarke.

● (1740)

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 14 I asked the government a series of questions related to the damage it has inflicted upon Canadians with respect to its economic mismanagement. The basic thrust was that the Conservative government operates on a policy of borrow and spend.

Canadian families are struggling with debt loads that even the OECD has found to be the highest in the industrialized world. While the government claims the economy has created jobs, the fact is that

those jobs are either of short duration or of lower quality than Canadians require. As was mentioned in question period today, there has been a serious net loss of jobs since the Conservative government came to power.

The fact is that this government has been the biggest spending government in Canadian history. It has had the biggest deficit in Canadian history and it is growing. It has taken the country from surplus to deficit and seems to have no real direction.

We have a government that, instead of actually dealing with problems, somehow believes in the purchase of untendered stealth fighter aircraft costing \$16 billion. We have a Prime Minister who is bringing on his staff an individual who represents interests that will benefit from the signing of the contract for that same fighter aircraft.

To sum up the mismanagement and how the government is borrow and spend, there are \$16 billion for untendered aircraft, \$9 billion for additional prisons, \$30 million in additional costs for a census that will provide less reliable information, and a \$6 billion tax cut for corporations that already pay the lowest corporate taxes as compared to much of the world.

Let us look at a sector that I know well, and that is the agriculture sector. Farmers in this country are leaving the industry at about 3,600 annually. The government said it would live up to its commitment when it advanced payments under the advance payments program as emergency assistance to the livestock industry. It committed that livestock producers would not have to pay back those moneys until "conditions improve". Instead, the minister has now announced a payback. The government is insisting on a rapid payback, regardless of the kinds of circumstances producers face, and that is going to drive many producers into default.

This is a government that shortchanges our critical food inspection system. CFIA's own auditor has clearly pointed out that imported foods coming from other countries around the world do not meet the same kinds of safety standards as Canadian domestic foods do. Worse, Canadian producers are required to meet a regulatory regime in Canada, with production standards and the materials they have to use, that actually makes our farmers less competitive with imported products. That is wrong. It is time the government stood up for Canadians.

I again ask the government, why is it borrowing money from our grandchildren, basically, to give corporations cuts in taxes when they are already the lowest in the world?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Malpeque for his rambling question. I guess it was somewhat on the economy. That is what I was prepared to answer.

Adjournment Proceedings

Most of his comments here tonight were very much fact free. He alluded to a net loss of jobs since the Conservatives took power in January 2006. Let me set the record straight. It is publicly laid out that there have been 950,000 net new jobs since January 2006, coincidentally that is how long the Conservatives have been governing.

I would encourage that member to get his facts correct, because there will be some people watching this tonight who might actually think that the member had his facts straight when he did not.

I was very disappointed and a little sad to hear the Liberal member spew the tired Liberal tax-and-spend rhetoric that hearkens back to the failed economic policies of the 1970s. We all remember who was in power then.

It is a clear indication that the Liberal Party, especially under their current leader, has shifted to the extreme left of the political spectrum. We hear it in the Liberal leader's language and in the way he lashes out at the private sector. We saw it again this evening. They are lashing out at private businesses as if they are an enemy.

We see it in the Liberal leader's economic policies supporting tax increases, like the GST hike that they would like to put back; a carbon tax that was alluded to today; and punishment of job creators with higher taxes. Clearly, this is a Liberal leader whose unending devotion to a tax-and-spend philosophy would harm the Canadian economy and kill jobs.

However, this is not a debate about the Liberal plan to punish businesses with higher taxes, or a debate about the Liberal plan to hike the GST or bring in a job-killing carbon tax. This is a debate about jobs. The Liberals do not understand that the private sector creates jobs and drives Canada's economy. That is why they want to take more and more money away from businesses and from taxpayers in every part of this country, including in Malpeque, and funnel it into bigger Liberal government schemes.

That is a recipe for disaster. That is a recipe for driving away investment and killing jobs. I know the Liberal Party does not understand that higher taxes kill jobs and harm the economy, but it is a fact.

I ask the Liberal Party to listen to the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, which said:

Businesses are increasingly making decisions in a global economy, so it is crucial that the federal government remain visibly committed to reducing corporate tax rates.

Staying the course on reducing the corporate income tax rate is essential to attracting investment, enhancing Canada's competitiveness and creating prosperity.

• (1745)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary, and it amazes me how the parliamentary secretary reinvents history.

It has always been Liberal governments that took Conservative deficits and brought back surpluses. The government that sits in power today was left with a surplus of \$13 billion, and it blew it. It spent it all away.

What is it doing today? It already has the biggest deficit in Canadian history: \$54 billion for this year and probably going higher. It is going to borrow and spend. It is going to borrow money to spend \$16 billion for untendered aircraft. It is going to borrow that money from our grandchildren. It is a borrow-and-spend government.

I think it is time the government did something for middle class Canadians, for Canadians who want to care for their aging parents, something along the lines that the Liberal leader has asked for.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, once again, the member was rather fact free in his rebuttal and what I am assuming was a question.

I remind those hon. members who are still here about the dangerous tax-and-spend rhetoric that the Liberals continue to spew. Here is another fact: the Canadian Manufacturers reflected on what the Liberal Party's plans may be by saying:

Canadian business investment needed to sustain an economic recovery is threatened by [the] Liberal Party Leader[s]...pledge to scrap planned corporate tax cuts...I do not think we can afford the uncertainty right now if you want companies to make big investments in Canada.

According to respected academic Jack Mintz of the University of Calgary, "If the federal opposition parties get their way, these remaining corporate tax reductions will be put off, reversing our march to more job-creating".

• (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:50 p.m.)

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