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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, June 6, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 6, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1405)

[*English*]

HOCKEY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to recognize the Pembroke Lumber Kings as this year's National Junior A Hockey champions.

Known as “Hockeytown Canada”, Pembroke has a rich tradition of hockey excellence. This is the first national title for Pembroke.

The Pembroke Lumber Kings earned the right to play for the RBC Cup, which is presented to the National Junior A champions, by first winning the Central Canada Hockey League championship and then the Fred Page Cup to advance to the RBC Cup as the eastern Canadian representative.

The Ottawa Valley is well-known for its sporting traditions and contributions to the history of hockey. By defeating the two-time defending champion, Vernon Vipers, in thrilling fashion, they rewarded their loyal fans and added a new chapter to the hockey lore of the Ottawa Valley.

I commend the Lumber Kings' players and coaches for their outstanding performances. I also recognize the Vernon Vipers for their valiant title defence. Their defence of the RBC Cup demonstrated the passion, skill and competitive spirit that make hockey the world's most dynamic and thrilling sport.

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[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 2, a very large majority of the people of Gatineau voted for change, and I said I would deliver their message. Clearly, health is the number one issue for the people of Gatineau, and I promised strong leadership to ensure solid support from the federal government.

There are desperate needs in my riding. In May, at times, it got to the point where the Gatineau hospital's emergency room was filled to

over 200% of capacity, and the Gatineau CSSS had to ask people to avoid emergency room visits.

In 2010 and 2011, the average wait time to see a doctor was approximately 24 hours. In 14% of cases, wait times exceeded 48 hours. We all want a more effective health care system that meets everyone's needs.

From the very first day of the election campaign, the NDP, my leader and I put health care at the top of our priority list. The government said in the Speech from the Throne that it will help to ensure the stability of the health care system and will work to reduce wait times while respecting provincial jurisdictions.

I am prepared to begin working with the government and Quebec immediately in order to give the people of Gatineau the health care system that they deserve.

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[*English*]

STREETSVILLE BREAD AND HONEY FESTIVAL

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first let me express my congratulations to your on being elected as our Speaker.

This past weekend I participated in the Streetsville Bread and Honey Festival, which is a very popular local event in my riding. Founded in 1973, it has become an annual event celebrating the historic backbone of Streetsville's economy, which was its five major mill sites along on the Credit River. Honey was included to reflect the many small apiaries existing at the time the festival began.

The festival was run by over 300 volunteers over the three days. Thanks go to local business, community groups and service clubs that donated thousands of hours of their time for this event.

I give special thanks to David Mosley, Sandy Pitts, Lucie Muldoon, Kathy Dineley, Gary Clipperton, Greg Landry, Kevin Little, Christine Simundson, Suzanne Tierney, Bill Vautour, Reg Vertolli, Duncan Wilcock and Al Yoemans for their outstanding leadership of this great event.

*Statements by Members***D-DAY**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Vancouver Quadra, proud home of the 39th Brigade, I rise to recognize the 67th anniversary of D-Day and to honour the tens of thousands of valiant soldiers, sailors and pilots who invaded Normandy's coast on June 6, 1944 and who changed the course of World War II.

On D-Day, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division stormed Juno Beach facing fierce opposition and Canadian soldiers secured a critical bridgehead for the allied invasion. The liberation of Europe and the defeat of Nazi Germany soon followed.

[*Translation*]

These brave Canadians left their loved ones behind to fight for freedom, democracy and peace—fundamental values for Canadians.

Their legacy endures as we also pay tribute to our men and women in uniform serving in Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Sudan and here at home.

On behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada and all Canadians, I salute these men and women and I wish to express my profound gratitude to all Canadian veterans.

[*English*]

We will remember.

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AJAX—PICKERING

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the people of Ajax—Pickering. Poised between the blue water of Lake Ontario and the highlands of Durham, with its roots in first nations and around the world, in the tests of war and the promise of peace, from Carruthers Creek to the Rouge Valley, our community brings economic dynamism, youthful creativity and enriching diversity to Canada's table.

In the last election, the electors of Ajax—Pickering sent a clear message to the House. They want us to get Canada's economic recovery right. Amid global uncertainty and competition, we need to generate jobs that sustain growth, secure financial stability, unlock new markets and harness innovation.

My family has been proud to call Ajax—Pickering home since returning from Afghanistan in 2009. We are humbled by the confidence our neighbours showed in us on May 2.

As we begin this 41st Parliament, with its justifiable focus on our economic future, I will aim to discharge this trust by hard work and tenacity.

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[*Translation*]

VETERANS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start with warm thanks to the voters of the riding of Québec for the confidence they showed in me in the May 2 election. People voted for change and for MPs who will listen to their socio-economic

concerns and I will do everything in my power to live up to those expectations.

Today, June 6, 67 years after the Normandy landing—as my Liberal colleague pointed out—a day when so many young men and young women sacrificed themselves to defend our values against oppression, we remember them with gratitude, respect and pride.

Let us keep their memory in mind as we face today's challenges and as other young people follow in their footsteps, serving their country in Afghanistan and Libya.

Our past and future veterans deserve our unwavering support.

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● (1410)

[*English*]

LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease, is a fatal motor neuron disease that affects approximately 3,000 Canadians. Eighty percent of those affected by this terrible disease pass away within five years of diagnosis, being unable to breathe or swallow.

This cause is very close to my heart as my father succumbed to ALS a number of years ago. After my personal encounter with this disease, I introduced a private member's bill to have the month of June officially designated as National ALS Month. Each year at this time, friends, family and supporters of those suffering from ALS dedicate their time and energy to increase the knowledge of this devastating disease and to raise funds for a cure.

I encourage each member to wear a cornflower today to show their support for finding a cure for this devastating disease. I would also encourage all Canadians to help us find a cure for ALS by supporting or volunteering for their local ALS organization.

* * *

PAKISTAN

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is gravely concerned by the abduction and killing of Pakistani journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad.

Despite threats to his safety, he courageously reported on the terrorism and extremism that have undermined the security and stability of the people of Pakistan.

I wish to extend, on behalf of the Government of Canada, our deepest sympathy to his family and friends and to all Pakistanis for their loss.

Canada strongly believes that the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the effective functioning of a free and responsible media remain a cornerstone of democratic societies and are essential to the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

This murder is a blow to the advancement of these values in Pakistan. We welcome the announcement by the government of Pakistan that it will undertake an investigation to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

*Statements by Members***NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for my first statement in the House of Commons, I must acknowledge the constituents of the great riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl and thank them for their support.

For the first time since Confederation in 1949, Newfoundland and Labrador is represented by two New Democrat MPs in this esteemed Chamber. We may not have the raw MP numbers of the other provinces, but the way I like to see it, the member for St. John's East and I make up for it by being from Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have a quick note for Conservative members opposite. If they look to the stained glass window the furthest to their right, they will see the pitcher plant, the official flower of Newfoundland and Labrador. How privileged they are to sit across from such a raw and rugged beauty. The stained glass window also faces toward Newfoundland and Labrador. I ask members to look to the pitcher plant when they speak of my province. But be warned, the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

* * *

HOCKEY

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first off, I want to thank the constituents of Elmwood Transcona for the confidence they have shown in me by electing me to represent them. I look forward to serving them well for many years.

Speaking of Winnipeg, last week was a great week for all the people of Manitoba. We have been waiting a long time for our NHL team. It built the MTS Centre. We have had the Manitoba Moose and a trip to the Calder Cup finals. We have had pre-season NHL games.

Last week our dream came true. New generations of Winnipeg hockey fans will discover new hockey heroes, the likes of the "Golden Jet", Dale Hawerchuk, and Teemu Selanne.

As the Winnipeg Jets, Thrashers, Moose or otherwise, Manitoba's team is back and we are anxiously awaiting a Stanley Cup celebration down at The Forks.

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●(1415)

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, congratulations to all hon. members on being elected. I will start by thanking the voters of my riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

In 1989, 23 years ago, the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Canada currently ranks in the unenviable position of 25th out of the 33 OECD countries in terms of the percentage of gross domestic product devoted to social programs. We cannot turn a blind eye: poverty exists in Canada.

The voters in my riding and the rest of Canada expect the government to take concrete action to eliminate poverty in Canada.

[*English*]

1989 TIANANMEN SQUARE PROTEST

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's relations with China are positive, comprehensive and enduring. Canada will continue to promote and engage constructively with China on human rights.

With this in mind, I draw to the attention of the House the fact that June 4 marks the 22nd anniversary of the violent crackdown on pro-democracy forces in Tiananmen Square. We express our deepest condolences to those who lost friends and family in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

We urge China to account for those who remain missing, and to release those who continue to be imprisoned two decades later for their participation in this non-violent event.

In light of the ongoing suppression in China of freedom of expression, freedom of religion and other universally held human rights, we urge the Government of China to abide by international human rights standards and to engage in ongoing and open dialogue with its people about the events of 1989.

* * *

FORMER LEADER OF LIBERAL PARTY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a day when we are welcoming and celebrating the contribution of former parliamentarians, their parents and grandparents, whose memory they are respecting today, I would like to offer congratulations on behalf of the Liberal Party to all those who ran, either winning or losing, in the last election.

We all know that trying to represent our constituents is one of the great honours and pleasures of our own lives, but above all we have to reflect on those who fought so hard and who were not returned, or who wait for another occasion to be returned.

In that spirit, I would like, in this, my first statement as interim leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, to pay particular tribute to my former leader Mr. Michael Ignatieff, the former member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who served in this House with great distinction and who served the people of Canada with great ability. I know he will continue to go on to great public service, as he did before he came to this place and as he will afterwards.

* * *

D-DAY

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we also wish to acknowledge the 67th anniversary of D-Day, the first day of the major allied invasion of occupied France that led to the end of the second world war.

Oral Questions

On June 6, 1944, more than 450 Canadians parachuted inland before 15,000 Canadian troops stormed Juno Beach in the face of enemy fire. With courage and skill, the Canadians soon captured three shoreline positions.

The soldiers of the army, the air force and the navy continued fighting until August 25, 1944, when Paris was finally liberated. Nine months later the allies achieved final victory in Europe.

As we remember the contributions of those who landed on foreign shores 67 years ago, we honour Canada's brave service men and women who continue to serve today, and we remember that even if they are not physically injured, soldiers can still come home wounded.

We must never forget Canada's brave service men and women and their sacrifices.

Canada remembers D-Day and the Battle of Normandy.

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• (1420)

D-DAY

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 67 years ago the largest armada ever to face this planet arrived at Juno Beach, Sword, Gold and other beaches. It left the shores of England to free Europe. Sixty-seven years ago Operation Overlord started.

Those brave Canadians and their allies did not just stop in France, but went clear through Europe and ended up clearing the Nazis out of Holland, the country where I was born.

In fact my 89 year old mother called today asking me to wish this House of Commons well, as well as all the service men and women who served our country so bravely, and who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Those men and women left this country so that we could live in ours.

I am so proud to be a House of Commons representative, born in Holland, now serving the good constituents of Sackville—Eastern Shore in Nova Scotia.

On behalf of this party and all members of the House of Commons, we salute the brave men and women who have served in the past and who are serving today, and especially their families who have braved so much for this great country. God bless.

* * *

HOCKEY

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for four decades, British Columbians have rested their hopes in their hockey heroes.

In 1982 it was King Richard and Stan Smyl, led by Roger Neilsen and his white towel. We knew they would never surrender.

In 1994 it was Trevor, Kirk and Pavel taking us to game 7. We had never been so close.

Last year during the Olympics we saw what winning hockey gold could do for Canada.

Vancouver has waited since 1915 to see hockey's holy grail come back to the west coast.

I know what I will be doing tonight; I will be watching the hockey game.

We are all Canucks. Go, Canucks, go!

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the Prime Minister, the government and all members who were elected. I would also like to take this opportunity to remind the Conservatives that 60% of Canadian voters did not vote for them. After the recent campaign, the Prime Minister said he felt an obligation to work with all members of the House. I agree with him on that, but the Conservatives' tone did not change at all in the throne speech.

Where is the government's desire to work with others?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new Leader of the Opposition. His party was very successful in the recent election, and we can see the results of that here today. In the throne speech, we repeated the promises we made to voters during the election. The result is clear: we now have a stable majority Conservative government.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the election Canadians clearly voted for change and they clearly wanted members of Parliament to work together. That emotion and sentiment was very strong. They wanted a focus on their families and the issues that were affecting them each and every day.

New Democrats have committed to work respectfully, to end heckling and to give this place the decorum that it deserves. Will the government commit today to do the same?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are, of course, looking forward to a mandate in which we can move forward constructively on the issues that we talked about with Canadians and to have in this House a debate that is meaningful, thoughtful and focused on policy and on the values of Canadians.

I think we are going to have that in the years to come. It promises to be a very good, productive and constructive Parliament. I know that with our clear mandate, having laid out exactly what we would do to Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Peter Van Loan: —for Canadians, we certainly intend to carry through on those commitments and do exactly what we said we would do.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): I am sure the official record will show the sentiment that was just expressed, Mr. Speaker.

• (1425)

[Translation]

This spring has been extraordinary and unprecedented in the Arab world. The shift towards democracy is not an easy one. The people of those countries need support. Last month, the G8 promised \$20 billion, but there is nothing from Canada. The Conservatives do not seem to understand the importance of committing to helping these people make the transition.

Why has Canada isolated itself from its G8 allies?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of my time in the House, let me thank the electors of Ottawa West—Nepean and congratulate my friend, the new Leader of the Opposition, on an impressive result at election time. Let me tell him that our government and I are committed to working with him on this and other important issues.

I can correct the correct the record and tell the Leader of the Opposition that over the past few years, we have put more than a quarter of a billion dollars of new funding to support efforts that will be of direct benefit to the people of Egypt and Tunisia. Obviously, we are making an unprecedented commitment in Libya, and I look forward to working with the Leader of the Opposition and his team on this important issue.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBYA

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many cases of human rights abuses have recently been reported in Libya, particularly rape. This has happened in Benghazi, Tobruk, Brega, Misrata and many other cities throughout the country. Our top priority in Libya should be to provide humanitarian aid, particularly to women who are fleeing the violence.

Will the government commit to making this aid a priority, and will it help bring war criminals from the Gadhafi regime before the courts?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am equally concerned as the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie about the huge number of verified allegations with respect to sexual violence being used as a tool of war. I can report to the member opposite that I have had good discussions with her foreign affairs critic on this issue.

This morning I had a specific briefing on what we might do in Canada to tackle this issue, whether it is working with the International Criminal Court or providing tangible assistance either on the social services side or on the prosecution and policing side on this important issue. I would be very pleased to work with the

Oral Questions

member opposite on something that really should be a uniting force among all of us in the House, something that is reprehensible—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen tremendous change in the Arab world and Canadians support that change. They want to see their government do a bit more as we heard. G8 countries pledged \$20 billion for the Arab spring. There was no new money from Canada. There is nothing for Tunisia and nothing for Egypt. The government broke its 2008 throne speech promise to create a democratic development institute.

So, why is Canada not supporting these new democracies and why is the government out of step with the rest of the world?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can report, obviously, that Canada remains incredibly supportive of the change that we have seen going on in both Tunisia and Egypt. We have come forward with funds to support some initiatives with respect to young people in Egypt.

When the Prime Minister attended the G8 in France, he was certainly underlining the support that we are giving to Libya, both militarily and in humanitarian assistance. We are engaged.

We are providing a lot of funding, more than a quarter of a million dollars in recent years, to the multilateral bodies that should provide this direct support. We obviously are watching what is going on with great interest and will continue to see what more can be done.

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[Translation]

POVERTY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the government. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said that the government wanted the Speech from the Throne to include and reflect the values of Canadians.

Is poverty reduction in Canada a priority for Canadians? Yes. Is it a priority for the government? Apparently not.

Why is poverty reduction not a priority for the Conservative government?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the member for Toronto Centre on his new position as the leader of the Liberal Party. I know that after the election in which the NDP scored surprising results, he found himself in a position of power and influence that he did not have before. We look forward to seeing him in that role in a constructive way in this House.

As members know, this party and government has been very much committed to improving the condition and well-being of ordinary Canadian families. That is why, through our measures to reduce the tax burden, the typical Canadian family is now over \$3,000 better off on average in terms of the amount of taxes it has to pay.

Oral Questions

Later today in the budget we may hear some more things that—

● (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the allergy to the word “poverty” still seems to be there. Again, I congratulate the minister on his appointment.

In light of the statements by the government with respect to its desire to improve the condition of aboriginal people, Chief Atleo, in his statements on the Speech from the Throne, made it very clear that he regarded a meeting between the Crown and the leadership of the first nations, the Métis, and all the aboriginal people including the Inuit as necessary, and that the meeting had to take place on a government-to-government basis, on a basis that fully respected the jurisdictions of first nations and aboriginal people.

I would like to ask the minister why that commitment—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are at a place where we are having discussions with the national chief. We are looking at an action plan that we can work on together and part of that dialogue will be to discuss this very gathering that the member is bringing up. So, that is something we will flesh out over the next period of time. Hopefully, we will come to something quite solid in the fall.

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[Translation]

FLOODING IN MONTRÉGIE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while we are tossing these kind words around, the people in the Montérégie region have been up to their necks in water for the past 50 days. While we are tossing these kind words around, the Prime Minister is showing as much empathy as someone having a tooth pulled without anaesthetic.

Why does the Prime Minister not want to make an exception for Quebec, which is asking that the army play a role in the cleanup?

In 1998, Jean Chrétien called Lucien Bouchard to see what was needed. People want help from the army. What has happened to them is not their fault. Instead of being attacked, they want people to come help them clean up. What are they waiting for?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, along with the hon. member and all Canadians, we are very sympathetic to the plight of those affected by the floods not only in Quebec but in Manitoba, as well those who are suffering in Saskatchewan.

As members know, the Prime Minister has been in the region this morning. We have Canadian soldiers who have been on the ground within 24 hours after being contacted by the Province of Quebec. They continue to work with the province to the best of their ability to

help mitigate the damage there, continuing their efforts as we speak. There are 500 soldiers there currently and we congratulate them on that incredible effort.

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in Montérégie are struggling with the worst flooding that this region has ever seen. After 50 days, when the Prime Minister finally showed up in the region, we learned that, unlike disaster victims in Manitoba and Alberta, people in the Montérégie region still cannot get expedited processing of their employment insurance claims.

Why does this double standard exist for the people of Montérégie?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the difficulties and the stress that the disaster victims are experiencing in the Montérégie region. That is why we have expedited processing of their employment insurance claims. Once I learned about the situation, I made a request to the department. Information is now available on our website.

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back home, the entire Montérégie region is flooded. The people are exhausted. The government thought it was more important to expedite employment insurance to disaster victims in Manitoba and Alberta, and victims in Quebec have been ignored until now.

Can the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development explain why disaster victims in the Montérégie region are still waiting for this expedited assistance?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, natural disaster victims across Canada must receive the same support from their government, regardless of where they live. That is why, as soon as I learned about this situation, I asked the department to ensure that the victims of flooding in the Montérégie region immediately receive the same priority processing for employment insurance claims as victims in the rest of Canada. That priority processing is available immediately, and information is available on our website.

* * *

● (1435)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, both our rural and urban communities need help to revitalize their infrastructure. Take, for example, the Champlain Bridge.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities says that a permanent infrastructure development program will be implemented, but it is time to take action.

Will this development be sustainable? Will public transit be part of the plan?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has already invested a record amount of money in infrastructure. Our government also has an exceptional track record when it comes to transfers to cities and municipalities.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Since 2009, our government has committed unprecedented stimulus contributions, which were announced in the March budget and which will be once again introduced today, with improvements, that the gas tax fund will be made permanent. That is an achievement of this government. We are proud of it and we are going to move forward.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the 1990s, the federal deficit was downloaded onto the backs of Canadian communities. Twenty years later, Canadians are stuck in traffic, our bridges are crumbling, and our water systems are failing. Friday's throne speech ignored municipalities and infrastructure completely. Canadians deserve a vision, a national public transit strategy.

Will the government act immediately with new funds to deal with the \$123 billion infrastructure deficit?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member will recall that in 2007, we extended the gas tax fund by four years. In 2009, we doubled the gas tax fund. In 2010, despite economic challenges and despite efforts to keep costs down, we protected the gas tax fund.

In today's budget, she will have occasion to stand and join hands with our government as we move forward with an effort to make the gas tax fund permanent in order to help our communities right across the country.

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CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post belongs to us and is mandated to provide postal service to all Canadians.

Lately, Conservatives have been whittling away at economically stable elements of Canada Post and have moved toward privatization.

Does the government not realize that no private alternative can deliver Canada Post's mandate? Will the government use its influence to make sure management remembers that its mandate is to serve Canadians comes first?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to quality postal service for all Canadians no matter where they live.

Last year, Canada Post began a \$2.1 billion modernization initiative which will make major investments in equipment, technology and other processes.

We are making Canada Post more effective for Canadians, the clients, the people whom Canada Post serves, and I think Canadians will be very pleased with the results.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year, Canada Post made \$281 million in profit; yet, it is still asking its employees for concessions. This attitude threatens services in

rural and remote areas. No private sector alternative would be able to deliver the mandate of Canada Post, which is to provide postal service to all Canadians.

Will the federal government use its influence to remind Canada Post's management that its primary mandate is to provide services to all Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is mandated to provide postal service to Canadians regardless of where they live. Canada Post has made substantial investments in the infrastructure of Canada Post to the sum of \$2.1 billion, as I have already mentioned.

We are working to ensure that Canadians receive the best possible postal service regardless of where they live, and I look forward to working with the opposition parties and all stakeholders to ensure that Canadians get their mail when they ask for it.

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● (1440)

HEALTH

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Health Council of Canada released its 2011 progress report and the conclusion is very clear. The government failed to make progress because it failed to show leadership.

Conservatives stalled altogether on a cost-saving national prescription drug program, failing Canadians who are now facing extraordinary drug costs.

Will the government acknowledge its lack of progress and commit to working with New Democrats to protect Canada's health care system?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleague for the next four years.

Our government recognizes the importance of timely access to health care and is working to support the provinces and the territories in their efforts to address the issue of wait times, as an example.

We have increased the transfers to the provinces by over 33% since we formed government, so that the provinces and territories can continue to focus in areas of importance.

We will work collaboratively with the provinces and territories to renew the health care accord and to continue to reduce wait times in their respective jurisdictions.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, health care is far too important for just empty rhetoric and Canadians are very tired of false promises. Leading into the 2014 health care negotiations, now is the time to bring in much needed improvements.

Will the government commit to holding open consultations with Canadians, so that the next accord reflects their values and priorities for health care in this country?

Oral Questions

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are looking forward to working with the provinces and territories to renew the health accord and to continue to address the area of wait times, as an example, while respecting the fact that health care is delivered by and is under the jurisdiction of the provinces.

Our discussions will emphasize the importance of accountability and results for Canadians, including better reporting from the provinces and territories to measure progress and guarantees covering additional medically necessary procedures.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after last week's throne speech, we learned that the government is about to disband the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which, since 2004, has been examining the legislation, programs and policies that affect Canadian women from all walks of life.

Can the Minister for Status of Women reassure this House that the committee will definitely remain active throughout the 41st Parliament?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as it is my first time getting up in the House in our four year majority mandate, I would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton—Spruce Grove for re-electing me. They are hard-working Canadians who want us to focus on job creation and balancing the budget.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague and all the women who have been elected to Parliament in the last election.

I can assure members opposite that I will be working collaboratively with all women in the House, including those who sit on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, to improve the lives of women all across this country.

* * *

LIBYA

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the government announced the beginning of Canada's participation in the mission in Libya it said it was an effort to protect civilians. Subsequently, there has been some confusion about the mission's objectives.

We are wondering if the Minister of Foreign Affairs could confirm that in fact the objectives of the mission remain unchanged to protect civilians, and that in any subsequent extension of the mission there will not be a change in the clear objectives of the mission and, for example, the military footprint will not change, including a commitment not to put Canadian forces on the ground in Libya.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Beauséjour on his re-

election and on his appointment as foreign affairs critic. I look forward to working with him on advancing the principles of Canadian foreign policy that express Canadian values right around the world.

There is no change in the military mission. The military mission was approved by the United Nations through resolutions 1970 and 1973 to protect the civilian population from attacks by Gadhafi's forces.

I look forward to debating an extension of that mission with the member and all members of the House in short order.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, France and Italy have recognized the Libyan National Council as that country's legitimate government.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs clarify Canada's position on this?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada we recognize states, not particular governments.

We do look forward to working with the council throughout the Canadian mission in Libya. It has a very important role to play in the future of Libya.

The G8 leaders at their summit in Deauville did say at a political level that Colonel Gadhafi must go. That is an important political objective. We can work closely with the transitional council on this important objective.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has cost Canada some \$300 million to close Camp Mirage in the UAE. We now learn that the Minister of National Defence is planning to open a base in Kuwait, some 400 miles further away from Afghanistan.

Will the minister tell Canadian taxpayers how much this reopening will cost in addition to the already \$300 million sunk because of a turf war between the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the new defence critic for the Liberal Party and assure him that relations between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I are on good terms.

I can also tell the member that his figures are completely wrong. Those numbers are completely false. What we have done, obviously, is to make arrangements to have logistic hubs in parts of the Middle East that allow us to continue the logistic support for the ongoing mission in Afghanistan. That is the intention of the department, nothing more than that.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, throughout 2009 and most of 2010, the Prime Minister repeatedly told Canadians that our military forces were leaving Afghanistan in 2011 in accordance to the resolution of the House. When the Minister of National Defence mused about extending the mission, he was quickly corrected by the Prime Minister's Office.

But in reality, as early as March 2009 the government had put all options back on the table despite what the Prime Minister was telling Parliament at the same time.

Why did the Prime Minister not tell Canadians the truth about his plans for Afghanistan?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell the House that the Prime Minister has always told the truth on this issue.

I believe the member for St. John's East is talking about leaks that are not of Canadian origin and the government has a policy not to comment on such leaks.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are right to question the government's promises on Afghanistan.

For over a year the Conservatives repeatedly denied being pressured to extend our military mission by the United States, yet we now know the Americans made a formal request for Canada to extend the mission in 2009. Instead of saying "no", the government just asked them to have patience.

How can we trust a Prime Minister who says one thing to Canadians and another to the American government?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member for St. John's East knows full well, we have been open and transparent about Canada's involvement in the mission in Afghanistan.

We have debated this issue a number of times here in the House of Commons. We take the member's questions on a regular basis and I look forward to doing so in the coming session of Parliament.

* * *

[Translation]

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is about to invest \$35 billion in a maritime strategy that could create jobs in all shipyards across the country. What should be good news is worrying shipyard workers because foreign companies like BEA Systems want their piece of the pie. The NDP raised these concerns several times last winter.

Can the government now confirm that Canadian shipyards will be the only beneficiaries, the only shipbuilders in this maritime strategy?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the government made the historic decision to build the ships that our navy and Coast Guard needed right here in

Oral Questions

Canada, what that meant was more than 75 million man hours of work for the shipbuilding industry and for the manufacturing sector over the coming decade.

This is a competitive, open, transparent process between several shipyards. At the end of the day, two shipyards will be chosen to do a great deal of work on behalf of the shipbuilding industry, but there will be shipyards and manufacturing sectors all across this country that will benefit from those jobs.

● (1450)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is just the problem. The government says, "Trust us on jobs, trust us on this file", but the reality is that it has been playing politics with this issue.

With this much money and jobs on the line, Canadians must see that there is a smart overall strategy that puts forward the strength of each of our shipbuilding regions in B.C., Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

Will the government stop the political games and look to use the strength of every shipbuilding region of our country in these contracts, so that all Canadians could benefit from this strategy?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, the process that is under way is at arm's-length from the government through what is called the shipbuilding secretariat.

We have created an open, fair, transparent and very competitive process. This process includes not only independent oversight provided by KPMG but also a fairness monitor and an international third party marine expert that is evaluating these bids to ensure the fairness, openness and transparency of the process.

At the end of the day, this is a very competitive process. Again, this will create 75 million man hours of work across this country.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is tax freedom day, the day Canadians start working for themselves after paying off all the taxes they owe to all levels of government.

Unlike the tax and spend opposition, we do not believe Canadian families should pay high taxes. That is why since 2006, our government has reduced the overall federal tax burden to its lowest level in 50 years.

In the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, we will build on that record.

Oral Questions

Could the Minister of State for Finance please inform the House how much earlier tax freedom day is today compared to where it was before we formed government?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new member for New Brunswick Southwest in this hallowed House.

The member, of course, understands quite a bit about taxes. That is why we are actually celebrating today the fact that tax freedom day is 20 days sooner than in 2005. I think we all know why that is. It is because we have reduced over 120 different taxes. We have reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. I could go on and on about the reasons—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government continues to shake the confidence of federal public servants. Threats of blind cuts are looming in the national capital region. Today we learn that the government has already increased the use of vulnerable temporary workers by 100%.

Why does the Conservative government prefer using cheap labour over paying its public servants properly?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to this place and I also thank the electorate of Parry Sound—Muskoka for allowing me to be in this place.

The issues that the hon. member refers to involve merely 1% of total payroll expenditures. Of course, we use temporary help when it is crucial to ensure the delivery of services to all Canadians that are needed to meet unexpected circumstances, fluctuations in workload and special expertise. Those are the things that help us deliver services to Canadians and that is why we are proud to do it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in an article published today in *Le Droit*, we also learn that temporary workers are paid half the value of the job. The Conservative government is increasingly ridding the public service of its best and brightest and undermining the economic driver of our region.

Is that what this government envisions for the future of the national capital region: precarious work, privatization and cheap labour?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the main estimates and the budget outline the government's annual priorities with regard to budgetary planning and resource allocation for the fiscal year. The main estimates include details on planned budgetary expenditures of more than \$2,000 billion for the fiscal year.

● (1455)

[English]

We are doing things in a prudent way and spending on things that Canadians care about. That was our mandate and we are going through with it.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has just won another environmental booby prize. Canada was the last country to report its greenhouse gas emissions data to the UN. Canada's delay in complying with its Kyoto protocol obligations is another Conservative failure in terms of the environment. Even Japan, despite the terrible tsunami, met the deadline.

Why did the government not report its data on time?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me first congratulate my colleague on her appointment to the environment file.

In rising for the first time in this House, I would like to thank the voters of Thornhill for returning me to this place.

The Government of Canada has always fully and fastidiously complied with the reporting requirements of the Kyoto treaty. There was a 15-day grace period allowed at the end of the deadline, which occurred during the election, and we have filed those details.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it turns out that not only were we late reporting our data this year, but the government also decided to quietly remove data on tar sands emissions. It is no wonder, because the data showed a 20% increase in tar sands emissions in 2009 alone. That is more than every single car in Canada.

Will the minister tell us who made the decision to try and hide this information on oil sands production?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first offer a correction to my hon. colleague. We refer to the wealth of abundance in northern Alberta as “oil sands”.

With regard to the question, in our reporting of the 2008 emissions the department attempted to offer sectoral numbers. It did not work and they were not included.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, climate change was not mentioned even once in the throne speech. Now the Conference Board gives Canada a failing grade for climate policies. These plans are so disorganized and inefficient that Canada will not meet its 2020 target.

Oral Questions

After five years of ignoring climate change, will the Conservatives commit to a national plan that addresses the very real challenges?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I again congratulate my hon. colleague on her appointment to the environment file.

We do have a plan and that plan is working. We have committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions sector by sector and that plan is working.

With regard to the Speech from the Throne, I think my colleague was somewhat literal in her expectations. We reiterated our commitment to reduce climate change emissions across the board.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada released its 2011 climate change plan to the United Nations. The plan shows that actions taken by the Conservative government are projected to reduce emissions by only one-quarter of what is needed to meet the 2020 target.

Does the government have a plan to address the other three-quarters beyond deliberately fudging a progress report to the UN?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): The short answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, is yes. We have a plan and I would advise my colleague to familiarize herself with it. She and all Canadians can visit the Environment Canada website to see how we began last year with the major emitting sector, transportation. We are about to address new regulations for coal-fired electricity generation. We will continue to work our way around the emitting sectors to meet our 2020 target.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

SOCIAL HOUSING

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's gradual withdrawal from social housing and the fight against homelessness is at risk of causing a dramatic increase in rental costs for hundreds of thousands of low-income renters. Many others will be left out on the streets.

Stakeholders at all levels are demanding that the federal government also do its part, be it through the homelessness partnering strategy or HPS or other housing programs. Will the government remedy this situation?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the new member and wish her luck.

[English]

I also take this opportunity to thank the good folks of Haldimand—Norfolk for once again placing their trust in me. I pledge to honour that trust to the best of my ability.

During our economic action plan, we made tremendous investments in social and affordable housing. Some 26,000 projects are under way right across the country. Unfortunately, the hon. member's party did not support those initiatives that are helping so many people who are vulnerable.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they are fine words, but they are just not good enough.

Instead of working to fix the problem, Conservatives actually cut housing programs. Last year, thousands of Ontario families could not afford decent roofs over their heads, and almost 70,000 of those families live in Toronto. Make no mistake that this is a national crisis and seniors bear the biggest burden.

When will the government open its eyes and address this issue? We need a national housing strategy.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that having roofs over their heads is one of the hallmarks to help people get out of poverty, get into the workforce and lead self-sustaining lives. It is good for them and it is good for the country. That is why we have invested record amounts of money in affordable and social housing. Through our economic action plan, we supported the renovation and construction of some 26,000 units right across the country. Had it been up to the NDP, 26,000 families would not have received our help this way.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and strengthening the long-term financial security of hard-working Canadians. Free trade creates jobs and economic opportunities and that is why we have made it a priority to open new markets for Canadian businesses.

Could the Minister of International Trade please tell us why we are pursuing these agreements?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on being re-elected for a third time by the good residents of Kelowna—Lake Country. He knows, as does our government, how important international trade is to growing our economy, creating jobs and ensuring our long-term prosperity.

Closing the doors to the world is not an option for us. Canadians know this is a kitchen table issue and how important free trade is to our country.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Fabien Melanson, a 15-year Canadian veteran who served twice overseas, has started a hunger strike in front of the Department of Veterans Affairs in my riding of Charlottetown. He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. Melanson has tried to have government take ownership of the trouble created when a clerical error caused a lapse in his benefits.

My question is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. What will the government do to ensure that this veteran gets the compassionate treatment he so rightly deserves?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his recent appointment.

As the member is aware, under the Privacy Act, I cannot discuss the specific details of this individual case. However, I was given a mandate by the people of Lévis—Bellechasse and today, as the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I commit myself to bettering the lives of our veterans, and I count on the support of all members in the House, starting today.

What took place many years ago was unfortunate and was an unacceptable mistake. Corrective measures were taken. I have instructed my officials to follow up on this veteran's case—

* * *

• (1505)

LABOUR

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, the justice department sent a threatening letter to USW Local 1005, ordering the steelworkers to cease their information pickets on the Burlington lift bridge. However, these workers are simply doing what the federal government is refusing to do. They are trying to stop U.S. Steel from taking profits from its Hamilton operations until the federal government's court case against the company is resolved.

Instead of getting tough on Canadian workers, when will the government get tough on foreign companies that break Canadian laws, undermine Canadian jobs and attack Canadian pensions?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member opposite on her recent election in the same area that I come from, and I thank the residents of Halton for returning me to the House.

As the member opposite knows, this matter is one of provincial regulation. However, we are monitoring the situation, as we would, and I speak to the Minister of Labour in Ontario on the matter almost on a monthly basis to ensure that we can keep track of what is going on there.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Governor General highlighted our government was here for all Canadians.

My question is for the new Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism. What steps does this government plan to take to reduce red tape so Canadian small business can focus their attention on growing their businesses and creating jobs.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, economic growth and jobs will remain priorities for this government because they are the priorities of Canadians. We have designated 2011 as the Year of the Entrepreneur in order to help Canadians understand the role of entrepreneurs, who create our country's wealth. We need to reduce the red tape imposed on them, and we need to do so as quickly as possible. And that is what we will be doing with the Red Tape Reduction Commission.

* * *

[*English*]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Diamond Aircraft had a solid order for 240 jets worth \$400 million, private sector funding and a loan guarantee from the Ontario government. All that was needed to secure hundreds of jobs and a place for Canada in the modern aerospace industry was a commitment from the federal government. That commitment was denied. It was a major blow to job creation and to the London families that depended on those jobs.

Could the minister explain to the people of London why Diamond Aircraft was refused funding?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to congratulate the member for her re-election and thank the people of Cambridge and North Dumfries for re-electing me to this great House.

The Government of Canada has already invested some \$20 million into this company, through the strategic aerospace and defence initiative. However, as stewards of taxpayer dollars, it would not be judicious to increase that amount by another \$35 million.

After a thorough review of Diamond's request, the company was advised by this government that we could not support the request. The company has other alternatives that it is exploring. We wish it well.

[Translation]

FLOODING IN MONTRÉGIE

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister finally visited the Montérégie region today, more than one month after the flooding started. The Prime Minister reluctantly made a flyover visit, and, what is more, he is not responding to the immediate demands of officials and the people affected. As the mayor of Saint-Paul-de-l'Île-aux-Noix said, "I do not think that [the Prime Minister] understands what we have been going through all along."

The 3,000 victims of the flooding in the Montérégie region are no less deserving than the victims in Manitoba and Alberta. Yet the Prime Minister still refuses to change the army's mandate. The flood victims simply want the army to help with the cleanup. Will the Prime Minister listen to reason?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Forces will remain in these regions during the emergency period to provide assistance to the civilian authorities, until their specific skills are no longer needed.

• (1510)

[English]

The member would know that the regional minister for Quebec attended the flood-ravaged area, as did the Minister of Veterans Affairs and myself.

Our thoughts are certainly with the people of the region. We will continue to work with them as members of the Canadian Forces continue to go about their important work there.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Canadian Forces Day is an opportunity for Canadians across the country to recognize the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform make on our behalf.

[Translation]

It is my great pleasure to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of 11 members of the Canadian Forces, who participated in today's celebrations marking Canadian Forces Day.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

SPECIAL ECONOMIC MEASURES ACT

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 7 of the Special Economic Measures Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the special economic measures, Syria regulations and the special economic Syria permit authorization order formally announced on May 24, 2011 by the Prime Minister.

Routine Proceedings

CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to present to this House, in both official languages, a document from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that indicates at the end of fiscal year 2010-11, CFIA inspection staff had increased by a net total of 733 members since this government was formed in 2006. That is an 18% increase, something to be celebrated.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE WHOLE

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose for the ratification of the House a candidate for the position of Deputy Speaker and chair of committee of the whole.

Pursuant to Standing Order 7, I propose Ms. Denise Savoie for the position of Deputy Speaker and chair of committee of the whole.

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose, for the ratification of the House, a candidate for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mr. Barry Devolin for the position of deputy chair of committee of the whole.

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

APPOINTMENT OF ASSISTANT DEPUTY CHAIR

The Speaker: I am now prepared to propose, for the ratification of the House, a candidate for the position of Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 8, I propose Mr. Bruce Stanton for the position of assistant deputy chair of committee of the whole.

The motion is deemed moved and seconded. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, when the House adjourns on June 9, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, June 13 and, for the purpose of the debate on 2011 Ways and Means Motion No. 1, Standing Order 84 be amended as follows:

Section (5) be deleted and section (6) replaced with:

“(6) On the fourth of the said days, at fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business in such sitting, unless the debate be previously concluded, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and forthwith put every question necessary to dispose of the proceedings.”; and

immediately following the adoption of the budget motion, the Speaker forthwith puts every question necessary to dispose of the Ways and Means motions tabled during the budget presentation.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1515)

PETITIONS**ASBESTOS**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from literally thousands of Canadians from right across the country who call upon the House of Commons to recognize that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. They also point out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and also blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, these thousands of petitioners from all across the country call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers; to end all government subsidies of asbestos, both in Canada and abroad; and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to put forward a petition from seniors and others from within the constituency dealing with the whole issue of senior pensions. At a time in which we are dealing with the budget coming down just an hour or so from now, it is very easy to distinguish what are the important priorities of the government.

The petitioners are saying that we need to see more seniors receiving higher pensions, as opposed to issues such as giving corporate tax breaks.

It is with pleasure that I table this petition.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on the first day back to present a petition in the 41st Parliament with over 1,400 signatures on an issue that is of grave concern to many Canadians concerning animal safety and well-being.

The petition calls upon Parliament to protect sentient beings in our care from needless cruelty and suffering; to ban the sale and use of electric shock devices on any animal to ensure that in that future no person will be able to purchase these kinds of tools in Canada; to recognize that the use of electric shocks as a teaching tool is barbaric and unnecessary; and to heed the advice of credible, world-renowned experts, documented evidence and scientific studies that explicitly affirm that the use of electric shock is abusive and damaging to an animal's physical and psychological well-being.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition from members of the community of Twillingate Island who want more science being infused within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Over the past 20 to 25 years, science has taken a back seat in many of the managements decisions. The result of all this comes down to last minute decisions that affect all the communities involved in a social way detrimentally. I have 193 communities in my riding and they are affected, especially along the eastern coastlines.

Therefore, the petition calls for the government to initiate a public inquiry into all aspects of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with emphasis on fisheries management, dismantling the current state of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and put in place a model that takes into account fisheries science. Indeed, this is essential for these communities, not just for the east coast, but for the west coast as well.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Friday June 3, the sitting is suspended until 4 p.m. this afternoon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 3:19 p.m.)

● (1600)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 4 p.m.)

The Speaker: Order, please. It being 4 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 1 concerning the budget presentation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved:

That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying on March 22....

I rise today to table before this House budget 2011, a low tax plan for jobs and growth, a plan to ensure Canada will remain on the right track for economic growth and jobs.

As I said in this House less than three months ago, implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan will preserve Canada's advantage in the global economy, strengthen the financial security of Canadian workers, seniors and families, and provide the stability necessary to secure our recovery in an uncertain world.

It is my hope that the members of this House will now move quickly to implement this job-creating plan.

We are on the right track with nearly 540,000 jobs created since July 2009, the height of the global economic recession, and seven quarters of positive GDP growth.

Our job creation is the envy of other advanced countries, with job growth concentrated in full-time positions in relatively high wage industries. While that is positive news, too many Canadians are still looking for work and the global economic recovery remains fragile.

By supporting this plan, hon. members will echo the most essential endorsement of all: the backing of Canadians themselves.

Through their votes last month, their voices have been heard and they said yea to the economic plan that was put before them. Canadians gave this government their support for job creation and efforts that will help businesses and entrepreneurs succeed.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Canadians provided their backing for targeted measures that will help them find and hold onto good, high-paying, private-sector jobs, while improving the quality of life of Canadians in communities big and small.

Canadians endorsed an economic strategy that would help Canada's seniors secure a dignified and hard-earned retirement, through an enhancement to the guaranteed income supplement, and new tax support for Canadians making selfless sacrifices to care for a loved one.

[English]

Canadians said yes to a disciplined and measured plan to control government spending and eliminate the deficit. We humbly thank Canadians for the trust they placed in us last month.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan is unwavering evidence that this government will honour the commitments we made to Canadians.

The Budget

Today I am presenting, again, the important commitments our government made on March 22. The updated budget includes all the measures that were part of the previous budget. It also includes two additional commitments we made to Canadians since March 22.

[Translation]

We have made a provision in 2011-2012 for \$2.2 billion in support of the conclusion of a satisfactory sales tax harmonization agreement between Canada and Quebec.

• (1610)

[English]

Also, at a time of fiscal restraint and as part of our goal to continue to strengthen government integrity and accountability, we will gradually phase out the quarterly allowances for political parties.

For the most part, however, parliamentarians who took the time to read the March budget will be familiar with what we are pledging to do today.

[Translation]

To support job creation, for example, this budget includes our intention to introduce a one-time hiring credit for small business. It will provide an EI break for some 525,000 small businesses, reduce payroll costs, encourage hiring and give companies and the employees who work for them the boost they need to fully contribute to the nation's economic recovery.

This budget also includes a two-year extension of the temporary 50%, straight-line accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturing or processing machinery and equipment, incenting our businesses to invest, improve productivity and stay competitive.

In the still-uncertain global climate, many businesses remain hesitant to hire and expand. In the Year of the Entrepreneur, we are creating the environment for the private sector to invest again and take its rightful place as the engine of the Canadian economy.

[English]

Creating the environment necessary for our businesses to thrive also requires assisting hard-working Canadians as they make the most of the opportunities ahead.

As was the case in March, the next phase of Canada's economic action plan will support Canadian families across the country.

The Budget

This support includes: providing additional support for a work-sharing program that has helped more than 277,000 workers; renewing two special EI measures to assist Canadians in their search for a job, support worth \$420 million over 12 months; extending the targeted initiative for older workers program until 2013-14, ensuring older workers have access to training and employment programs that will prepare them for new careers; supporting the helmets to hardhats program to assist the brave veterans who offer up their lives to protect our country by helping them find work in the construction industry when they leave our armed services; supporting the courage of volunteer firefighters who risk their lives to protect ours by establishing a new volunteer firefighters tax credit; and easing the financial burden of young Canadians preparing to assume their rightful place in tomorrow's economy by enhancing and expanding eligibility for Canada student loans and grants for both full and part-time post-secondary students.

Part of helping hard-working Canadians, of course, is keeping their taxes low as they try to make ends meet. This commitment explains why the average family of four now receives almost \$3,100 in extra tax savings thanks to the numerous tax reduction measures introduced by this government. It also explains why the federal tax burden for all Canadians is now the lowest it has been in 50 years.

We are building on that low tax commitment even further through the measures being tabled today.

● (1615)

[Translation]

Today's budget takes action to help our most vulnerable seniors, who have worked hard their entire lives building a better community and a better Canada.

To provide greater support to those seniors most in need, we will provide a top-up benefit to the guaranteed income supplement. This is an affordable new measure that will provide up to \$600 extra per year for single seniors and up to \$840 per year for senior couples.

It will lead to greater financial security for more than 680,000 seniors across the country.

[English]

This of course is on top of actions this government has taken that are already providing \$2.3 billion in additional tax relief to seniors and pensioners right now in this fiscal year, measures like pension income splitting, increases in the age credit amount and a doubling of the maximum amount of income eligible for the pension income credit.

For those Canadians coping with the added responsibility of caring for infirm parents or other relatives, we are introducing a family caregiver tax credit in the amount of \$2,000 that will benefit more than 500,000 Canadians.

On top of that, we are recognizing the often substantial costs incurred by caregivers by removing the \$10,000 limit on eligible medical expenses that can be claimed under the tax system in respect of a financially-dependent relative.

[Translation]

Our government is also investing \$400 million to extend the eco-energy retrofit homes program for this fiscal year, giving Canadian families more time to take advantage of grants of up to \$5,000 to offset the cost of making their homes energy efficient.

[English]

We are also helping families lower the cost of nurturing the next budding Canadian artist by establishing a new children's arts tax credit covering up to \$500 per child in qualifying expenses for eligible arts or cultural activities.

These measures that I have mentioned are as essential now as they were when they were first introduced in the House.

[Translation]

We introduced Canada's economic action plan to meet the worst global recession since the 1930s head-on.

The plan worked, as evidenced by one of the strongest economic recoveries in the G7 and the strongest employment growth since the depths of the downturn.

Now, through the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, we are rolling up our sleeves to take on our next challenge, as we complete the transition from providing temporary stimulus to winding it down, to eliminating the deficit and returning to balanced budgets.

[English]

The cornerstone of the updated budget tabled today, just like the one tabled on March 22, is strong fiscal management. That budget included the strategic and operating review designed to realize substantial savings through greater efficiency and effectiveness.

With the backing we have received from Canadians on May 2 to guide us, we will now launch that review so that once it is completed we will achieve \$4 billion in annual savings and allow the government to return to a balanced budget by 2014-15, one year earlier than previously planned. These substantial savings will be reported on and recorded in budget 2012 when the review is completed.

This is a responsible, credible approach, one that is consistent with the careful fiscal management that has been the hallmark of this government's approach to public finances.

● (1620)

[Translation]

A month ago the people spoke. Through their democratic power they clearly signalled the need for principled, stable government at this challenging but promising moment in our nation's history.

The Canadian voters guide us as we reintroduce the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. We owe it to them to deliver the economic stewardship Canadians expect and deserve.

The Budget

[English]

Our efforts to ensure strong and sustainable recovery are not yet finished. This budget is the next step to getting there.

It is now time to make this budget a reality, to complete our economic recovery, to set the stage for this country's future prosperity. It is time to get back to work.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian exports are slipping, corporate tax cuts clearly have not produced the new investment that was promised and consumers are tapped out.

With the government intent on cutting spending by billions, I ask the Minister of Finance: Where is the job creation going to come from? Who is going to take up the slack for our economy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and I welcome her as the finance critic for the official opposition. I hope she will take the opportunity to review the data in the budget in great detail, see the 540,000 new jobs created in Canada since the recession and see how well our great country has done. Relatively speaking, certainly in the G7, we are leading the pack. This is all good news.

It does not mean we are out of the woods. The global economic recovery is fragile, but that is why we are encouraged when we see, for example, an increase of over 15% in the first quarter this year by Canadian industry, particularly in manufacturing and equipment processes.

It is very important for our country to increase productivity and create new jobs as we go forward. That is incented, of course, by provisions like we have in the budget today, such as the accelerated capital cost allowance provision.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by making the family care tax credit and the volunteer firefighters tax credit non-refundable, low-income Canadian families would not qualify for any help. A taxpayer making \$20,000 per year with a dependant would not qualify for any help whatsoever from these tax credits.

Why are the Conservatives leaving low-income Canadian families out in the cold? Will they reverse this regressive policy decision and make these tax credits refundable?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I remember the hon. member just a couple of months ago voting against those provisions in the budget when he was sitting on the other side and then campaigning against them.

These are the realities of May 2. Canadians endorsed those policies, they are in favour of the children's fitness tax credit and they are in favour of the children's arts tax credit.

We intend to keep our commitments to Canadians.

• (1625)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members, let me congratulate the finance minister on tabling six and a half consecutive budgets. Even more, let us congratulate him on tabling his first budget for a majority government in the House.

This past May Canadians endorsed the next phase of Canada's economic action plan as the right plan for economic growth and the right plan for jobs. They also endorsed support for Canada's most vulnerable seniors, especially the new guaranteed income supplement top-up of up to \$600 for single seniors and \$840 for couples.

Could the finance minister inform Parliament why swift passage of budget 2011 and the subsequent budget legislation is crucial to ensure seniors benefit from this top-up on January 1, as we promised?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, let me first thank the hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc for his question and for his reference to six and a half, if only that were my height, six and a half budgets.

The member raises, of course, a very important question with respect to the increase in the guaranteed income supplement, the top-up. We have mentioned that today. It will be presented to the House, seeking the approval of hon. members, in this month of June. It is quite important because this top-up will not be available and the cheques cannot go out until, I hope with Parliament's approval, there is royal assent through the Houses of Parliament.

The question raised is very important. We are looking at helping the poorest of the poor in terms of seniors. These are seniors who have worked hard their whole lives for their families and communities, and have no pension incomes. I look forward to the support of hon. members on this matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after hearing Mr. Flaherty's budget, we feel it is fair to question—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I missed that. It is important to remember that we must not use names but, rather, ridings or titles.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, after hearing the Minister of Finance's budget, we feel it is fair to question the Conservative government's priorities. It is a government that is continuing to go in the wrong direction by giving billions of dollars in handouts to big businesses, big companies. We all know that, after five years of Conservative government, we are in an extremely difficult fiscal situation. Yet this government's position—its attitude—is like that of someone trying to get out of a hole by digging deeper.

On the other hand, while the government is granting tax breaks to large corporations that do not need them and is not creating any jobs here at home, it intends to cut \$11 billion in public services that provide direct assistance to our constituents.

How does the minister justify giving handouts to banks and oil companies when thousands of workers who provide public services will pay the price of his poor choices?

The Budget

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. On May 2, we presented clear programs to the voters of Canada. We have to take into consideration the results of the May election in Canada. Growth and the economy are Canadians' priorities.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget talks about strategic review savings, which is just a nice way of saying "cuts". One of the key areas that has been cut in this budget is regional development agency programming in all regions of Canada.

I have to ask the minister, why is he cutting the very programs without telling us definitively where they have been cut? Why is he cutting the very programs that the regions need in order to develop economic prosperity and move ahead in the future?

• (1630)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, the third party in this place now is an expert in cutting. This was the party that in the mid-1990s cut transfers to the provinces. What were those transfers for? They were for health care, education and social services. Liberals did it without notice. They did it without negotiation. It resulted in the closing of schools. It resulted in the closing of hospitals, in the laying off of nurses. These are the experts who well deserve to be sitting where they are in this chamber today.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is well known throughout the industrialized world that Canada is the envy of the world. I would like the minister to answer a very simple

question. How does our debt and deficit compare to other countries in the G8 and G20?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Much better, Mr. Speaker. Our debt to GDP ratio is about 2.4%. Compare that with the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries which are up 10% and more. This is not a matter with which any of us certainly on this side of the House can be complacent. There are difficulties in the world economy. We are pleased that our country is recovering better than some other places. We also wish them well, of course, because this is an integrated economy, a global economy, and Canada is not an island.

We will maintain our course, in response to the hon. member, to ensure that on the deficit and debt we get back to a balanced budget, and then get back to the position where we can pay down public debt. We paid down almost \$40 billion of public debt before the great recession happened, and it happened from outside Canada and came into this country, but it put Canada in a position where we could take the kind of action we did in the economic action plan.

Hon. Jack Layton (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed to have been adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 4:33 p.m.)

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