



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 082 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, February 16, 2012**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 16, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

●(1005)

[*English*]

### STATUS OF THE ARTIST

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Section 61 of the Status of the Artist Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 17th annual report of the Canadian Artists and Producers Professional Relations Tribunal for the period of April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011.

\* \* \*

### PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT

**Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act.

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

\* \* \*

### INCOME TAX ACT

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-397, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (golfing expenses).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill entitled “an act to amend the Income Tax Act (golfing expenses)”.

Most golf courses are small businesses that are struggling in the current economy. The bill would help to protect the nearly 350,000 jobs across the country. Almost 1,000 of those are in my riding. Half of those jobs belong to students who are trying to complete their post-secondary education.

The bill would correct a long-standing discrimination against golf as a tax deductible business expense. While taking clients for drinks or to a hockey game are both fully tax deductible business expenses, taking them out to play a game of golf is not.

Golf was once considered an elitist sport with only the wealthiest able to play, but now golf is the sport with the largest participation in Canada, even more than hockey. More than six million Canadians play golf annually.

The game of golf accounts for an estimated \$11.3 billion in Canada's gross domestic product, with \$1.2 billion in property taxes and another \$1.9 billion in income taxes going into government budgets and contributing to all of our other public services.

The bill would recognize the importance of boosting our small businesses and ensuring quality jobs in Canada are maintained in the golfing industry.

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### PATENT ACT

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-398, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes).

She said: Mr. Speaker, today, I am proud to introduce my bill entitled An Act to amend the Patent Act.

This bill will modify the provisions of the current access to medicines regime, which allows Canada to export generic versions of drugs for HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other illnesses to developing countries, and it will make the regime easier to use.

This will enable Canadian manufacturers to send potentially life-saving medicines to those who desperately need them.

This bill is an improved version of Bill C-393, which the House passed by a comfortable margin last March but which, unfortunately, died on the order paper in the Senate.

When drafting this bill, I worked closely with the Grandmothers Advocacy Network and the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. I would like to thank Pat Evans and Richard Elliott for their help.

[*English*]

The bill has already received significant support from all parties in the House. Over the coming months I will be encouraging my fellow parliamentarians to take this opportunity to support lifesaving legislation.

Together, with hope, love and optimism, we can make a difference.

*Routine Proceedings*

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

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**INCOME TAX ACT**

**Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-399, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (volunteers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill to amend the Income Tax Act as it pertains to volunteers is very important. Right now, volunteerism is growing rapidly and, contrary to what some may say, more and more people are volunteering. In my riding alone, there are 225 organizations that hold over 500 events and create partnerships to help the community and the private sector. There is the Marché de Noël, a volunteer organization that supports small businesses and generates many economic spinoffs. In Repentigny, there is the International Junior Tennis Open, which is an international event.

In total, Canadians do 2 billion hours of volunteer work a year, which is absolutely incredible. What is more, 54% of non-profit organizations and charities are run entirely by volunteers. A total of 12 million Canadians claim to do volunteer work. Statistics Canada estimates the value of volunteer work to be \$14 million.

Volunteer work is imperative. The support we receive from people we hold dear, family members and friends, is of great value to us.

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

\* \* \*

●(1010)

**ACT TO ENSURE SECURE, ADEQUATE, ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR CANADIANS**

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-400, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today it is my honour to introduce a bill to ensure that every single Canadian has secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing.

[English]

Access to decent affordable housing is not a privilege. It is a fundamental right.

[Translation]

I would like to thank my colleague from Vancouver East, who introduced this bill during the last Parliament, where it died on the order paper. I humbly ask the government and all parties in the House to join me in supporting this bill to improve people's living conditions so that we can make our country fairer and leave nobody out in the cold.

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

[English]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study on the Review of the Delivery of Front-Line Health and Wellbeing Services for Canadian Veterans, seven members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the Winter-Spring of 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member 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?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place among all the parties and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Manicouagan, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, February 27, 2012 at the end of government orders.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. opposition whip 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?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

**PETITIONS**

## ASBESTOS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians.

The petitions call upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known. They point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial or occupational causes combined, 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 blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities they live in, 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.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by Canadians from all across the country who are concerned about the proposed megaquarry in Melancthon Township in Dufferin County, Ontario, which would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres. They are concerned with a number of issues, one of which is that the proposed megaquarry would threaten the Grand and Nottawasaga river watersheds, including various freshwater fish species.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies' mega-quarry development.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety said this week that people who are against the government's online spying bill stand with pedophiles.

My constituents in the riding of Davenport in the great metropolis of Toronto beg to differ. Along with 80,000 others, they have signed OpenMedia.ca's online petition to stop the government's online spying bill. They wish to add their voice of opposition to the measures contained in the lawful access legislation that would compel telecommunications companies to collect and store personal information and turn it over to law enforcement without a warrant.

This petition speaks to that and I am honoured to present it today.

• (1015)

## CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition in regard to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's policy decision to freeze the ability of an individual to sponsor his or her parents to come to Canada. The petitioners wish to make a strong statement that what is being done by the minister is met with great opposition in many different communities throughout Canada.

The petitioners ask that the government immediately lift the freeze so that people can sponsor their parents and grandparents in an effort to reunite them with their families here in Canada.

## NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today. The first is a call for Canada to host a conference on nuclear disarmament.

The petitioners wish to quote the International Red Cross:

Nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive power, in the unspeakable human suffering they cause, in the impossibility of controlling their effects in space and time, in the risks of escalation they create, and in the threat they pose to the environment, to future generations, and indeed to the survival of humanity.

*Business of Supply*

For that reason and many others, the petitioners ask that the House of Commons issue an invitation to all states to gather in Canada to begin discussions needed for a global legal ban on nuclear weapons.

The petitioners are from Nova Scotia. I look forward to the minister's answer.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am presenting is on the Canadian interfaith call for leadership and action on climate change.

The petitioners point out that global warming is a reality and that while all governments have committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Canadian levels have been increasing. They say that we cannot wait for others to act but must lead by example.

The petitioners call for a number of measures, such as implementing a binding international agreement, or committing to national carbon emission targets.

I am pleased to present this petition and look forward to the minister's response.

\* \* \*

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

## BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

## OPPOSITION MOTION—EDUCATION FOR FIRST NATION CHILDREN

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP) moved:**

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should adopt Shannen's Dream by: (a) declaring that all First Nation children have an equal right to high-quality, culturally-relevant education; (b) committing to provide the necessary financial and policy supports for First Nations education systems; (c) providing funding that will put reserve schools on par with non-reserve provincial schools; (d) developing transparent methodologies for school construction, operation, maintenance and replacement; (e) working collaboratively with First Nation leaders to establish equitable norms and formulas for determining class sizes and for the funding of educational resources, staff salaries, special education services and indigenous language instruction; and (f) implementing policies to make the First Nation education system, at a minimum, of equal quality to provincial school systems.

*Business of Supply*

He said: Madam Speaker, first of all, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona. I sincerely hope that my speech here today gets as much media attention as other events that have happened recently.

The presentation of this motion will go along the same lines as the approach I used in my previous speeches. Madam Speaker, I have made a number of speeches in this House since I arrived here on May 2, 2011. My detractors and those who might be interested can look at my record at [www.openparliament.org](http://www.openparliament.org). There are nearly seven pages on my speeches.

It should be noted that analysis of the material on the living conditions in aboriginal communities in the country lends itself well to empirical considerations and highlighting cultural subtleties. As with my previous speeches, I will talk about the basics and address the realities as experienced in the communities and on the streets of my home reserve. This ties in with the oral tradition I come from.

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the press conference held by the national panel on first nation elementary and secondary education. To my great surprise, the spokesperson for the organization addressed a number of points that demonstrate culturally relevant progress, thanks to which it is possible to identify the obstacles to educating youth on first nations reserves. Sometimes in my speeches, I talk about cultural relevance and a culturally integrated approach, and those are the aspects I am going to focus on today, since government efforts in the communities to promote school enrolment and completion of education among youth have to be measures that take into account the sometimes difficult realities experienced by young people in the communities. This has to be a grassroots approach.

The panel is to be applauded for the mere fact that, in preparing its report, it focused on the true causes of absenteeism and dropout rates in the communities. During the press conference, the panel members also highlighted one of the greatest strengths of youth living in adverse conditions: resilience. In fact, as I stand before you this morning, I am an excellent example of that resilience. Despite the fact that industry-sponsored media have tried to take me down, I am still here. I want everyone to know that I ate out of garbage cans as a child. This is nothing new to me, and it takes more than that to bring me down.

In my remarks today, I will focus on adversity and resilience because first nations youth encounter obstacles to learning every day. One of the primary obstacles is the cyclical way of life that has gradually become the norm on reserves in Canada. By “cyclical way of life”, I am referring to, in my language, *mitsam shuniau*, or social assistance benefits. Life in reserve communities today follows the rhythm of social assistance payments.

Teachers in reserve communities can attest to that. Absenteeism is significantly higher on the 1st and 15th of each month because that is when people get their cheques. As I will show, a large proportion of families that depend on federal transfers do not function well on the days the cheques come in. Children in such families suffer the consequences of their parents' dysfunction and do not go to school because they cannot find food in the morning or get themselves ready. I am talking about young kids, high school kids and elementary school kids.

This factor must be taken into account when implementing education programs adapted to the realities of Canada's aboriginal communities. Teachers and other stakeholders called upon to work on remote reserves that are truly struggling do not have an easy task. Therefore, it is important that we focus on giving educational institutions the tools they need to meet the needs of these students on their individual journeys. When I talk about their journey, I not necessarily referring to their academic journey, but rather their life journey. This is not the case in all communities, but from my personal experience in the communities of Uashat-Maliotenam and the Lower North Shore, from a very young age, children are regularly exposed to deviant, negative influences and behaviour that would be considered unacceptable by today's standards, but that is trivialized in those communities because it is so pervasive.

• (1020)

These young people have been brought up in a world that is quite different from that of other young Canadians. Any teachers who answer the call to go to these communities to work—for they are often from outside the community—will have to learn about and be prepared for this reality, as demonstrated by the youths' behaviour and psyche.

The dysfunctional nature of many aboriginal communities in Canada is partially linked to idleness and dependence on agencies that are part of the band management. For instance, in my community, over half of all individuals who are of working age, that is, 16 and over, depend on *Mitsham Shuniau*, or money to eat. Basically, that is our word for social assistance. In some cases, band leaders are forced to divert funding to other priorities established by the band council.

There is a case in a community in my riding, a community whose name I will not mention because it is rather infamous. It announced that, due to fiscal restraints, it had to cut the school days at the secondary school to four days a week in order to mitigate the cash shortage. It is the young people who are ultimately going to suffer the consequences. That is a concrete example.

All efforts to implement policies regarding the first nations education system must ensure that the funding allocated to education is used only for the purposes of the specific educational programs.

I will certainly not limit my remarks to students attending on-reserve primary and secondary schools. My arguments also apply to post-secondary students who often have to leave their home communities to pursue their academic endeavours. Those students, like the ones living on the reserves, are entitled to high-quality education that takes into account the added burden on aboriginal youth who want to pursue higher education.

*Business of Supply*

I want to talk about my own experience. I left my home community in early 2000 to pursue my post-secondary education. I then enrolled in the faculty of law at Université Laval. I spent six years in all in Quebec City. Things did not go smoothly at first. I had a hard time adjusting to urban life. I carried the reality I grew up in with me during those years. Young aboriginals who have to study abroad or away from home are dependent on transfers from the band council education authorities. They are on an allowance. Imagine how hard it is to rent an apartment when your only source of income is an allowance from a band council. You can imagine how many doors were slammed in my face. I ended up living in residence. That is just one of the obstacles facing students wanting to pursue higher education, not to mention breaking from their traditional lifestyle and the distance between them and their home community.

I want to clarify that just because my head was leaning over towards my BlackBerry, that does not necessarily mean I was asleep in my seat.

•(1025)

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I appreciated the speech given by the member opposite. I would like to ask him a question and make some comments. On June 9, the minister and the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, announced a Canada-first nations joint action plan designed to improve the quality of life of first nations people. Education was identified as one of the major priorities. On January 24, 2012, a historic crown-first nations gathering took place. Once again, education was identified as a priority by the first nations and the Government of Canada.

My question for the hon. member is a simple yes or no question. Is this the first and most important step in making sure that we have established a relationship and that both parties intend to work together to build an education system in every province that will benefit every first nation in Canada? Is it important to start with that?

•(1030)

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

Yes, it is of the utmost importance. In passing, I would also like to compliment my colleague on his French. This is the first time I have ever heard him speak in French.

We must now ensure that the government's willingness is transformed into action. We have been hearing lip service for the past 50 years. Clearly, big things are happening now, meaning there is a great interest in aboriginal issues, and I am a prime example of that, this morning. However, this willingness must truly be transformed into concrete efforts and inclusive measures to help first nations.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my friend from Manicouagan and my friend from Edmonton—Strathcona accompanied me on a visit to a reserve in Ontario where education was its number one priority. Members of the reserve have created a native language immersion school for

grade school students and they have built their own polytechnic but the government works hard to make it very difficult for them. They had space donated for the school and the government withdrew the value of that space from the allotment for these children.

The government refused for years to hire a superintendent for their school system. We were told that 8,000 kids are awaiting spaces for post-secondary education and that there are so many on the waiting list that the waiting list is now full. They cannot even put their names on a waiting list for post-secondary education. Would the member please comment?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

I cannot speak for other communities, but I can draw on my own personal experience. It is a good sign that so many people want to pursue higher education. However, that is not the case on my reserve right now, where the high school graduation rate is less than half that in other Canadian communities.

I think that the Canadian government should help communities and community members who show a strong interest in higher education, and it should invest money accordingly. Sometimes, these measures manifest as a massive cash injection. I think this is one of those cases. Some situations call for significant additional funding so that aboriginal students who wish to exercise their right to education have the means to do so.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member said that people in first nations communities depend on federal funding for their education, and I understand that they do. Does the member have any ideas that can help them in the future become less dependent on federal funding and become more independent or self-reliant for education funding?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I have a solution, but it does not necessarily involve pillaging natural resources as the only option for economic development. We have to find other ways to ensure that these programs receive adequate funding.

[*English*]

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague from Manicouagan for his heartfelt remarks. It is a pleasure to work with him on this file.

I think it appropriate to commence my remarks in support of this motion with a quote from Shawn Atleo, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. I intend to close my remarks by sharing messages from children. Shawn Atleo stated:

### *Business of Supply*

It is unacceptable in Canada that First Nations children cannot attend a safe and healthy school. It is unacceptable in Canada for First Nations education to languish with outdated laws, policies and funding practices that do not support basic standards. It is time for fairness and equity. Shannen Koostachin stood up for justice so the young people coming behind her might have an equal opportunity for a quality education in her community, just like young people have in communities throughout Canada. Now is the time for fairness, justice, and equity. Now is the time to realize Shannen's Dream.

National Chief Atleo also shared with parliamentarians this sad statistic. More aboriginal students are incarcerated in this country than graduate from high school. Fewer than 50% of aboriginal youth graduate from high school. Why is this? It is perhaps not surprising, given that on average first nations students receive \$2,000 to \$3,000 less support for their education per year than other Canadian students. That is discounting the non-investment in computers, lab equipment, libraries and other basic supports.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer reported in 2009 that close to a tenth of first nations schools were temporary structures. Only 49% were in good condition. Many had not even been inspected. Seventy-six per cent of Alberta and B.C. reserve schools were reported in poor condition. I have personally witnessed the mould in the Lubicon community school in Alberta.

Increases in first nations children's education funding have reportedly been capped at 2% per year since 1996. Remarkably, the cap on funding was imposed the year following the issuance of the report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples calling for substantial new investments. The funding shortfall for schools for 2009-10 was \$620 million. The cumulative shortfall in funding is estimated at \$1.2 billion since 1996.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer concurred with the finding of the Auditor General that the formula for band-operated schools has not been modified since the late 1980s and warrants review. Auditor General Sheila Fraser, in her final report of June 2011, criticized the poor response by the government to the growing gap in education opportunities and rates of graduation for first nations children. She stated:

What's truly shocking, however, is the lack of improvement. Last year, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada reported that between 2001 and 2006 there was little or no progress in the well-being of First Nations communities. In a wealthy country like Canada, this gap is simply unacceptable.

She criticized the government for failing to implement the action plan that both she and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommended in 2004 for post-secondary education. They called for a comprehensive strategy and action plan to address serious gaps. She said that education is critical to raising the social and economic strength of first nations comparable to other Canadians. In her words, "Post-secondary education could improve employment opportunities for First Nations".

Last November, I asked the government when it would finally commit to ending the discrimination in the funding of education for aboriginal children. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development responded that another panel had been appointed to recommend an action plan. The action plan from the national panel has been released. Its findings and recommendations mirror those of all the previous reports over the last decade. It issued a strong call for action now. Its recommendations are reflected in this motion.

When asked last week if his government would finally end the discrimination and invest in education and economic opportunities for first nations children, the minister astoundingly replied that he found the report aspirational. If decades of reports and inequities still fall on deaf ears and if its international commitments are not inspiring action, perhaps the government will listen to the pleas of Canadian children. Yesterday, more than 400 elementary school children came to Parliament Hill to deliver their message to the government. Their message was clear. Aboriginal children have the right to an education of the same quality as other children.

• (1035)

They can be counted among the many children across this country determined to carry on the legacy of Shannen Koostachin, to fulfill her dream of a school and quality education for her community of Attawapiskat and all first nations communities. I was pleased to deliver the children's handmade schoolhouse, filled with their letters, to the office of the Prime Minister. They will be waiting patiently for his response.

Last month, a delegation of aboriginal students travelled to Geneva to present their concerns to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. They pointed to the failure of the government to comply with its international commitment to end discrimination of access to education. The students shared concerns about Canada's failure to comply with commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They testified that Canada has yet to deliver on the right of first nations children to quality education in their own language, respecting their own culture and delivered by their own people.

Let me share two of their heartfelt letters. This is from Christa. She writes:

A long time ago our ancestors made a 'treaty' with the white people that included education. Now, the government doesn't give the same amount of money as the others, they give us less. To me, I think this is Racism. It's not fair that we get less money. So, it's about time someone stood up and brought up the past about the treaty. We are going to fight for this. We need our education.

A letter from Jeremy, submitted to the UN committee says:

I feel angry that the government is taking money from us. It's not fair that we don't have the same amount of money like the other schools near our community. We want to learn as much as them. Why should it be different? We have dreams and we want to realize them. Without this funding, some of us won't make it to college or university. We need an education to succeed in life.

In closing, I would like to share a plea sent to me just last week by Savannah Thomas, a Manitoba first nations student. She wrote:

I'm a 19 year old Aboriginal girl who has spent the last three years trying to finish grade 12. I quit twice to go to work at Domino's Pizza. After I make a bit of money I go back to school again.

Presently, I have no income. I'm about to graduate from high school at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate.



*Business of Supply*

I hear a lot of conversations about how so many Aboriginal youth do not finish high school. For me, the point is lack of funding and no support from anybody except for my grandparents. My grandfather and grandmother have given me what they can over the past two years to help me stay in school. They're both old-age pensioners and cannot spare much.

I'm sure there are many other youth in my predicament. What do we do when no one listens? I read the other day about the government's response to the recent study on Aboriginal education. The word I hear is aspirational. However, that is not going to help me at all. I still need to eat and clothe myself in order to stay in school.

Perhaps we need to look at individual cases across Canada. Where do we, as Aboriginal youth living in urban areas, go for help? My First Nation community does not have a high school so a lot of us have no choice but to live in the cities. But we are forgotten the minute we leave our communities. Our rights are portable and should extend beyond the borders of our First Nations.

Savannah told me if she can just graduate from high school, she hopes to study earth sciences so she can help protect the environment. What can possibly be more important than investing in Savannah's and all first nations children's futures?

● (1040)

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the passion with which the member speaks. It is a pleasure working with her at committee, particularly around education and the relationship with the environment. Just as recently as this week, we had an opportunity to talk about that relationship so first nations communities can play an important role in environmental stewardship and processes that take place with development across the North.

My question is with respect to a recent agreement signed by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development; British Columbia's minister of education, George Abbott; and Tyrone McNeil, president of the First Nations Education Steering Committee. It is a tripartite education framework that aims to provide B.C. first nations students with access to quality education programs and more flexibility to attend school on or off reserve.

Does the member concur with the notion that provinces, as a constitutional matter, play a significant role in the administration and the delivery of education, that they have an important role to play across the country and that developing these tripartite agreements across the country, as we have a number of already, is also an important way to improve the quality of education for first nations on and off reserve?

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments. Indeed, we are doing important work in our committee together.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the tripartite agreements. I have had the opportunity to look at the recent one signed with the organization in British Columbia. The good part of the agreement is that it is transferring responsibility for first nations organizations to be organizing and overseeing education of their own children.

However, I found this agreement lacking any commitment to dollars. I am concerned that increasingly we are seeing the government downloading responsibilities that are solely its own, including responsibility for first nations peoples and their interests,

to the provinces. That is a matter that I look forward to pursuing with the first nations communities to ensure their interests are being looked after.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I share the emotions felt by the hon. member who just spoke and the previous member. I thank them for sharing their personal experiences with such dignity. When I was first elected to the House, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, where we heard a great deal of moving and alarming evidence.

I think it is absolutely appalling that we still need to move such a motion in 2012, and I congratulate the hon. member for doing so. I do not understand why the government cannot set aside its ideology, and its propensity to do everything based on that ideology, and do something immediately to fix this problem. The Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-599 on this same problem.

Why is it that services, including education, are still capped at 2%, as they have been since 1996? This is appalling and must be corrected. What are the member's thoughts on this?

● (1045)

[*English*]

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his dedicated work in the direction of providing quality education for first nations children. It is a very good question.

As far back as, and probably earlier than, 1995 recommendations have come forward to provide the proper funding to ensure the quality of education for first nations children, as is provided to other children. It is reprehensible that in report after report, in 30 reports over a decade, the Auditor General has come forth and remonstrated with the government for lack of attention to this.

We have heard from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We have heard from other committees of Parliament recommending that the funding structure be revisited and addressed. Indeed, I would say today is the time. The budget is coming soon to this House. That is the time to be addressing the shortfall in funding.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I will start my remarks by thanking the constituents of the great Kenora riding, particularly the 42 first nations and the great people who work in towns and cities across my riding on first nations education. I appreciate their input over the past couple of years as we move forward together around strengthening education on and off reserve for first nations.

I want to thank the hon. member for his remarks from the outset, and extend my thanks for bringing this important matter to our attention.

That said, of course we have, in my presentation this morning, quite a bit to say about this. We have had some major accomplishments, even quite recently.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for the motion and tell him that I support it. Improving the education of students in first nations communities and the conditions in which these children learn must be one of the highest priorities of all of us here in the House. First nations children must be afforded the same opportunities as children who live off-reserve.

[English]

The stakes are simply too high for us not to make first nations education a priority. In fact, the stakes could not be any higher. First and foremost, quality education enables people, regardless of their background, to enjoy more fulfilling, more meaningful and more rewarding lives.

[Translation]

We also know that, in today's knowledge-based economy, a quality education is an essential building block for career success and community enrichment. As a result of continuing globalization and rapid technological advances, new skills and knowledge are required to enter the labour market. In fact, study after study tells us that some two-thirds of all new jobs will require higher education or advanced training.

[English]

What may be less well-known is that, in this emerging working world, gaining a quality education is especially critical for people in first nations communities. It is especially critical for these Canadians because there are major developments occurring in regions, particularly in the north and in the great Kenora riding, where new industries and traditional industries, particularly in the mineral resource area, are fast developing.

As a group, first nations people are much younger than the average Canadians. The median age of these Canadians is 15 years younger than all other Canadians, 25 versus 40. What is more, the growth of the first nations population has been five times greater than the growth of the country's non-aboriginal population in the last decade.

Simply put, young men and women of first nations communities represent the fastest growing segment of our country's population and the most potentially dynamic contributors to our labour market moving forward. If our country is to address anticipated labour shortages in a variety of industries, if we are to boost levels of innovation and entrepreneurship, then first nations kids must be equipped with a quality education.

If Canada is to reach its full potential in a world in which the highest paying jobs are filled by people who possess, not only deep knowledge and keen skills but also nimble minds who are eager to take on new challenges, then first nations youth must be ready to take their place in this exciting labour market moving forward.

• (1050)

[Translation]

This was echoed at the crown-first nations gathering that took place in January. The Governor General said that "our future hinges on our ability to share and to learn from each other, and to create the

conditions in which aboriginal and non-aboriginal people can thrive equally, according to their hopes and dreams."

[English]

What are current conditions when it comes to education for first nations children? The federal government spends some \$1.5 billion each year to support education for approximately 117,500 elementary and secondary school students who live on reserves.

[Translation]

That is a lot of money. Yet it is not giving us the return we want. Educational outcomes for first nations students are not improving as quickly as they should be.

[English]

We are working with our first nations partners to improve high school graduation rates for first nations students. Currently they are significantly lower among children who live on reserves than they are for other Canadians. We appreciate that. Without a high school diploma, labour market options are limited and diminished.

Further, our government is currently spending more than \$820 million annually on income assistance programs. We need to find ways to use these programs to better prepare first nations for the workplace.

[Translation]

We must take steps to encourage more boys and girls in first nations communities to stay in school. We must work to improve the educational outcomes of boys and girls in first nations communities.

We must help these young people graduate with the skills they need to enter a labour market that is projecting large labour shortages in the next 5 to 10 years, including up to 190,000 jobs in Alberta and 80,000 jobs in Saskatchewan. With a good education and the right supports, these young people can become permanently attached to the labour force and fully share in Canada's economic opportunities.

[English]

Enabling first nations children to experience better educational outcomes and set off on the path of personal and career success is not an easy task. First nations education is a complex matter, complex because the different levels of government involve the different learning challenges that first nations children face and because of the very nature of education, first nations or otherwise.

That is why our government is focused on practical partnership efforts with two new programs that are already working to set the foundation for the long-term improvement for first nations education. Indeed, these two programs are building blocks that are helping us establish some key school-based, commonly found in high school, high-performing school systems around the country.

*Business of Supply*

●(1055)

[*Translation*]

The first is the first nation student success program. This program was created to support first nations communities as they develop school success plans, implement learning assessments for students, and put in place performance measurements that will enable schools to assess and report on the progress of their schools and students. In particular, the program focuses on projects that these schools can use to improve literacy, numeracy and student retention.

[*English*]

The program encourages individual first nations to partner together to deliver projects and also to align with provinces by implementing comparable assessments and improving the overall standard of education in first nations communities.

We have also advanced work on the education information system. It is a single data system that tracks performance and, in doing so, responds directly to one of the key concerns that were raised by the Auditor General.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to report that 92% of first nation students across the country are benefiting from the first nation student success program. That level of enthusiastic adoption of the program tells me that it is working—that administrators, teachers and students at first nations schools recognize the value of the program.

[*English*]

The second program I want to discuss is the education partnership program. This is a common sense initiative that establishes and advances formal and practical working relationships between officials and educators in regional first nation organizations and schools, and officials and educators in provincial systems. I am pleased to report that, since 2008, our government has used this program to put in place five tripartite education memorandums of understanding with provincial governments and first nations communities and organizations in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta, Prince Edward Island. There is also a sub-regional agreement with the Saskatoon Tribal Council and, as I mentioned in the question previous, more recently in British Columbia.

Those five partnerships, as a result of our efforts, have realized practical partnerships between the federal government, the provincial government and first nations communities that now cover the education of some 58% of eligible first nations communities represented in formal tripartite partnerships.

On January 27, 2012, we signed a tripartite education framework agreement with B.C. and the first nations education steering committee. This tripartite agreement seeks to ensure comparable education so that first nations students are able to transfer between first nations schools and provincial schools at the same grade level and similar level of achievement. I would add that this is an important indicator for success in college and university. One of our superordinate goals here would clearly be to reduce, if not eliminate, the number of preparatory years at college or university that first nations students would require before embarking on a substantive program in a specific faculty.

However, the momentum does not end there. Drafting of tripartite arrangements is currently under way in Quebec, Labrador, Ontario and Yukon.

[*Translation*]

On a similar note, on Friday I will be in Chisasibi First Nation in Quebec, for the grand opening of this community's new elementary school. This new school is yet another demonstration of the commitment we all share to ensure first nations students have the tools and facilities they need to succeed.

●(1100)

[*English*]

I am pleased to tell my colleagues in this place today that over the past couple of years we have opened no less than three schools in the great Kenora riding with another one soon to be opened. In some cases, these were schools that, for more than a decade and a half, needed to be replaced but which previous administrations or governments had passed over. In one instance, the Lac Seul First Nation had a school built for the first time, one of the richest historical first nation communities in the Sioux Lookout region.

Under the education partnerships programs, partners are working together, sharing expertise and services with the objectives of not just improving the learning environments but, importantly and objectively, through the framework to ensure that the appropriate facilities for first nations communities are available to them so that children can go to school in a nice facility and celebrate learning.

[*Translation*]

Yet it was Chief David Peter-Paul of Pabineau First Nation in New Brunswick who voiced the best reason for this practical partnership approach. He stated that these forward-thinking agreements—like the one reached in his province—ensure that our first nations children are better educated and prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

[*English*]

I could not agree more. These education partnerships are beginning to address some of the key structural impediments to progress raised by the Auditor General's report. However, members should not take my word for it. The success of these partnerships has been so apparent that first nations leaders and provincial officials elsewhere in Canada have expressed a keen interest in forging similar tripartite arrangements.

I can assure the House that this government will continue to work with our partners in the months and years to come to develop these kinds of important agreements.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

We are also using our success with these tripartite agreements as a springboard to carry out the next phase of partnership-based reform. Our government will continue to work with first nations groups and other willing partners to overcome the challenges and impediments they face.

[English]

We in this government know that we must work hand in hand with first nations communities to address these impediments. There is simply no other way.

Last summer, we joined the Assembly of First Nations' national chief, Shawn Atleo, a champion in no uncertain terms for education for first nations, to announce Canada's first nations joint action plan. One of our key action plan priorities was education, a non-partisan, arm's-length national panel on first nations K to 12 education. We asked panel members to travel to first nations communities across the country to gain perspectives and opinions from first nations leaders, parents, students, elders and teachers on further steps that we could take to improve first nations education for children living on reserves. Many other Canadians have also had the chance to contribute to this important effort via the panel's website.

[Translation]

Let me provide you with one quote the panel received from Kenzie, a grade 7 student from Cross Lake First Nation in Manitoba, where I worked as a nurse over 7 or 8 years ago. He said, "No matter what kind it is, we will be better off with education. We become better people and better citizens and we also can have better lives."

[English]

We are indebted to the national panel members for their tremendous work, which will guide our actions in the months and years ahead. Their report, which was released just last week, provides valuable feedback and recommendations on the next steps that could be taken to improve education on reserves. They done first nations youth in our country a great service by offering a menu of pragmatic measures and recommendations to ensure that first nations children succeed in school, develop their talents and fulfill their hopes and dreams.

[Translation]

We will now work with the Assembly of First Nations and others to consider and act on the panel's recommendations to improve K-to-12 first nations education.

Our overall goal, however, remains much the same: to provide first nation students with quality education that enables them to realize their aspirations and receive the skills they need to enter the labour market and be full participants in a strong Canadian economy.

•(1105)

[English]

With just a couple of minutes left, I want to emphasize that our government is determined that aboriginal learners will enjoy the same opportunities as other Canadians. This motion also represents a relationship here in this place between all parties. It recognizes that while there remain some structural challenges ahead and there

continue to be questions of resources, it does not depend exclusively on any one of these. It demands partnerships here in this place and non-partisan, substantive discussions about how we can work with first nation communities, first nation leadership and organizations and the provinces to improve the fortunes of first nation students and the education they receive.

I want to thank the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for his tremendous leadership in education and leadership in working with National Chief Shawn Atleo and stakeholders and the provinces across this country, and for giving me the opportunity, not just at committee but in so many instances, to work lock-step with him and my colleagues on the standing committee. We have received tremendous support from this caucus to make important strides toward improving education in first nation communities across this great country.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his encouraging comments that go in the right direction, but the concern is about how quickly we are going to be moving in that direction. It is encouraging that the government is now beginning to look at comparability. It is regrettable that past governments stalled on that and first nations and organizations have been forced to go to the courts to try to seek comparability between provincial and federal programs for social services, education and so forth. The children deserve to have comparable, equitable programs.

The Auditor General and the public accounts committee and the recent national panel between first nations and the government all came forward with the same recommendation, that we need to have in place federal measures to which first nations can hold the government accountable. These would include federal legislation mirroring provincial and territorial legislation guaranteeing long-term funding for quality education and, second, clear and binding criteria setting standards for the services to be provided.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary can advise us if, in the coming budget, we are going to see the dollars and commitment to initiate this legislation immediately and to take substantial action on ending the discrimination in funding and support for first nation children.

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague so much. She is one of the few members who is able to ask within one question fifteen others. We went from accountability to resources to legislation, all in one fell swoop. I am going to take this opportunity to focus on the accountability component of this because it is key.

*Business of Supply*

When we look at the partnerships we are establishing, I would point out that accountability rests on all of us, not only federally but also provincially, because provincial governments have constitutional competencies in this administratively and in terms of program delivery. The same applies to first nations educational organizations and first nations community leadership and families. In moving forward we all understand that accountability for this rests on all of us to make important, substantive contributions to help not just to improve education but also, as highlighted today, to commit ourselves to finding the best ways to keep kids in school. We all have to make contributions in this way. This is about the accountability of us all.

On the question of resources, as I said earlier, we have identified education as a key priority in the joint action plan and we are going to work with the Assembly of First Nations and our provincial partners to get maximum value for our collective investments in education moving forward.

• (1110)

**Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have a couple of questions. What role does Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada play in first nations elementary and secondary schools, and how many students does AANDC support when overseeing the delivery of elementary and secondary education?

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Madam Speaker, I am humbled to answer the question by a gentleman who has invested his professional life in education in the great province of Saskatchewan, from where my mother, her father, and so many of my family members hail.

It is a great question. Aboriginal Affairs supports first nations and their regional organizations by providing funding for programs and services for elementary and secondary education for first nations students who live on reserve. This includes funding for students who are attending band operated schools or funding for the tuition of first nations students who live on reserve and attend provincial schools.

We are talking about 117,500 students, 61% in band operated schools, 36% in provincial schools, and 3% in federal and private schools across this great country.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I just wish to ask the parliamentary secretary this: will the Conservatives be voting for this motion or not?

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Madam Speaker, I think I mentioned at the outset of my speech that we will be supporting this motion.

I get no greater pleasure than rising in this place and answering any question, whether on water and sewer, education, or the health services delivered by the federal government, and to hold the third party's record on this to account. Decades of whimsical and irresponsible spending is what gave rise to these foundational problems and structural challenges that we face. I know this. I was living there during those dark decades and experienced first hand the shortcomings of the government, as they were then, with respect to education and any other major file with respect to on-reserve living conditions.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary asked us to work together. I would suggest that perhaps we should step back a little.

We have a situation of institutional discrimination that has gone on for many years and has left our first nations children at particular risk. At the same time we hear the extraction companies talking about how they need our first nations, who include one of our largest growing demographics as well. We not only have to invest to correct the mistakes of the past but also to prepare for the future.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary about this discrimination. Is the government prepared to address directly the \$2,000 per pupil difference in educational spending on first nations versus other Canadian students?

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Madam Speaker, with the exception of my last answer, where I perhaps had a little more of a personal point of contention with previous governments' handling of this and other files, the tone has been respectful, to say the least. I have said to my colleagues across the way that we look forward to working with them.

That said, we are going to move forward in a manner that respects and understands the role of all partners on this important point. Obviously, there is a need for reconciliation in this regard. We believe that improving the quality of education necessarily demands that we all understand the resources that we put into this, that we support the administrative capacity for providing a good education and that we have a framework of tripartite agreements that absolutely delivers on reconciling what, if any, disparities, exist from a purely resource perspective.

• (1115)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am interested in the member's comments. I would be interested in knowing what he thought of the Kelowna accord.

When he talks about all parties and stakeholders coming together, that in fact did happen. Paul Martin did a fabulous job in bringing first nations, aboriginal peoples, and many different stakeholders together in Kelowna. They came up with a multi-billion dollar agreement that would have resolved many of the issues we face here today. Yet one of the first actions his government took was to get rid of the Kelowna accord.

Does the member not recognize that the Kelowna accord would have done far more for our first nations people than this government has done in the last number of years, in which—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I would like to give the hon. member time to respond.

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Madam Speaker, typically lob questions come from this side of the House, but in this particular case I have been given a second gift by the third party.

If we asked Paul Martin at this very moment whether in his 13 years as a finance minister and his subsequent brief period as prime minister, enough had been done on this particular file, I think he would admit that it had not. This I say with the greatest of respect I can muster for him. The Kelowna accord was agreed on the eve of the third party being put out of power by Canadians across the country, which I think was a strong signal that its policies in this regard had not worked and did not work.

*Business of Supply*

I had the unique experience of living in isolated first nations communities during that time period. Therefore, with some credibility I can say that the frameworks we are working together with now depend on good relationships with first nations leadership and our provincial partners.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on behalf of the Liberal Party on the opposition day motion on Shannen's dream, moved by the member for Manicouagan, although I must say I was disappointed by the gesture made by the member in an inappropriate attempt at humour at the beginning of this very serious debate.

It also gives me a huge opportunity to thank the people who help me do my job on a daily basis: the Right Hon. Paul Martin; our leader from Toronto Centre; former minister Andy Scott; members of the Aboriginal Peoples' Commission; and past aboriginal candidates, especially Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux; and our aboriginal colleagues in the Senate. I also want to thank Daniel Rubinstein and Rick Theis in my office. This is a huge file and it is not possible for me to handle it in any way on my own.

Today's motion is inspired by the courageous words and work of Ms. Shannen Koostachin of the Attawapiskat First Nation, who raised national awareness of the gap between first nations and non-first nations education systems. She died tragically in a car accident before she could realize her goal of equal education for first nations kids.

At this time I think we also need to applaud the inspiration and tireless work of Cindy Blackstock and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, who thankfully is there all the time, pushing us to be better. When people across the country ask what they can do, sending people to the society's website to understand Shannen's dream, Jordan's principle and the first nations "I Am a Witness" campaign actually makes people feel there is something they can do to bear witness to this unfortunate situation, where more and more causes across this country are really relegated to the refrain of, "See you in court".

[Translation]

On behalf of my Liberal colleagues, I would like to pay tribute to Shannen Koostachin, reiterate our strong support for Shannen's dream, and demand that the funding gap be closed for first nations education.

We support the right of every aboriginal student to quality and culturally appropriate education. In order to achieve this, the federal government must work in consultation and partnership with the first nations in order to, first, admit that a funding gap exists, which the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development refuses to do; cooperate with the first nations in order to establish a framework to fund education based on real needs and costs; create structures to guarantee success and also mutual accountability when it comes to results in first nations education.

● (1120)

[English]

The recent report on the National Panel of First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education concluded there was actually no first nation education system in Canada. Instead, a patchwork of

uncoordinated, unaccountable and underfunded policies and programs have failed first nations students.

The panel heard from first nations about many gaps, including: no regular reporting on the educational attainment of the child; poor quality of reporting on learning needs; inadequate or non-existent early literacy and numeracy programs; absence of any meaningful or functioning special needs system; no funding or support for language and cultural curriculum and programs; poor school facilities, including at least 100 schools that are not up to standard in terms of physical facilities and are not safe places for learning; very limited programs for quality distance learning; limited availability of technology or library support; and significant discrepancies in remuneration, institutional support and benefits for school staff, including teachers and principals.

Unlike in the provincial education system, where there is a statutory guarantee for education and funding that is based on real costs and real needs, there is no legislation governing first nations education and a cap currently exists on funding increases.

With these significant gaps, it is no surprise that the educational outcome of first nation learners on reserve are so unacceptably poor. According to the aboriginal affairs 2010 departmental performance report, the high school graduation rate for first nation students living on reserve was just 33.3% in 2009-10. The graduation rate actually fell 7% from 2008 to 2009.

[Translation]

In comparison, 77% of non-aboriginal Canadians have a high school diploma.

The Auditor General noted that at this pace, it would take 28 years for the first nations communities to bridge the education gap.

[English]

The lack of educational attainment is directly related to the disproportionately high rate of incarceration of aboriginal people in Canada. For example, according to the 2006 census, the incarceration rate among aboriginal young adults in Alberta without a high school diploma and employment was 46.1 per thousand, compared to 2.4 per thousand for those with a high school diploma and a job.

A major impediment to closing the gap is in the chronic underfunding of first nations education, which the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development continues to shamefully deny.

For the benefit of the minister, here are the facts. Based on population growth and cost inflation, federal funding for first nations K to 12 education should have grown at 6.3% per year. However, the Conservatives have continued to cap funding at 2% per year.

[Translation]

At the same time, provincial funding for education from kindergarten to grade 12 has increased at a rate of over 4% since 1996.

This has created a funding deficit of approximately \$2,000 to \$3,000 per student per year.

[English]

The Assembly of First Nations calculated that the cumulative funding shortfall for first nations education was \$620 million in 2009-10 and \$1 billion since 2006. The underfunding does not take into account what is needed for basic services like libraries, first nations language training, support services like special education and the development of culturally appropriate curriculum, which are not included in INAC's funding formula for first nations education.

Recent reports by the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples and the Auditor General, as well as the national panel, have all called on the federal government to end its systemic underfunding of first nations education and base funding on real cost drivers.

Even the provinces are calling on the federal government to respect its moral, legal and constitutional responsibilities and provide equal funding. Just yesterday, Don Drummond's report to the Ontario government recommended that the Ontario government should put strong pressure on the federal government to provide funding for first nations on reserve education that at least reaches parity with per student provincial funding for elementary and secondary education.

This past December, the Senate committee likewise concluded in its report, "Reforming First Nations Education" that:

—we believe that a new funding formula, negotiated by the parties and based on real cost drivers, must be developed to replace the current system of contribution agreements.

Just last week, the national panel recommended that the government ensure adequate funding to support a first nations education system that would meet the needs of first nations learners, first nations communities and Canada as a whole, and remarked:

It does seem clear that most First Nation schools do not have sufficient resources to properly support the success of their students.

It is important to acknowledge that both Senate committee and the national panel reiterated that funding alone would not solve the problem. It must be accompanied by steps to build a new first nations education system, centred around a jointly developed first nations education act. For this reason the national panel recommended the following steps be taken immediately in the upcoming budget: a new funding formula, coupled with new standards of accountability for expenditures and results is developed; increase education funding in the 2012-13 school year by an amount equal to the percentage increase for provincial schools; increase teacher and administration compensation to a level equivalent to provincial schools in order to recruit and retain educators; and make an immediate investment in the early literacy programs.

### *Business of Supply*

My Liberal colleagues and I agree completely with the need to immediately lift the 2% cap. We will be looking to the upcoming budget to see if the Conservative government is upholding its stated commitment to improve first nations educational outcomes.

The minister's remarks that the national panel's recommendations and timelines are merely "aspirational" have put this commitment into question. This reminds me of the government's position on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states clearly in article 14:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

While the Conservatives endorsed the declaration in November 2010, after initially refusing to do so, the government has since made clear that it views the declaration as, and I repeat, "aspirational".

In reply to a recent order paper question I submitted, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development wrote that Canada endorsed the declaration without the intention of creating legally binding obligations and that the declaration did not give rise to any requirement to undertake specific reforms. I surely hope the minister's use of the term "aspirational" does not indicate that the government intends for first nations education reform to befall the same fate as the declaration.

Getting back to the need for a funding reform, Liberals also strongly support the recommendation that any new funding formula must abandon the old model of grants and contributions in favour of multi-year, statutory funding based on real costs that is predictable and sustainable. This would not only respect first nations jurisdiction and the government-to-government relationship between the Crown and first nations, but would undoubtedly create stability and improve outcomes.

● (1125)

There is also a need for dedicated funding for first nations on reserve educational infrastructure. The impetus from Shannen's Dream was a struggle for Attawapiskat to secure its funding for a new school to replace the existing portables located on the site contaminated by a spill of over 50,000 litres of diesel fuel. While the federal government repeatedly issued tenders for the construction of a new school in Attawapiskat after years of delay, there are 100 other communities with similar needs. Without appropriate infrastructure funding, the gap will surely remain.

*Business of Supply*

There have also been recommendations to create an accountability and reporting framework to assess improvements, a national commission to support education reform and improvements and the creation of regional first nations educational organizations.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Today, as this House discusses the first nations people's rights to education, we must remember that the objective of investing in education is not simply to make aboriginal communities self-sufficient, but also to bolster the performance of the Canadian economy in its entirety.

Canada is facing a critical skilled labour shortage, which will get worse over time. The first nations can and must play a leading role in alleviating this shortage, but only if we work together.

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards noted that raising the education levels and market performance of the first nations to equal those of other Canadians would contribute \$401 billion to GDP, increase government revenue by \$5.8 billion and reduce government spending by \$8.4 billion over 25 years.

Access to quality education, particularly in northern or remote communities, means that more aboriginal people will be able to participate in the development of natural resources and in other projects.

[*English*]

Liberals have recognized both the right to education and the economic imperative of education. We have strongly supported the need to work in consultation and partnership with first nations to dramatically increase the level of education attainment.

Our party collaborated with aboriginal people to create the Kelowna accord, which among other things provided \$1.8 billion in new targeted funding for education over five years in order to raise first nations outcomes to a level equal to the rest of Canada.

While today's debate is largely about first nations K-12 on-reserve education, we also need to address first nations post-secondary education as well as the barriers facing Métis and Inuit in achieving better educational outcomes.

In terms of post-secondary education, the 2% cap on the post-secondary students support program is a significant barrier to increasing the number of status Indian and Inuit students receiving a post-secondary education.

The need for more investment in post-secondary education is clear. In 2006, only 8% of aboriginal people had a university diploma as opposed to 23% of the general population.

In addition to post-secondary education, I learned in a recent meeting with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges that there is a great demand for additional investment in academic upgrading programs so that aboriginal Canadians who have not graduated from high school are able to do so later in life.

Regarding Inuit education, the recently released national strategy on Inuit education report "First Canadians, Canadians First"

identifies the factors behind the Inuit education gap and recommendations for the way forward.

The federal government also needs to work collaboratively with its provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that there are Métis-specific educational programs.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to share with members a letter written by a young first nations boy named Wesley, who contributed to "Our Dreams Matter Too", an alternate report from the Shannen's Dream Campaign to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the occasion of Canada's third and fourth periodic reviews. Wesley wrote:

I'm writing this letter to you as a young native man with something to say about my education. I have attended kindergarten, elementary, and high school on reserve and I am aware of the differences between the education that I have received and the education that non-aboriginal, off-reserve students have received. The lack of funding is a concern, the lack of resources is a concern, but the lack of cultural content in our school is the biggest concern for me.

If we had more funding, there would be more possibilities to include cultural activities. If we had a better sense of culture, we would be more confident, which would lead to success in life.

I would like to see native aboriginal students treated and funded the same as any other non-aboriginal students because we are all students, we are all human, we are all equal and should be treated as such.

I would urge all members to support today's motion. We have lost six very long years in improving the educational outcomes for aboriginal students in Canada, but it is never too late. We know what must be done. All that is left is political will to do not only what is right in terms of fairness and equity, but what is right in terms of securing Canada's economic, social and cultural future. Ending the underfunding of aboriginal education is where we must begin.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Madam Speaker, if the education system for first nations improved each time a speech was given on the topic, they would have the best education system in the world.

That is not the problem. The problem is not our speeches and our intentions, but the results obtained. No results have ever been obtained. This is not a recent issue.

For 25 years, the first nations education system has been underfunded, and everyone is responsible. We are all responsible. We have not succeeded in convincing people that when budget cuts have to be made, they should not affect education. I am not pointing the finger at any person or party in particular, but I would like to know today whether the talk will be followed by action. For once, can we drop the neo-liberal talk and get the job done?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his remarks.



It is very important that we stop laying blame and start looking toward the future for the children of our country, who are so important. I think and I hope that the March budget will include investments in aboriginal children and students.

[English]

Enough already; it has been six years and things only have become worse. It is time to push reset, look to the future, and make sure that the discrimination stops.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, we appreciate the *ex post facto* wisdom of the member. However, the reality is that six years ago, in addition to water and sewer matters on reserve, health program delivery and its infrastructure and, as we are speaking thematically today, education were a mess. Hundreds of schools either needed to be severely rehabilitated or replaced. Some communities needed their first school. When I became an MP, there was one school that had burned and had not been replaced by the previous government.

Is the member willing to concede that over the 13 years the Liberals were in power, hundreds of schools had been neglected and there was not an objective framework to prioritize the replacement and rehabilitation of those schools?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, what I will acknowledge is that our government realized that the system was not working and that there needed to be a partnership involving first nations, Inuit and Métis communities, the provinces and territories, and the federal government. We worked for 18 months on a plan called the Kelowna accord. We booked \$5 billion for that accord in that fall's economic statement. I know the current government has torn up that accord and pretends it never existed. It has removed it from the website even though it can be accessed on the Saskatchewan website. We have had six lost years.

I am prepared to say to the member that we will look forward now but we want to know that there will be money in the budget to do the kind of infrastructure and education rebalance that was in the Kelowna accord.

• (1140)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I was very pleased to hear my colleague speak to this issue, but I am concerned about the issue of six long years. Never let it be said in the House that I have given the Conservatives a break on anything, but we are talking about 100 lost years. Anybody who is my age or older who is a first nation and was taken from his or her family and put in the residential schools, we apologized for that two years ago. Anybody younger than I am was put in those federal schools which were basically dumps with substandard education. Then the people were turned over to band schools without funding.

We are seeing an accumulation of decades of systemic negligence and abuse that has gone all the way through Indian Affairs where the reports have sat on desks. This was never a priority until children made it a priority. That is what makes today's motion different.

### *Business of Supply*

Rather than go back and forth as to how we got here, Shannen's dream talks about the necessary steps of going forward. Can we as a Parliament in this day and age rectify the 100 years of abuse of first nations children and say this is the beginning when we start to march forward?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, I should have acknowledged the member in my remarks. I meant to, but I will take this time to say that his tireless work on this file in working with Shannen toward the dream is really admirable. It is the type of work that parliamentarians need to be doing.

Today's debate regarding Shannen's dream is an opportunity for all parties to come together to rectify, as the member said, 100 years of doing things badly. I hope the member understands that we had such hope in the fall of 2005, until his party took us down, that we could move on the investments that took place in the accord after that 18 months of work. We have to go forward together—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. There are many members rising and I would like to give them the opportunity to ask questions.

The hon. member for Prince Albert.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Madam Speaker, this is such a timely debate. It is unfortunate that this debate did not happen many years ago. When I look back at history, we need to refocus our talk on the kids. This is important for them. We want to make sure that kids get the proper education they deserve in a fashion that is accountable and bankable.

We have had a situation in the past where the government just threw money at the problem. The Liberal government would close its eyes, throw money at the problem and think that it had a clear conscience. When there was another problem, it would just throw money at it and its conscience would be clear. That was the Liberals' attitude toward this whole file throughout the decades. They would close their eyes and throw money at it. They would not worry about accountability or where the money was going. They would not worry about whether it actually got to the kids for their education. They would just throw money at it. That does not work.

*Business of Supply*

The member would recognize that those types of policies are from bygone days. We need policies that work with the first nations people directly, that actually achieve a goal in partnership with first nations. Will the member not recognize that throwing money at everything does not work? Accountability, and more importantly, partnerships with first nations are what is needed to achieve the required results for the kids so that they can participate in the economy in the future. It has to be done in co-operation with first nations with accountability and a process that achieves results.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, I will be the first one to admit that the paternalism of the past has not worked at all. The process in the Kelowna accord was to build from the bottom up with first nations, Inuit and Métis in order to build a system of accountability that would work, was implementable and of their own design. That accord provided for a first nations auditor general. There were real targets but there was also the necessary money. The member for Timmins—James Bay would admit that there had not been money put in place for a school or for infrastructure.

We cannot pretend that if we make a wish and sprinkle Tinker Bell dust that everything will be better. It requires serious investments and serious strategies: what, by when, and how will all first nations children—

• (1145)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for the last question, but it must be very brief, 30 seconds.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I want to make it clear that I plan to vote in favour of today's motion. The treatment of children in first nations communities is scandalous. They have a right to a decent education.

My question for the member for St. Paul's is very direct and very brief. What does she believe it will take to see this legacy of shame end once and for all?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, the exciting thing of having Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the brilliantly articulated Shannen's dream, is that people have been thinking about these things for a long time. It is up to us to listen, to provide the appropriate resources and then to work with the first nations people on the ground to make sure that we are always re-evaluating in terms of investments and results. If more money is required to kickstart this out of the darkness, then we need to have a commitment that it will happen with stable, predictable funding that first nations can count on so that they can plan in the same way that other communities do in this country.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay who has been a true advocate on first nations issues.

I am proud to speak to this motion today on a subject that is of vital importance to the people of my riding, the first nations and Canada.

The motion, if I were to sum it up in a word or two, speaks to opportunity. It addresses the nuts and bolts of levelling the playing field for first nations students who are being denied what most of our kids take for granted. It sets a course that would see the benefits of

education improve the lives of more first nations people and, by extension, their communities, which can only be described as a very good thing.

What we are debating today comes largely from Shannen's dream. Many members would know that Shannen Koostachin never got to attend what we would call a "normal school". Her school was closed because it was built on contaminated soil. She received her education in portable trailers that were charitably called "temporary schools".

Shannen dreamt that she would be able to go to school like all other Canadian kids. It is a simple dream if one thinks about it. Most kids are not dealing with that issue and get to enjoy other dreams. Sadly, Shannen passed away, but not before she brought her dream to prominence and created a great awareness of the challenges she and other first nations students faced. She was extraordinary and all she wanted was what we would call an ordinary school.

This was in Attawapiskat. It is the same community that Parliament was seized with as winter set upon northern Ontario a few months back. Nine years ago, the children there created an Attawapiskat school campaign and have heard promises from three different ministers of Indian Affairs since, none of which ever amounted to a new school.

Sadly, we know that Attawapiskat is not alone. There are many first nations that share similar circumstances. In fact, former auditor general, Sheila Fraser, told us that it would take 28 years to bridge the gap if we did not increase our efforts, which is why New Democrats are making this issue a priority.

For many Canadians, it is difficult to understand how we can have a thoroughly modern country but are unable to deliver the kind of education that makes all the difference in a child's development for a significant portion of our population who live on first nations.

This chronic problem has moved well past pressing and immediate. It could more accurately be described as critical and urgent. There is a cost associated with chronic conditions and, over time, the cost can start to outweigh those of the preventive measures that would put an end to the condition. In this case, the cost is that Canada is being robbed of the benefits that flow from a better educated population. It is short-sighted if we decide that we cannot make the proper investment now.

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is studying land use and sustainable economic development right now. We are hearing a lot about training. The motion today addresses the conditions that are needed to ensure that any training received on reserve has roots set in solid ground. That ground is good education, one that allows a person to be a lifelong learner, able to develop more skills and become a net benefit to themselves, their community, our country and its economy.

*Business of Supply*

If we think about it, this motion dovetails nicely with the agenda set out by the government on its own committee. I hope that other members will come to see it in that way, as well.

I certainly would not want to stand before members and say that there are no success stories among our first nations schools. The shame is that there are not more. The same can be said of any school, it is true, but the challenges faced by educators and students in far too many first nation schools are of a different scale and seem to persist no matter how much goodwill this chamber can muster.

• (1150)

I want to share with the House some of the findings from the report of the national panel on first nation elementary and secondary education for students on reserves. I think it will help focus some of the broader issues that New Democrats are trying to address in our motion.

The report stated that, in 2006, approximately 50% of the on reserve population aged 25 to 34 did not have a high school certificate compared with 10% for other Canadians of the same age. Can anyone believe that? There is an absence of a system for quick assessment and diagnosis of special needs to provide individual learning plans and resources for children with those needs. At least 100 schools are not up to standard in physical facilities and are not safe places for learning.

Those are not findings we should be particularly proud of as parliamentarians. They speak to the challenges that must be addressed and the work we need to undertake. This motion goes a long way in doing some of that.

Who could actually say that they are against ensuring good schools are in place for first nations kids? Who could be against the broader benefits of education or deny basic health and safety to school kids? We would have to be a Scrooge McDuck to say that Canada should not make this investment and make it a priority.

I read something as I prepared for this debate. It was written by Lorna Williams on the subject of Indian control of Indian education and it captured the benefits of education in a nutshell. She wrote, "Education teaches more than the required curriculum. It teaches hard work, persistence, self-discipline, consistent effort, responsibility, co-operation, commitment, mutual respect and tolerance".

Those are certainly qualities we would like to see our children have. How could it be any different for parents on reserves across Canada?

I will take a moment to tell the House about a constituent I met shortly after I was first elected. Her name is Eden Beaudin and she lives in the M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulan Island. When she was nine, Eden created the Pegasus Literacy Writing Award to encourage first nations students and other students to write stories of their own and to pursue an education. I have been invited to my friends' award ceremony every year since and think she is a great example of a young girl who is getting a good education on reserve. I want there to be more Edens all across Canada and I think this motion goes a long way to doing just that.

I am hopeful that some of the government's new-found willingness to work with the opposition on reasonable proposals makes its way into the vote on this motion.

I am glad that the parliamentary secretary for Indian affairs has indicated that he will help us pass this motion and use the upcoming budget to provide the funding needed. I believe that is the kind of Parliament Canadians want and this is the kind of motion they would like to see come from this place once in a while.

The challenges are obvious. We have had steady inflationary growth, coupled with population growth on first nations, that erodes current education budgets and allows no headway to be made on well-documented problems.

We know that people with a grade 12 education are twice as likely to be unemployed, receive social assistance, engage in anti-social or self-destructive behaviour and be involved in the criminal justice system. We know that improving education for first nations will give them opportunities to contribute to the economy and workforce.

We have an idea of the money needed to do all of this work and we should not be afraid to make this good investment in ourselves. We should be proud to be parliamentarians who can say that we did something to really move the chain on the education crisis plaguing our first nations.

Former national chief, Phil Fontaine, posed this question in a 2008 editorial article:

If 88 per cent of all children do not have access to early childhood programs, no money for language education, no funding for libraries, and no money for computers, what does this say about how our country cares about our children's future?

• (1155)

I believe we could pass this motion, include the money needed in the upcoming budget and move on to the next challenge. There are many challenges to address. We are asking a lot of our first nations. We just need to ask the bands that are seized with questions about development on their land.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her contributions. It is great to work with her on the standing committee and to have a partner from northern Ontario.

I agree with her assessment that important pre-conditions for training and skills beyond secondary education means getting a good education on reserve. I appreciate organizations like SLAMMB in Sioux Lookout and Wahsa that does upgrading with first nations communities, helping to overcome some of the geographic barriers that are posed for adult learners.

*Business of Supply*

As a standard for moving forward with education that is on par, and I am not asking about the resource component here, but does she agree that the province plays an important role in raising up the standard? We have seen some principals in some of the communities do their best to introduce testing so that grade 12 students have a good chance to start a college or university education. However, is the province an important part of that process with respect to achieving standards after high school?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Madam Speaker, of course the provinces play an important role in education. On this matter in particular, we need to ensure there is proper consultation with first nations with respect to their needs for education. If they believe that is working in conjunction with the provinces, then I think they will take those necessary steps.

The issue at hand here is that education funding from not only this government but past governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have continued to fail first nations.

Chief Shining Turtle, from White Fish River First Nation, indicated that the government had not provided an increase in funding since 1988. He goes on to say:

All stages of First Nation education require attention and support. As the fastest growing population in Canada and as confirmed by countless studies, enhancing investments in First Nation post secondary education is a critical requirement that will return significant dividends to both First Nation and Canadian societies and economies, as stated in the Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (2007).

He said that in a letter he wrote to the Prime Minister on February 19, 2010.

• (1200)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I can speak personally to the fact that the member is a stalwart member of Parliament speaking on behalf of first nations rights and interests, and it is an honour to work with her. I promise to finally get to her communities.

We have been reviewing, in our aboriginal affairs committee, discussions about economic opportunities for first nations people. We just heard this week from Regional Chief Toulouse from Ontario expressing concern about the failure to deliver on treaty rights and entitlements and the inability to actually benefit from resource development, which would help them to have the resources to educate their children. Would the member like to speak to that?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Madam Speaker, Regional Chief Toulouse has certainly been working very hard with our first nations communities in addressing treaty rights. Until that is dealt with, I think we will continue having these challenges.

I will quickly reiterate a statement that Chief Angus Toulouse made when he appeared before the standing committee. It is actually included in the “Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope” report that was tabled. He was talking about the funding caps. He said:

The impacts of this cap can be felt everywhere, from antiquated education facilities, to day-to-day classroom operations, to the lack of resources available to fully develop and sustain First Nation structures that provide second and third level supports.

They have been saying over and over again that this is the issue that needs to be dealt with and over and over again Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to deliver.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to speak to Shannen's Dream motion, representing the great people of the Timmins—James Bay region where Shannen Koostachin was born. Today in Fort Albany is the great moon gathering, where all the Cree communities will come together. I would like to point out that tonight in Fort Albany the great band Tragically Hip will be performing because it has been inspired by the young people of the James Bay coast.

This is a historic moment in Parliament and for Canada. This is the first motion that has been driven by children. The reason we are debating this issue is because children across the country have recognized their brothers and sisters have been denied basic education rights. This is about putting children first. I cannot think of another instance where school children in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and across western Canada could tell every member in Parliament about what Shannen's Dream means. They know it, they have been living it and they have been inspired by the story of Shannen Koostachin. This is a historic opportunity.

It is also an extremely important time for parliamentarians because of all the rock throwing that has gone on in the House and all the blame that has happened. It is our job to fight with each other, but there are occasions when, as a nation, we are called to rise to something greater. That moment came for me when members in the last Parliament gathered for the apology regarding the residential schools. I remember standing in the House on that historic day, wondering who was going to apologize to this generation of children.

That question has remained unanswered until perhaps today with the adoption of Shannen's Dream, not just the idea of Shannen's Dream but the actual principles that have been articulated about the need to close funding gaps, to ensure there is ring fencing around capital projects so we can start to build schools and ensure that there are adequate teacher-student class size ratios, just like every other child in our country. If we agree to that as parliamentarians, we are taking a historic step forward. I can tell everyone that the children are watching.

I would like to tell the House a bit about Shannen Koostachin. George Stroumboulopoulos picked five teenage girls in history who kicked butt. I know that is probably not a parliamentary expression, but George Stroumboulopoulos' words were even tougher. He picked Joan of Arc, Anne Frank, Mary Shelley, Buffy the vampire slayer, and I am not sure why but my kids say that has a lot of street credibility, and he picked Shannen Koostachin as number one. That is an extraordinary achievement for a child who came from the impoverished community of Attawapiskat.

*Business of Supply*

Shannen did not want to make history. She might have liked to make history, but she did not set out to be a hero. She wanted to be on a volleyball team. She wanted to have a locker. She wanted to write notes in the classroom. She had a dream that she could have what she called “a comfy school”.

I once walked with Shannen in Cobalt, Ontario at little St. Patrick Catholic School, a tiny school. It would not even be on the radar of what people think of as a proper school today, but it has a nice, comfy little feel. Shannen kept disappearing on me. I went to look for her and I found her looking in a classroom window. I asked her if something was wrong and she said, “I wish I had my entire life over so I could go to a school like this”. At age 13, she had realized that opportunity was slipping away from her and that might never come back. To see a sense of urgency through a child's eyes, the sense that if he or she does not get an education, that the child will never be better off, is deeply disturbing.

We have known about the underfunding. We knew about study after study that sat at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for years. It just was not a priority. Nobody in the House thought it was a priority that children were suffering, that there was substandard education and children were being treated with systemic discrimination based on their race and the fact that they lived on reserve. It was never a priority until one child said, “Enough”. When Shannen Koostachin started to fight, other children came with her. She has been called by many young people across Canada as the Rosa Parks of this generation, the one who said, “Enough is enough. We don't want to spend another day sitting at the back of the school bus”.

• (1205)

This can be about the blame game. This can be about the 100 and some horror stories that have been mentioned. I have been to communities where I do not know how the children can go to school in the morning and sit in those cold substandard classrooms. To me, that is a sign of real heroes. We could talk about all of that or we could talk about how we will actually fulfill the obligation of this great nation.

Every now and then I hear people say, “When is enough enough? When have we done our bit with first nations?” We are on a path together. We are in a relationship together. It has been an abusive and dysfunctional relationship, but we will continue on in this relationship together.

It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Commons to stand today and say that we as Canadians believe in the fundamental principle that every child has a right to an education. Every child has the right to guaranteed access to education. A right to an education is not just access to a school. A right to an education is a more fundamental principle. Children should not have to know what that right is when they walk in that school. Just like any child, whether in Timmins, Red Deer or any other community in the country, their rights are encoded in law, that class-to-size-ratios are guaranteed and that there is a plan for children with dyslexia, autism or special needs because they only have one childhood. It is too precious a thing to waste. Under the bureaucratic indifference of successive governments, we have squandered the lives and potential of tens of

thousands of wonderful young aboriginal children who have never been given what they should have been given.

Shannen's Dream motion was born the moment of her horrible death on May 31, 2010, on Highway 11, just south of Temagami. It was the worst day of my life when I found out we had lost a youth leader. National education leaders, national labour leaders, Cindy Blackstock and others called me to say that we had to carry this on. Young Chelsea Edwards from Attawapiskat called me. Her community and the whole of James Bay area was devastated that we had lost this young leader. They said that we had to fulfill what Shannen started.

The language of Shannen's Dream was crafted out of that tragedy, out of that sense of grief. We sat down with members of the Assembly of First Nations, the Canadian Public School Boards Association, the trustees and teachers to ask what steps were necessary to guarantee that this generation of children would not be squandered.

Shannen would be 17 now. She had a dream. I think she wanted to be a lawyer on some given days and I am not sure what she wanted to be on other given days, but she wanted to get an education more than life itself. That was her passion and her belief. She used to tell me that it was not about her anymore; it was about the younger brothers and sisters. I think of those younger brothers and sisters in my communities, in Kashechewan, where we do not have a proper school, and in Attawapiskat where the kids still wait for a school. They are looking to the House of Commons.

This is a moment of unity, not just for first nation students but for non-native children from across Canada who have reached out to say that if we work together, we can bring change.

Here we are in the House of Commons. This is our moment. I call upon all parliamentarians to say that this is our time to apologize for what has gone on and that this is the way we will move forward as a country. I would like to see the support of every member in the House as we stand for Shannen's Dream.

• (1210)

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, having a neighbouring riding in northern Ontario and sharing communities along the James Bay and Hudson Bay coast, I appreciate the member's experience and perspective in this regard.

*Business of Supply*

With all due respect to Shannen, I can assure him that there are a number of children and great first nation leaders in northern Ontario who have certainly been a motivation for me and other parliamentarians to ensure that new schools and new training facilities are being built. For example, Pikangikum and Confederation College is working in co-operation with the community for the exciting Whitefeather forest management program, one of the rare relationships that will provide important training. As a signatory to the Indian residential school agreement, I am hopeful there will not be a need for an apology.

My question for the hon. member is this. Outside of a pure education, does the member agree with me that there are other things that are important, particularly given the vastness of northern Ontario, that add to a child's education, like communications, access to radio and newspapers through Wawatay? Does he support the commitment that our government has made to ensure these kinds of communications reach out to those communities and provide important forums and a life-learning forum that is also important to getting a good education?

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for mentioning Wawatay Radio, which is the connecting point for all of our northern communities that otherwise are not able to, in some ways, communicate. We need to see the digital infrastructure built.

The fundamental issue comes down to meeting the existing provincial standards. For years, Indian affairs has been telling children to go out and meet the provincial standards if they want to pass, but that it is going to fund at the federal rate, build smaller schools than the provincial standards and that it is not going to meet those standards.

Education is the beginning. Fort Albany has a good school that is underfunded, but the sense of hope in those children is remarkable because the school is the centre of that community. Every one of our first nations communities needs to have a school that is the centre point and that is culturally based, like in Fort Albany. The elders come in, sit in a central circle and the young people come in and feed them. There is a sense of community.

That is how we start to heal. That is how we build the opportunities. That is how we will see the immense resources that these communities have to offer the rest of our country and themselves.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the member for Timmins—James Bay, no one has worked harder for the first nations of our country. I am very proud to be in the House with him.

The remarks I have heard from the parliamentary secretary today are very positive. However, aside from the talk about education, until we reach the point where there is a clear understanding that the institutional discrimination for years has affected the first nations people, until a first nations person has a toilet instead of a pail, until there is no mould or leaky roof in their house and until the foundations are there to support the child at the home level, building all the schools in the world will not work if these needs are not addressed as well.

Would the member for Timmins—James Bay please comment on that?

●(1215)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I am so inspired by the incredible resilience of people in communities in my area, like the people in Attawapiskat, who have hope, who have an incredible belief. They put their belief in their children first.

Today we have to honour that obligation to the children. We need that to be our first step right now. We have many other issues such as mould and housing crises. We can start to deal with those as well, but we need to make that firm commitment to the children. We need to say that as children, their futures are sacred and that the House of Commons will protect the rights of those children.

We have signed international agreements. We should never have aboriginal youth, like those who went to Geneva last week, challenge Canada to live up to that. That is our first job. All the rest will begin if we show the good will to making a difference.

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to express my full support for the motion tabled by the hon. member for Manicouagan.

The education of first nations students is of the utmost importance. This government will continue to do its best to improve the educational outcomes of students attending first nations schools.

Education plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for the labour market. A quality education equips a young person with the skills and sensibilities needed to thrive as an adult. There is no question that first nations students should have access to educational opportunities that will help them thrive.

For all young Canadians, education should encourage and inspire them to stay in school. Ultimately, education should enable students to acquire the skills they need to enter and succeed in the labour market and to share fully in Canada's economic opportunities.

The truth is that for many years high school graduation rates among first nations youth have lagged well behind graduation rates among other Canadians. This means that this young and growing segment of the Canadian population is limited in its ability to contribute to and benefit from Canada's economic prosperity. Achieving this goal absolutely depends on improving educational outcomes among first nations students. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution. Many factors contribute to the problem.

Solving such a complex problem requires a multi-faceted strategy developed in partnership with first nations, one that addresses specific factors in a complementary way to inspire overall progress. This is an apt description of this government's strategy for first nations education. While much work remains to be done, I am convinced that this strategy has us on the right track.

My remarks today will focus on a single aspect of the strategy: infrastructure.

First nations own and operate community infrastructure on reserve. As such they are responsible for the operation and maintenance of their schools. They are also responsible for minor renovations.

*Business of Supply*

The Government of Canada also has responsibilities for first nations education infrastructure. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada plays the lead role in exercising these responsibilities.

The department provides financial and advisory assistance to first nations for the development of school infrastructure on reserve. This assistance takes a number of forms, from investing in projects to building new schools and facilities, to renovating and repairing existing ones, and providing funding for project design and planning.

In the 2010-11 fiscal year, our government's total investment in the building and renovation of schools was \$304 million. Since our government came into office in 2006, up to 2010 we have invested approximately \$924 million on school infrastructure projects. For the 2011-12 fiscal year, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada plans investments of approximately \$198 million.

These amounts reflect the fact that this government appreciates the benefits of safe and productive learning environments for first nations students. To get a better sense of how investment decisions are made, one must have a grasp of a few key programs and processes.

The primary funding vehicle within Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada is the capital facilities and maintenance program. The program invests in four main areas: housing, education, water and waste water systems. It also invests in other community infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and fire protection.

● (1220)

The total annual budget for the program is approximately \$1 billion. Investment decisions under the program are guided by four criteria. The first criterion involves addressing immediate concerns related to personal health and safety. The second criterion relates to proactive measures to address potential risks to health and safety. The third criterion involves recapitalization and major maintenance. For example, whether a project would extend the useful operating life of a facility or asset or maintain its original service level. The last criterion pertains to actual and anticipated growth and the adequacy of existing infrastructure vis-à-vis a community's current and emerging needs. School projects, whether for new construction or renovations, are further prioritized at the national level based on health and safety, overcrowding and curriculum requirements.

To manage funding decisions, the program relies on regional five year capital plans. Each investment plan lists specific projects first nations in the region intend to complete as funds become available. Regional investment management boards make the final investment decisions, based on program criteria and relative priorities.

Last year, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada completed a progress report on educational facilities in first nations communities. The report examined the period of April 2006 to December 2010 and provided a valuable summary of recent accomplishments. During the period, 248 school projects were completed with a total value of approximately \$415 million. Projects completed during this period included 22 new schools, major renovations to another 22 schools and the construction or major

renovation of 20 teacher residences. The list also includes another 184 projects involving minor renovations, the purchase and installation of portable classrooms, and feasibility and design work. Another 100 school projects were still underway, including new schools, major renovations, teacherages, upgrades to mechanical and heating systems, roof repairs and other renovations.

Since the review wrapped up, I am pleased to report that the implementation of the final year of Canada's economic action plan has been successful in the completion of 12 new school construction and renovation projects, an investment of \$173 million. As a part of the building Canada plan, \$102 million has been allocated from the gas tax fund to build five new and renovate two existing on-reserve schools. Of these, four school projects have been substantially completed and the remaining three projects are progressing well.

Although investment statistics and details of programs and funding processes are essential parts of this government's strategy, they tell only a small part of the story. To get a true sense of the considerable benefits of improvements to on-reserve school infrastructure, one must look closely at individual projects and their impact on communities. Consider a new school that opened last year in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. The Penticton Indian band's Outma Sqilxw Cultural School is a modern facility built to highlight ancient cultural traditions. The school has already become an important gathering place for the community. Jonathan Kruger, the chief of Penticton Indian Band, says the school means a great deal to the community. During an interview, he described it this way:

...it builds a strong foundation for the future if our children ...grow up in a stronger environment....

He further stated:

they're going to grow up to be healthy...and they're going to make great decisions and they're going to do great things.

● (1225)

Schools such as this can help lead to better educational outcomes for first nations children. Better outcomes lead to employment success and personal fulfillment. They create the foundations for strong sustainable communities. This is part of the reason that Canada's economic action plan invested \$7 million in this project.

Another new school in British Columbia also promises to improve educational outcomes. In 2011, Ahousaht First Nation opened the Maaqtusiis School with 11 classrooms. The school will provide a safe, comfortable and stimulating environment for students in grades 8 to 12. This government contributed \$9 million through Canada's economic action plan and another \$3.8 million through the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada capital facilities and maintenance program.

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Last November marked the grand opening of Kistapiskaw Elementary School at Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. A fire destroyed the old school in 2005. The new school will accommodate 250 students, with 170 in grades 1 through 5 and another 80 in kindergarten. Canada's economic action plan contributed \$20 million to the project. Our contribution supported the design and construction of the school, roadways, parking lots and playing fields. Investments such as this one provide lasting, sustainable benefits for first nations and help create jobs.

Birch Narrows First Nation built a new, \$25 million, comprehensive school last year thanks to investments from our government, the Province of Saskatchewan and the first nation. Before the school was completed, students attended schools outside the community. Chief Robert Sylvester described the impact this way:

Not only will we have input into the instruction our students receive, as parents, we'll have peace of mind knowing they are not having to travel outside the community to get it. This school will also help to enhance our rate of students graduating, which should translate into an increase in the number of students who continue their education beyond Grade 12.

Further east, a major school renovation project in the Innu community of Natashquan, Quebec has already begun to have a positive impact. Thanks to an investment of \$9.4 million from the Canada economic action plan, the project replaced several portables at the Uauitshitun School with permanent classrooms. The first nation managed the project. In an interview, Chief François Bellefleur talked about the impact of the project:

This work is excellent news for the community, especially for the students. Natashquan youth deserve to study in a safe, healthy and modern school. In the long run, modernizing the school, especially by building new classrooms, will certainly contribute to the success of our youth.

School infrastructure projects have had similarly positive impacts in several communities in northwestern Ontario. Last November, Wabaseemoong First Nation opened a 16 classroom facility for students of kindergarten through grade 12. The Mizhakiwetung Memorial School can accommodate up to 460 students. This project was made possible thanks to a \$25 million investment under Canada's economic action plan.

In the words of Chief Eric Nelson Fisher:

I look forward to witnessing generations of learners passing through the school and reaching their full potential.

In September last year, North Spirit Lake First Nation in Ontario also opened a new school. Construction was made possible by investing \$14.4 from Canada's economic action plan and \$1.5 million from the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada capital facilities and maintenance program.

• (1230)

Chief Rita Thompson had this to say about the project:

The children of North Spirit Lake have a beautiful new school to learn and grow in. This facility will be an asset to our community for current and future generations to come

In speaking about Shannen's dream, I would add that Attawapiskat First Nation, also in Ontario, has begun to plan construction of a new elementary school. This government has set aside funding over the next three years to support that project. The first nation, in partnership with the department, is responsible for managing all aspects of this project, including tendering and selecting contractors.

The first two phases of the work plan to build the new school have been completed. The school capital planning study and the detailed design phase were approved on January 25, 2012. The construction phase is ready to move forward. It is anticipated that the school will open in the 2013-14 school year.

I am happy to report that the local member of Parliament for Timmins—James Bay is supportive of this timeframe, having stated in a May 20 Canada Press article that:

—2013 is a good timeline, you couldn't build a school up there any quicker—

The Government of Canada is encouraged and hopeful that Shannen's dream will continue to have a positive impact on Attawapiskat First Nation, and potentially on other first nations across Canada.

All of these stories emphasize the important link that exists between schools and a first nation, between the bricks and mortar of a school and the hearts and minds of community members.

With more than 400,000 Aboriginal youth projected to enter the labour market by 2020, the Aboriginal population is poised to help meet Canada's future labour market requirements. In order for the young men and women of first nations communities to take full advantage of the opportunities available, they must be equipped with a quality education. That challenge begins with the buildings themselves.

This government will continue to invest in school infrastructure projects in first nations communities as part of our larger strategy to improve educational outcomes. We are committed to working with first nations and interested parties to ensure that first nations children receive a quality education.

I encourage my hon. colleagues to endorse the motion before us and to support the government's efforts to improve educational outcomes in partnership with first nations.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's speech. It certainly has given us some hope that as opposed to dusting off reports and having study after study, hopefully we will see an increase in funding for first nations education in the budget. Maybe he could elaborate on that for us.

I also want quote Shawn Atleo, who appeared at the Senate committee before it tabled its report on education for first nations. He said that:

The current approach for funding First Nations schools through an outdated funding formula, combined with time-limited, proposal-based programs, is just not an acceptable approach. The 2 per cent cap on annual expenditure increases that has been there since 1996 has meant that classroom funding in First Nations education has not kept up with inflation, nor with population growth. We estimate that at least a 6.3 per cent increase was required over this time period to simply keep up.

Could the member advise us whether or not we will see the funding cap reduced, and is he in agreement with the 6.3% increase that the chief indicated was required?



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•(1235)

**Mr. David Wilks:** Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working with my colleague on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. We have committed \$198 million this year toward infrastructure as a result of the 2011-12 budget, as I mentioned in my speech. I am very encouraged by our government moving forward to ensure that first nations do have the right education, equal to that of everyone else in Canada. I believe we will be able to do that working together collectively.

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to be on the aboriginal affairs committee, working with my colleagues on both sides of the House. In particular, I was honoured to attend the first nations meeting here in Ottawa on January 24 and see where first nations and the Government of Canada are in agreement in working together in partnership. I know that education is a high priority for our government and we have done a number of things.

My question for my colleague, who also sits on the aboriginal affairs committee, is how much money has Canada put into first nations schools?

**Mr. David Wilks:** Mr. Speaker, \$924 million has gone into first nations schools since 2006. Everyone in the House believes that the cornerstone of first nations education is the building that students can enter, where they can learn and come out of a better person and attain the type of education and work they want. By continuing to put money into first nations schools we will contribute to that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I particularly appreciated the member's comments concerning the community of Natashquan, which is in my riding. I was there four or five days ago. I do not have a question or a comment, but I humbly submit for the information of the House that a portion of the infrastructure intended for youth is already unusable. Winds of up to 120 kilometres per hour tore the roof off.

[English]

**Mr. David Wilks:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak with regard to the structure of that building right now, but if there are problems with the structure of the building, I believe the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee would look at it and ensure that it comes up to standards so that students can use it and get an education.

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are comparing first nation schools and provincial education systems across Canada. What really frustrates me is the fact that all education systems are using portable buildings. I went to school in a portable and I lived in a city of 25,000 people. The way the education system has developed, I see the NDP and the Liberals as having a paternalistic mentality. As a first nation, we should take care of our property, take care of our schools and have pride in ourselves.

It took the member for Timmins—James Bay seven years to get off his butt to bring the issue of education to the House of Commons. The member for St. Paul's wants to raise funds for schools for first nations to take kids out of the communities.

How many schools have been built since 2008 during Canada's economic action plan? I have had three new schools built and many

modernizations made in my riding of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

•(1240)

**Mr. David Wilks:** Mr. Speaker, we have had 22 new schools built since 2006, with major renovations to 22 others. We have others on the way as well and believe that the cornerstone of any educational system is to have a vibrant school that can accept students, provide them with the best education and let them flourish after their education.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, I will comment on a question that was just posed and a comment just made about the member for Timmins—James Bay. Both the Liberals and Conservatives have continually failed to address the issues in Attawapiskat and the only person who has really been bringing those issues forward has been the member for Timmins—James Bay. That was despite the fact someone in the community was refusing to bring the issues forward. The comments that the member opposite made were really atrocious, and I commend the member for Timmins—James Bay on this issue.

I would like to ask the member a question. The issue is not only about schools but also about the underfunding of teachers. In the upcoming budget, will there be funds to ensure that first nations teachers will be paid the same wages as teachers in non-first nations schools?

**Mr. David Wilks:** Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that teachers in schools are paid at a very good rate to ensure that students get the maximum benefit from those who are teaching them. The provincial system that oversees the school system will have to ensure that the wages are equal for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal teachers.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague would recognize that one of the best tools on the path to self-reliance is an education and that one of the best ways to improve the economic situation of any community is by improving education. That in fact is why National Chief Shawn Atleo has focused so heavily on improving education for first nations across this country.

I am wondering if the member could comment about removing the 2% cap on funding. There was a question about that earlier. Will he commit now to removing that 2% cap?

**Mr. David Wilks:** Mr. Speaker, the issue with regard to the 2% cap will be looked at by the ministry. At this point in time I cannot personally speak to that, but I encourage all members to speak with the minister to ensure that it is rectified.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time.

I would like to acknowledge those colleagues who have worked so hard on this issue. We have heard from many of them in the House already.

I rise to speak in support of today's opposition motion. The motion calls on the government to adopt Shannen's Dream by the following:

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(a) declaring that all first nation children have an equal right to high-quality, culturally-relevant education; (b) committing to provide the necessary financial and policy supports for first nations education systems; (c) providing funding that will put reserve schools on par with non-reserve provincial schools; (d) developing transparent methodologies for school construction, operation, maintenance and replacement; (e) working collaboratively with first nation leaders to establish equitable norms and formulas for determining class sizes and for the funding of educational resources, staff salaries, special education services and indigenous language instruction; and (f) implementing policies to make the first nation education system, at a minimum, of equal quality to provincial school systems.

Shannen Koostachin of the Attawapiskat First Nation had a dream: to provide first nations children and youth with culturally-based education in safe, comfortable schools, or “comfy” schools as she called them. In her short lifetime, Shannen became the voice for first nations reserve children who had been deprived of their right to an education.

For 10 years, the community of Attawapiskat fought for a school to be built on its reserve. It refused to accept that the best the federal government could do was portables set up on grounds that were so toxic and so contaminated that children were actually passing out from the benzene fumes.

For a time, it seemed that the community's efforts would pay off and that a school would finally be built for the children of Attawapiskat. However, in 2007, the federal government reneged on its commitment, choosing instead to continue the chronic mismanagement and underfunding of the education of first nations children.

The lack of adequate first nations education is inextricably linked to the issue of widespread and persistent poverty. In Canada, being aboriginal often means being poor. One in four first nations children grows up in poverty, that is 25%.

Why is this the case? There are a number of factors that contribute to these unacceptably high rates of poverty. The unemployment rate of aboriginals is almost 10 percentage points above that of the non-aboriginal population. Aboriginal youth are less likely to complete secondary education, as my colleague from Manicouagan pointed out earlier today in his speech. Living and health conditions are also well below Canadian averages.

It has been documented that aboriginal people have shorter life expectancies, in part due to higher risks of diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

We know that we can break the cycle of poverty through education.

We must also understand the importance of culturally-based education. During the era of residential schools, aboriginal children were forced to assimilate into European-Canadian society. Their cultural traditions and languages were taken away from them in what some would describe as a cultural genocide.

Today, educators of first nations children face the task of recovering the cultural heritage of first nations so that the children can once again take pride in their heritage.

In my riding, there are two first nation communities, the Kwikwetlem First Nation and the Qayqayt First Nation.

The Kwikwetlem First Nation takes its name from the salmon that historically travelled up the Coquitlam River. Kwikwetlem literally means red fish up the river. Its culture is similar to other Stó:lō and northwest coast Salish groups. Its traditions are closely tied to watersheds and the life cycle of the salmon. After contact with the Europeans, its spiritual, linguistic and cultural traditions were challenged. It lost its right to sell and trade salmon, its children were placed in residential schools and a system of regulations and protocols handed down by Ottawa were imposed on its lands. The process of regaining these rights and traditions is a lengthy and complex one.

● (1245)

I will now talk about the Qayqayt First Nation, which is historically located in New Westminster. At the end of the 19th century, there were some 400 members of that nation. However, by 1913, only one orphan band member remained. The federal government seized most of the band's reserve lands and the orphan child, Marie Lee Bandura, was sent to a residential school where she would be punished for speaking her native language. The burden of shame stayed with her throughout her lifetime. Her daughter, Chief Rhonda Larrabee, eventually uncovered her family's heritage and, after a lengthy process, she was able to reclaim her status as a member of the Qayqayt First Nation.

The stories of the Kwikwetlem and the Qayqayt First Nations demonstrate that today, more than ever, the federal government must work in partnership with first nations across Canada to ensure that first nations children have access to culturally relevant education so that students can re-engage with and take pride in their traditions, languages and cultures.

We know what the challenges are and we know what the solutions are. These solutions have been reiterated time and time again over the past two decades. Over the course of former auditor general Sheila Fraser's 10-year mandate, her office produced 31 audit reports on aboriginal issues. In these reports, Ms. Fraser highlighted the gaps between first nations and non-first nations education, stating that, “conditions are getting worse instead of getting better”.

She also noted that between 1991 and 1999 at least 22 studies recommended the following measures to improve the quality of first nations education: address retention of aboriginal languages; enhance curriculum to meet first nations needs; increase funding for special education, counselling and library services; address inadequacies in special services, technologies and guidance clinics; and improve teacher training.

In her final report in 2011, Ms. Fraser criticized the government for failing to take action on her previous reports, noting that, despite over 30 reports in the past decade, little action had been taken by successive governments to address the inequality.

This February, the national panel on first nations elementary and secondary education released its final report following through on its mandate to consult with first nations communities to develop recommendations on how to improve education for first nations children. The report called for the co-creation of a first nations education act, which would outline responsibilities for each partner in the system and recognize and protect the first nations child's right to their culture and identity, a quality education, funding for the system and first nation control of first nation education.

Another of the report's recommendations called for statutory funding that is needs based, predictable, sustainable and specifically designated for education.

Report after report has called on the federal government to take action to protect the rights of the first nation child. How many more dozens of reports are required before the government will take substantive action?

I believe that the national attention paid to the Attawapiskat this past winter has served as a wake-up call to the government. I certainly would like to acknowledge my hon. colleague, the member for Timmins—James Bay, for his tireless work and for drawing attention to this important issue.

The first nations summit held in Ottawa just this past January was a step in the right direction. Now it is time for the government to keep its word and take immediate concrete action. This begins by rebuilding trust between first nations and the government and working in partnership to break through the status quo.

I hope that today all members of the House will come together in agreement that it is time for change.

• (1250)

I will finish by reading into *Hansard* the words of Shannen Koostachin:

I would like to talk to you what it is like to be a child who grows up never seeing a real school. I want to tell you what it is like to never have the chance to feel excited about being educated. That's why some of our students begin to give up in grade 4 and grade 5. They just stop going to school. Imagine that. Imagine a child who feels they have no future even at that young age. We want our younger brothers and sisters to go to school thinking that school is a time for hopes and dreams of the future. Every kid deserves this.

That was Shannen's Dream and we need to make that a reality.

• (1255)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend, the member who raised and supports, as I do, this motion, again recognizing that my riding is in Saanich territory where there are four first nations that uniquely have something called the Douglas treaty, which we should be called upon to observe.

In this instance, I want to ask my hon. friend what he believes will be the kind of commitment that will make the difference to ensure that all first nations children receive the high quality education they deserve.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on what Canada's New Democrats or an NDP government would do. We would commit to removing the punitive 2% funding cap that exists today that focuses on the current inequities, which is what I think is holding back putting the funding into a quality education system for

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every aboriginal first nations child across this country. That is what we would commit to, that is what we have been asking the government to commit to and that is what needs to happen.

We have heard the parliamentary secretary and others comment on the funding that has been put into first nations education. What is recognized is that it is inadequate. We need the 2% cap removed so we can address the fundamentals that go along with education and address even the poverty issues that exist on reserves for bands across the country.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, coming from British Columbia, I will take this opportunity to ask my colleague how he feels about the tripartite education framework agreement.

I take the points around the issues of spending on a per student basis but we know moving forward, based on our consultations and our relationships with first nations and the provinces, that part of the success in reconciling this, improving the quality education and the outcome, is based on flexibility within the provinces with first nations and the federal government to get into certain agreements that guarantee comparable standards of education, whether they are on or off reserve, and the flexibility to deal with the reality of students who may transfer to and from a provincial and first nations school.

Does he see this tripartite agreement, by way of example, and others that we formed with the provinces, as an important step, moving forward, with respect to improving the quality and the outcome for first nations children?

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that a tripartite agreement is fundamental in developing a sound relationship with first nations.

As the parliamentary secretary referenced, I am from British Columbia, from New Westminster—Coquitlam. I have worked a long time with first nations and one of the most fundamental elements of working with first nations is developing a relationship. Developing a relationship takes time. It means establishing trust, and that is something that must be done over a long period of time. However, once we have that trust and relationship, and once we have built those agreements, we need to take action .

It is not like we do not know. As I pointed out in my speech, the Auditor General over the past 10 years has pointed out time and time again the specifics that we need to do to address the systemic, fundamental problems of not only education but poverty that exists on first nation reserves.

We know this. We need to build on the agreements, the partnerships that exist, and we need immediate concrete action today.

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•(1300)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of sadness that I rise to speak to this motion.

From 1984 to 1992 I taught at an inner-city school in Nanaimo. At that inner-city school there was a very high percentage of aboriginal students. I saw the struggles first-hand that those students were going through.

After having taught for a while, I became a counsellor at the school. I soon began to see overall how many of the aboriginal students left school, disappeared from the school I should say, at a very early age. I had to ask myself why that was happening. Why was it that so many secondary school students from the aboriginal community were leaving school? We had no way of knowing what was happening to them.

As I got to know many of the students, I began to realize the struggles they were having. I also began to realize that in order to address those issues we had to talk not about equality but about equity. There were services we needed to provide that were not needed by all students at the school but were absolutely needed by first nations students. I also saw in the school the lack of role models and mentors. I saw the alienation aboriginal young people felt in public schools when they walked onto those hallowed halls.

I left in 1992, but I returned to that school in 2007. During that period, the provincial and federal governments made all kinds of pronouncements about how they had made things better. It was with a great deal of sadness that I realized when I went back to the school that things were actually worse for first nations students. Things were worse 15 years after I had left that inner-city school.

Yes, I saw more first nations workers. I saw more liaison and closer ties with the community. I saw more social interaction. However, I also saw a greater number of students who were disillusioned and not engaged in their learning. There are fundamental reasons the students were not engaged in their learning. We were trying to educate them in an environment that was not culturally sensitive. We were trying, through our own education system and without meaning to, to colonize them. That is what happened. There was very little in the curriculum or the day-to-day teaching about the aboriginal community itself or the language. Maintenance of a language is a very important link to a culture and therefore, it is absolutely imperative to try to preserve many first nations languages.

The point I want to make is when we look at Shannen's dream, she is asking not just for a nice school but also for a culturally sensitive education so that the curriculum actually speaks to who the first nations children are. Who their parents are speaks to their history, dreams and aspirations.

•(1305)

This reminded me a little of my early years in teaching. There was a wonderful program in England called the Ladybird reading scheme. The stories are written in beautiful language. Jane and Peter, both Caucasian, had a dog called Pat. They went on beautiful picnics. They would put out a tablecloth. They would go to the park. Everything was glorious.

That reading program was sent to the Caribbean. This amazing program that was so successful in England failed in the Caribbean because children in the Caribbean could not relate physically to Jane and Peter nor to the activities in which Jane and Peter engaged. They did not have the kind of family structure that Jane and Peter had. Every Sunday in the summer they did not go to the cricket field or on a picnic.

One of the things I have learned from teaching over the years is that if we really want to connect and engage children in their learning, we have to connect with the child. Those of us who teach may enter the profession to teach a subject but I can assure the House that those of us who have a passion for teaching and who stay in teaching do it because we love working with children.

I have argued the point most of my life that the only way to be an effective teacher is to build relationships and know where the students are coming from. The teacher's role is not to make them like everybody else. Today in our multicultural society, we are sensitive to that. I would say that where we lack sensitivity as a nation even today is toward our first nations communities.

Attawapiskat has been in the news a lot recently. I thank my colleague, the member for Timmins—James Bay, not only for his courage but also for his passion for social justice and equity. He has not given up on that story or that community. He has gone there. He has painted us a picture.

Suddenly the world's eyes are on Attawapiskat. The United Nations is looking at it. The Red Cross is looking at it. Every Canadian is looking at what I would say are some of the worst third world living conditions right here on Canadian soil for Canadian citizens. Canadians are upset. They want action.

Canadians do not want long-term promises anymore. The children cannot wait. I have a very difficult time when people say that this is going to be a 20-year plan. That 20-year plan has to start today. It has to be meaningful and it has to provide services.

Twelve years is a long time. Imagine that from birth to the time a child reaches 12 years old is how long Attawapiskat has been dreaming of a school. In the meantime, Shannen has passed on without having her dream realized.

I would urge all my colleagues on all sides of the House to go to [www.shannensdream.ca](http://www.shannensdream.ca) and to watch the very moving video. I urge all members to make a commitment in this Parliament to work together to make Shannen's dream come true.

All Canadian children, no matter where they are born, north, south, centre, east, west, no matter whether they are from aboriginal or other ethnic groups, deserve a quality education. It makes economic sense to provide that. The savings to the health care system, the increased productivity and the taxes going into the public purse all show that this is not just a humanitarian issue, but it makes economic sense as well. The Conservatives should be able to understand that.

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• (1310)

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear my colleague speak to this extremely important issue in terms of first nations peoples, the Government of Canada and the other interested parties, including students, elders and parents.

We have invested approximately \$1.5 billion in first nations education and 118,000 students. We reached a tripartite agreement in B.C. on January 27. There are now seven of those tripartite agreements. We also had the joint first nations and Government of Canada conference and the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education. It is extremely important and that report has just been released.

Would the hon. member agree that we need to work in partnership with all the first nations people, our provincial governments, the parents, the elders and the children to ensure that education moves forward?

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely we need to work in partnership. No one level of government has the solution. I would also argue that the time for talking without taking action is over.

Shannen passed away at the age of 15 with a beautiful dream. That dream is one we would want for any of our own children: a decent school that is culturally sensitive. Surely it is time for Canada, one of the wealthiest nations in the world, to ensure that all our children, including our first nations children, have a school that is culturally sensitive.

Sometimes we use working in partnership to prolong taking action. It is time to take action now. Let us not confuse the issue by throwing around numbers and what has been done over a number of years. We see the images on television. The circumstances are dire. Children in Canada, Canadian-born children, do not have a decent school, never mind a decent education.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that being a teacher my colleague fully understands the intent of lifelong learning.

Earlier the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River talked about portable classrooms not only being in first nations communities. If members have ever been in a first nation community and have seen those portables, they would know why they are such an issue. Regardless, portables should not be allowed as part of the learning environment. Maybe the member could speak to that.

I would also like the member's opinion on the following comment by Chief Angus Toulouse:

Let me begin by expressing that the federal government continues to have an obligation to ensure that First Nations can implement their inherent right to exercise jurisdiction over lifelong learning. This entitlement is affirmed by the spirit and intent of treaties signed in exchange for the sharing of the territories and lands and is guaranteed also by section 35 of the 1982 Constitution of Canada.

Could the member comment with respect to lifelong learning and the jurisdiction that the first nation—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. The member for Newton—North Delta, a short answer please.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, lifelong learning is the only way to go. That is what we want for ourselves and for everyone.

As for jurisdictional issues, the first nations community should be the driver and should have a critical say in it.

I want to talk about portables. In my community in Surrey there are thousands of children sitting in portables. That is not acceptable. However, I have visited portables in first nations communities on the west coast of B.C., and we would not survive for an hour in some of those portables. It is an absolute shame and is unacceptable.

• (1315)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful to have this opportunity to stand in the House to address this important issue and talk about our government's commitment to first nations education.

There has been proof in the House of our government's commitment to ensure that we produce results for first nations children, their families, and the communities that are represented in many of our constituencies. I am proud to represent 32 first nations.

Members on this side of the House recognize that education is a key personal empowerment tool that leads to prosperity. We fully understand that the way for individuals to succeed, for communities to escape poverty and for first nations economies to prosper is to have an educated, skilled and employed population. A strong economy and a good education really go hand-in-hand.

There is no question that our government is committed to ensuring that first nations students enjoy the same opportunities as other Canadians do. First nations students deserve an education that ensures they graduate with the skills that they need to succeed in the jobs of today and that they can fully enjoy the same opportunities everybody else in Canada can.

That is precisely why, in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, we created the national panel on first nations education last year. The panel criss-crossed the country during the fall of 2011, consulting with first nations leaders, parents, elders, students, teachers, provincial officials and the private sector about how to improve the elementary school experience and the outcomes for first nations students across the country.

We are grateful for the panel. It did tremendous work. Its final report offers ideas to improve educational outcomes for first nations children and youth. We are currently reviewing this report and its recommendations carefully before determining the next steps.

*Business of Supply*

Successive federal budgets further reinforce that this government places a high priority on first nations education. We invest roughly about \$1.5 billion on an annual basis to elementary and secondary programs for 117,500 first nations students across our great nation. This investment supports structural service, special education, cultural educational centres and targeted initiatives for first nations students. Band councils and first nations educational organizations manage and deliver these programs and services in some 520 on-reserve schools.

We are also investing \$200 million on an annual basis to school infrastructure so first nations children have a safe and healthy environment in which to learn. Construction projects are under way in communities across the country. I know of many in the province that I represent and even in my own constituency. These include new comprehensive schools, such as the one that has been recently opened in Birch Narrows First Nation in Saskatchewan, the new community school in North Spirit Lake First Nation in Ontario and the recently inaugurated Mah-Sos School in Tobique First Nation in New Brunswick. Our government has completed 248 school projects since April 1, 2006.

More important than issuing cheques, we are working in close partnership with first nations communities and the provinces to ensure that every first nations school gets off to a good start. We know that dollars alone will not address the challenges confronting first nations students.

Budget 2008 was an example of this. There was an investment in first nations education, not simply by adding money to existing funding arrangements but by focusing on practical initiatives that would lead to real results in the classroom. The budget launched the reforming first nations education initiative, which set out the foundation for long-term improvements to first nations education.

For instance, our first nations students success program took the tools to strengthen on-reserve education and put it into the hands of local decision makers. The program helps first nations educators plan and make improvements in the three priority areas of literacy, numeracy and student retention. Over 90% of first nations students are now benefiting from these initiatives.

● (1320)

Participating schools develop school success plans tailored to increase efforts in these priority areas. They are supported in developing success plans, conducting student assessments and measuring performance to assess and report on school and student progress. To monitor progress, students are looked at to ensure that they are making progress. Schools implement a student learning assessment process based on provincial jurisdictions and established performance measurement systems. These processes and informed instruction methods help teachers in setting priorities in assessing the planning to increase student success over the long term.

Our government recognizes that language and culture also play an important role in helping first nations students build confidence and self-esteem. These are essential skills and important elements to ensure academic success.

Pride in one's heritage and culture is important in encouraging first nations students to stay in school. Understanding this, Aboriginal

Affairs and Northern Development Canada provides \$9.5 million for cultural educational programs, which help to preserve and strengthen aboriginal culture, tradition and language.

Support is also available to first nations through initiatives, such as the new paths program, to allow first nations and their organizations to develop a curriculum for first nations schools, which are culturally relevant to the student population.

There is an additional \$5 million that the Government of Canada provides each year under the aboriginal language initiative. It underwrites community-based projects to preserve and revitalize first nations, Inuit and Métis languages.

Beyond these important activities, our government recognizes that deeper structural reforms are needed to provide education that is comparable to that which is provided in the public school systems, but this is not something that we can tackle alone. Improving educational outcomes is a shared responsibility in which governments, communities, educators, families and students all play an important role.

Another of our key reform initiatives is the education partnerships program to increase collaboration among first nations, provinces and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada so we can collectively increase students' success.

Many first nations schools have operated largely independently, with little connection to one another, or any connection to the provincial systems. As a consequence, these schools are left without some of the essential tools that are needed to improve student outcomes, attain provincial educational standards and ensure students can transition between first nations and provincial schools with no academic penalty.

The Government of Canada believes that co-operation and collaboration among first nations and other governments are essential to provide first nations students with the same advantages that other Canadian children enjoy. These three-way partnerships marry first nation control over local education with new models of accountability for results and stronger links to provincial standards for students and teachers.

The educational partnerships program supports the use of joint action plans where first nations and provincial officials share expertise and services. This approach helps to ensure that first nations students receive comparable instruction and obtain comparable results, whether the classroom is located on reserve or off.

*Business of Supply*

To date, we have reached seven tripartite educational partnerships across Canada and five new tripartite educational memorandums of understanding have been entered into by our government since introducing the reforming first nations education initiative.

Since 2008, these include agreements with first nations and the Governments of New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta, Prince Edward Island and a sub-regional agreement with the Saskatoon Tribal Council. There are additional pre-existing tripartite partnerships in Nova Scotia and British Columbia. These tripartite agreements enable first nations communities to provide educational programs with high standards and strategies that reflect their unique first nation cultures and aspirations.

● (1325)

I am happy to report that negotiations are under way to complete many more such agreements. We are close to finalizing a tripartite educational memorandum of understanding with the First Nations Education Council in Quebec as well as with the Labrador Innu in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Equally encouraging, there is a province-wide effort to reach an MOU in Ontario with the Chiefs of Ontario office. Several sub-regional agreements are proceeding well and so too are negotiations with the Yukon first nations. We are especially excited about the work that is taking place in British Columbia, which perfectly illustrates the benefits of the tripartite approach.

In budget 2010, the Government of Canada invested \$30 million for comparable education for first nations. We started in B.C., where there is an advanced state of partnership between the province and the First Nations Education Steering Committee.

The committee is an independent society that represents 88 first nations across the province and provides administrative services for first nations school administration. B.C. First nations and FNESC have been working together to establish an educational system that provides support for first nations students, demonstrating their capacity to administer educational programs and services.

On January 27, a new second generation tripartite educational framework agreement was signed by our government in the province of British Columbia and the First Nations Education Steering Committee. Under this agreement, the steering committee will support the delivery of quality education programs and services. This means meeting standards that will allow first nations students to transfer, without academic penalty, at a similar level of achievement between first nations schools and the provincial public schools.

Most promising is that this partnership agreement is accompanied by a new funding model. First nations education funding will be comparable to a similar size and situated school which would be funded in the public system within British Columbia. Progressive steps like these will close the gap in educational outcomes and graduation rates between first nations and other Canadian students.

The tripartite educational framework is an option available to all first nations in a province to help operate their schools. Communities in British Columbia are currently negotiating educational self-government agreements that they will be able sign on to and the framework that will establish the conclusion of the self-government agreements.

I should point out that approximately 21 nations and Inuit communities have opted to negotiate an assumed jurisdiction over education outside the Indian Act as part of a broader agreement or modern treaties covering self-government arrangements and comprehensive land claims.

Our government is determined that first nations students will enjoy the same opportunities as other Canadians. We are providing the funding necessary to make education accessible to individuals and communities. Most important, we are partnering with first nations communities and the provinces to bring about meaningful educational reforms that will lead to lasting student success.

We know that education holds the key to creating a future in which first nations are self-sufficient and prosperous, making their own decisions, managing their affairs and making strong contributions to their communities and the national economy.

I am not suggesting that the initiatives I have outlined today are the entire solution, but there is no question that they are vital steps in the right direction.

There should be no doubt about our government's determination to keep moving forward. We have made it clear with our investments and commitments to productive partnerships that we believe in the value and necessity of education for first nations children and youth. We are ready to do our part and anxious to work with willing partners to achieve better and greater results.

I know that we all agree in the House that first nations children deserve nothing less. With the fastest growing youth population in the country, we want to ensure first nations young people acquire the knowledge and skills that are necessary to be part of the growing Canadian economy and society.

● (1330)

I can assure the opposition that our government will continue to work with first nations partners across Canada, as we have been doing, to deliver tangible and lasting results and ensure that first nations are well positioned to be full participants in a strong Canadian economy.

I just hope that first nations children and youth can count on the support of all parties in the House to work together as we move forward.

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on his rapidly acquired understanding of the concept of a culturally integrated approach as presented in the House this morning. It fits quite nicely into a speech. All of the Conservatives' speeches this morning have one thing in common. They all include plenty of mind-boggling numbers to shore up their attempts to show that they are committed and that they want to hand the reins over to communities and help them. Are they really committed to getting involved on the ground and taking into account the sometimes difficult situations that young people have to deal with in their communities?

[English]

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that I have long been engaged on the issues of first nations education throughout this country.

More specifically, I can assure the member that the 32 first nations that I represent have been engaging with me as their member of Parliament over the last six years to ensure that we build a stronger and more vibrant education system within our community and throughout this country.

I will take no lessons from the member opposite. Of course, he is new to the House and may be unaware of the work that this government and I have undertaken. That is why it is important that he listen to the speeches today so that he might be able to learn about some of the advanced work that has been undertaken by this government in partnership with first nations communities across this country.

I am proud of the work that we have been doing and we will continue to do. I could speak all day on our accomplishments, even in my local communities.

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague is probably aware, in 2008 our government brought in the student success program that helped educators make plans for and improvements to literacy, numeracy and student retention.

I wonder if the hon. member could speak to that and other programs that have been beneficial to first nations over the past several years.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, I talked a bit about some of the partnerships that had been undertaken and the new initiatives that our government has launched over successive years in successive budgets.

Our government strongly believes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to education in first nations communities across this country. This is a new relationship being charted by our government with first nations communities. As a matter of fact, the realities in one of the communities in my constituency are far different from those in some of the other ones. To see the different partnerships that are now being established, the different avenues that our government has undertaken, the tripartite agreements that our government has undertaken really begins to speak to the reality that there is not a one-size solution for all communities. It is about working with first nations, dialoguing with first nations, consulting with first nations on these.

I hope that the hon. members across the way understand the essential role that consultation plays when dealing with the issues and ensuring that educational outcomes improve for communities across this country.

• (1335)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure working with the hon. member for Peace River on our aboriginal affairs committee.

I have heard members across the way speak about partnering, but it is my understanding that it is the first nations communities themselves that have been reaching out and asking the government to partner with them. It is therefore encouraging to hear that the government is now keen on moving in that direction.

Looking at some of these partnership agreements, I am concerned because I do not see a lot of direct transfers of dollars to in fact deliver quality services. For example, the one in British Columbia appears to establish a non-governmental organization or NGO to be somewhat of a school board and give assistance to the first nations, who have long been wanting to deliver education, and in fact in some cases have been doing a good job of delivering their own school systems.

Some of my colleagues and I visited the Six Nations community and its school a while back. They are delivering education in traditional ways in traditional languages, but are struggling because they do not even have a facility or any support from the federal government to deliver that kind of education.

I wonder if the member could speak to the government's commitment on that.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, the member asked about two different things in her question. I will jump to the second because she talked about infrastructure and the necessity of having good teaching facilities and opportunities for students to come together in adequate facilities.

I know this is not the first time the member has heard this today, but since 2006 our government has undertaken nearly 250 building projects to ensure that schools are upgraded. Over 34 brand new schools have been constructed, many in the province of Alberta, which I know she would be fully aware of. She lives in the province of Alberta and I know that she would be mindful of many of those significant investments over the last number of years.

I can also assure the hon. member that there have been over 26 massive undertakings for major renovations of schools. The infrastructure is there. It is being re-established. There is a major challenge in many communities, because the system thus far has been to ignore the structures and allow them to become dilapidated. Our government is now having to invest significant amounts of money to ensure they are retrofitted and, in some cases, replaced to ensure students have adequate places to go to school.



*Business of Supply*

She also talked about ensuring that on-reserve schools are funded at the same rate as other schools. Of course, the joint panel, which has just made its recommendations known to the government, talks about the necessity of moving toward a number of things. Our government is reviewing that and will continue to work with first nations to ensure that students in first nations communities have the same outcomes as those in the general population.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad I heard the member talk about the funding increases that are needed, but he also indicated that the government will continue to review the recommendations. We need action and not reviews all the time. We have studies, national panels and reports, but no action. It is about time.

I would like my colleague to comment on the fact that when we look at the joint panel's recommendations on first nations education, the AFN estimates that the average annual increase required since 1996 was 6.3% and that the cumulative blending shortfall since that time has been almost \$1.2 billion. Here I would point out that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states:

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

Principle 10 states:

The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination.

My question to my colleague is this. Does he not think that the current funding shortfall is discriminatory to first nations children?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, clearly the hon. member did not listen to the speech I just gave, in which I outlined efforts that have been undertaken by this government in successive budgets to address the challenges of first nations schools. Budget 2008 and budget 2010, and the budgets in-between, allocated significant amounts of funds to address the concerns that she just outlined. We have tripartite agreements that are seeing major changes in the way in which education is assured for first nations, in the same way it is guaranteed for all other students.

I am thankful that the member asked the question. Unfortunately, I am not certain that she heard the speech and I will therefore make every effort to have the speech delivered to her office.

• (1340)

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to this very important motion. I will be splitting my time.

I want to acknowledge the good work that has been done by the member for Manicouagan and the member for Edmonton—Strathcona. I particularly want to thank Shannen Koostachin's family for allowing their daughter's name to stand in this place and honour the work that Shannen did in her very short life.

There are a couple of other people I want to recognize specifically as well, because I will also speak about Jordan's principle. I want to acknowledge the family of Jordan River Anderson and the Norway House Cree Nation.

Back in 2007 I had the honour to stand in the House and move Motion No. M-296:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should immediately adopt a child-first principle, based on Jordan's principles, to resolve jurisdictional disputes involving the care of first nations children.

I must point out to the House, because many of the members here were not in the House in 2007, that the motion passed unanimously in this House of Commons. All parties supported that motion. What was said in that motion essentially was that we would put children first.

While I acknowledge the member for Manicouagan for moving the motion, here we today debating a motion that still talks about the fact that first nations children have substandard education in this country. I want to refer to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 14(2) reads:

Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

Nonetheless, many here today have spoken very ably about the fact that first nations children in this country are often in facilities that are so substandard that we cannot even begin to list all of the deficiencies, whether doors that do not close; or children having to wear jackets, mitts and coats in the middle of the winter because there is insufficient heat; or children who do not have text books. The list is appalling.

What happens in some of these communities is a repetition of the residential schools all over again, because those children, in order to get an adequate education, must leave their communities and go somewhere else. The elders are saying that it feels like the residential schools, because once again their children are being removed from their communities, even if voluntarily, to get their education.

Surely in 2012, with all of the technology and resources we have available in this country, we should be able to provide those children with an equitable education that is culturally relevant, that respects their languages and traditions. Here we are in 2012, once again having to talk about this.

The member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing rightly pointed out the studies we have done. We could probably paper this chamber with the studies that have been done, and still we have children with substandard education in this country, first nations children, Inuit children. When will it change?

The government talks about productivity. It talks about skills shortages. From meeting with first nations leaders from coast to coast to coast, what they are saying to us is, "We have the children. Educate them. They could be part of that work force. We want to take our place in the economy of this country. Give us the tools to do that".

*Business of Supply*

It gets worse. Because we cannot get justice in this country, organizations are forced to go to UN bodies to talk about the state of education in this country. I want to refer to a briefing called “Our Dreams Matter too: First Nations children’s rights, lives and education”, a self-described alternate report from the Shannen’s dream campaign to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on the occasion of Canada’s third and fourth periodic reviews. Of course, I do not have time to read the whole brief, but I want to touch on two recommendations. In the preamble it says:

Inspired by our friend Shannen Koostachin, we respectfully ask the Committee to hear our voices and stand with us as we demand that the Government of Canada (INAC) respects our rights and honours its obligations to First Nations children, youth and communities. We are growing up right now and we cannot wait for the Government to decide to do the right thing.

● (1345)

One of the recommendations refers to Jordan’s principle:

Make sure Canada implements “Jordan’s Principle” across all Government services provided to First Nations children and youth. This would prevent us from receiving inequitable levels of service, experiencing excessive wait times and being denied urgent medical and other needed care simply because the provincial and federal governments can’t figure out who should pay for the service.

This is in the voices of the children in this country.

It is not just members of first nations who are talking about Jordan’s principle. The Auditor General, in her May 2008 report, talked about how first nations child and family services reflected the inequities in this country in terms of adequate child welfare services on reserve. She pointed out that Jordan’s principle put first nations children first. She said:

However, in our view, a dispute-resolution mechanism will not work in the presence of irreconcilable differences and without a change in funding authorities. Such difficulties need to be resolved if this proposal is to result in better and timelier services to First Nations children.

I want to refer to fighting the good fight, Jordan’s principle. This outlines the background and talks about what has happened so far.

Many first nations children are caught in payment disputes within or between the federal and provincial governments. This can have a significant impact on their access to essential medical and health services.

As a little aside, not only is it between federal and provincial governments, but we also understand it is between federal government departments. Health Canada will say that it is not its responsibility. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada will say that it is not its responsibility. Those two departments of government point the finger at each other while children once again wait for care.

It is not just complex medical needs. That is why I am invoking Jordan’s principle in the context of education. First nations children should not be treated differently in terms of access to quality education.

Back to fighting the good fight. Several organizations and individuals have fought the good fight to change this.

In December 2007, Jordan’s principle was adopted in the House of Commons. This child-first principle says that when a dispute arises between the two government parties regarding payment for services

for a status Indian child, the government of first contact must pay for services without delay or disruption.

This principle was named in honour of Jordan River Anderson, a child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba, who was born with complex medical needs. He spent over two years unnecessarily in hospital because the federal and provincial governments could not agree on who should pay for his care in a specialized foster home in his community.

Jordan passed away having spent his whole life in hospital. That is a crime in this country. It is even worse. Jordan River Anderson’s family had to surrender him to provincial care because the federal government would not pay for his care in his community.

First of all, Jordan spent two years in hospital being stabilized, getting to the level where he could go into a specialized foster home. At that age, when he could have gone into a family home and received the love and support of a family environment, the federal and provincial governments said, “It is not my job to pay for this. It is somebody else’s responsibility.” Jordan spent the next two years in hospital. Then he passed away. All it would have taken was one level of government to step up to the plate and say “We will pay for this child’s care, and we will fight about the money later.” That did not happen.

Canadians across this country should be outraged that we allow children, first nations, Métis and Inuit children, to be subject to that kind of care in this country in this day and age.

Sadly, since 2007, there has not been the kind of action that one would presume would happen when a unanimous motion is passed in this House of Commons. One would expect members from all parties to say, “We agree, first nations children should be put first in this country. We will pony up the money and fight about who pays later.”

That has not happened. Five years later, that has not happened. I urge all members in this House to stand up and support Shannen’s dream as a statement that we believe in equality for first nations children, Métis children and Inuit children across this country.

● (1350)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her very passionate speech. Certainly she has displayed to the House that she has a lot of experience meeting with the individual groups. She certainly has more experience than I do. She points out, seemingly quite rightly, how many people, like Shannen, get lost in a myriad of jurisdictional conundrum. In this case it was a jurisdictional disaster because someone perished. The situation just keeps proliferating.

What should we bring to the table? The money needs to go to the right people. How do we get in there and tell the jurisdictions to get their act together? From all the meetings that she has been to, and the people she has spoken to, what is the common thread about how to fix a problem like this?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, Jordan's principle outlines exactly what needs to happen. It is very simple. Whoever comes in contact with that child and that child's family first, be it provincial, federal, Health Canada, or Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, pays. While the child gets the service that he or she needs, whether it is education, adequate housing or health care, the arguments about that payment can be taken off the table. They can fight about who is going to pay later, behind the scenes, in their boardrooms. Children have to come first. They can fight about the money later. It is simple.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her heartfelt presentation. I admire the work that she did formerly in the aboriginal affairs portfolio. I know she is an incredible representative of her communities.

As the member is well aware, the trials and tribulations of children just trying to get access to decent education has actually led to suicides. Calls for greater action by the federal government to invest in education are now coming from coroners. In the community of Pikangikum, the coroner's report actually recommended specifically that there be greater attention to basic services, including quality education facilities for children. We are seeing that in reports out of Nunavut. We are seeing delays in the delivery of obligations under its land claims and treaties.

Could the member address this issue of the implications of not investing in aboriginal children?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Edmonton—Strathcona for her very good work as the aboriginal affairs critic for the NDP. As she and I have said, it is a very complex file. Part of our challenge as a country is to recognize nation-to-nation status, with first nations and the Government of Canada.

The member asked the question about the profound implications of not providing education. I have told the story many times. My very first official duty as a member of Parliament in 2004, on July 1, was to attend a funeral for a first nations youth who took his own life.

I am blessed to live on the Cowichan people's traditional territories. Many of the elders and other community members work hard to provide education to their young people, so they can take their rightful place in society. However, what we see time after time is a first nations school on reserve, a very good school where they are teaching the Hul'q'umi'num language. The elders are participating in the classroom and they are instilling the cultural values and values of family in their young children. However, they simply do not have the level of funding of the other schools, right next door.

How can that happen? This is not in a rural area, this is on southern Vancouver Island. There are children half a kilometre away, who do not have the same access to funding. How does that happen in this country? I think that is a question we have to ask ourselves.

• (1355)

[Translation]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the value of a good education is immeasurable.

### *Business of Supply*

A poor or inadequate education, on the other hand, can have serious repercussions on the rest of one's life and for future generations.

Unfortunately, first nations communities are all too familiar with the difference between a good education and a bad one. As a society, we must recognize that education is more than simply acquiring knowledge and academic skills. Education plays a major role in socialization. The teacher is a role model for students, inspiring and supporting them. Receiving positive socialization tools early on in life allows people to enjoy not only economic prosperity, but also physical, psychological and social health.

However, even after the Prime Minister's official apology regarding residential schools, first nations education remains insubstantial and inadequate. This is due to the lack of funding and coordination between the various federal, provincial, territorial and other partners. The direct result of this is that education is too often harmful for young aboriginals, their parents and future generations.

Despite the government's commitments, which may seem plentiful, the political will to take concrete action is simply missing.

Recommendations like those in Shannen's dream deserve immediate action by this government. Aboriginal people are fed up with studies conducted by a government that does not walk the walk. The Standing Committee on the Status of Women has witnessed just how fed up aboriginal women are with this government's inaction.

I have seen the same discontent in my riding, among the Mohawks of Kanestake. There are too many delays, too many broken promises. The government knows what the problems are in relation to first nations education. The government knows exactly why 59% of aboriginal people aged 15 and over who live on reserves have not finished high school.

As stated by the report of the national panel on first nation elementary and secondary education for students on reserve:

First Nation students are not failing. Rather, we are failing students through the impact of legislative provisions that are more than one hundred years old and linked to a period that we now accept as deeply harmful and destructive—the residential school era.

I see my time is about to expire. I will therefore continue after question period.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The time provided for government orders has expired. The hon. member will have seven minutes when the House resumes debate on this issue.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***CBC'S LIVE RIGHT NOW**

**Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, inspiring our communities to make healthy lifestyle choices is something we should all strive for. This is why we launched a healthy community challenge in Brampton—Springdale last month. My personal goal was to lose 15 pounds. As members may be able to see, it was a huge success. The support and involvement of the community was incredibly motivating.

As part of CBC's Live Right Now campaign, we joined the Champions for Change group in Brampton, led by four very inspirational individuals. Margaret Wallis-Duffy, Jennifer Thomas, Pamela Moore and Dr. Ed Cambridge were the forces behind our city's continued success in this national challenge.

I congratulate all Bramptonians for being awarded 500 spirit points by CBC's Live Right Now program for their passion and determination to be crowned the Live Right Now capital of Canada which will be announced on April 13.

• (1400)

*[Translation]*

I want to congratulate all Bramptonians on their participation.

\* \* \*

**INNURASSEMBLE PROJECT**

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge the exceptional work that the Polyvalente des Baies high school in Baie-Comeau is doing in our community. This high school won the Essor provincial grand prize for its InnuRassemble project at the Essor recognition gala held on Saturday night in Rimouski. The InnuRassemble project, which brings young people from both cultures together through the arts, was carried out in partnership with the Estuaire school board, the Uashkaikan secondary school in Pessamit and the Baie-Comeau centre for the arts.

This project is unique to Quebec and got off the ground in 2010 with the Théâtre Le Clou, which won the Baie-Comeau centre for the arts the Rideau award. The project was centred on creating a song. It allowed 600 young people from Baie-Comeau and Pessamit, which are 50 km apart, to attend workshops together and see shows by Chloé Sainte-Marie and the singer Samian, who performed a song called *Parle-moi* that was written by young people from the two communities.

This type of initiative illustrates the true willingness of the Innu and Quebec communities to come together, as we have seen in the riding of Manicouagan.

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*[English]***GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I commend the government for the transparent and competitive process by which the recent defence contracts have been awarded. It

gives taxpayers value for their money by selecting the best company for the job. This month, the contract to refit the HMCS *Athabaskan* was given to Seaway Marine & Industrial in St. Catharines.

This contract, through a fair and competitive process, has proven that shipyards in Ontario are among the best in Canada. This contract ensures 226 skilled workers are recalled at the Port Weller dry docks and it will create 117 new jobs. This contract shows Ontario has the skills and expertise to build on our proud history of providing equipment to support the men and women of the Royal Canadian Navy.

Finally, this contract is proof that the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway will always be part of our country's shipping industry.

St. Catharines and Niagara are ready to compete, to participate and to ensure that the Canadian economy grows, one new worker at a time.

\* \* \*

**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 45 years ago today, the Liberal prime minister, Lester Pearson, officially established the Royal Commission on the Status of Women based on the notion of equal opportunity. Florence Bird served as the chair of the commission and Monique Bégin as the executive secretary.

Over the next 10 months, the royal commission heard from Canadians from across the country and stimulated public consciousness of the real barriers to equality. It also gave a platform for women's voices to be heard and its groundbreaking recommendations on child care, pay equity and prohibiting gender and marital status as grounds for discrimination continue to be relevant today.

*[Translation]*

As we reflect on this historic anniversary, we should remember that much work remains to be done to achieve full equality of opportunity.

Under the Conservative government, the right to equal pay for work of equal value has been eroded, access to affordable child care remains elusive, the gender gap has grown and the long gun registry, which reduced cases of violence against women, has been abolished.

*[English]*

Even here in Parliament the advancement of women's rights has been challenged by the shameful efforts of Conservative members to force the status of women committee to work in secret. Since June, 38% of the committee's meetings have been behind closed doors. The late Doris Anderson would have been appalled.

\* \* \*

**CURLING**

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House with the pleasure of congratulating Team Jacobs from the Soo Curlers Association in Sault Ste. Marie.

Soo Curlers hosted the Dominion 2012 Northern Ontario Men's Curling Championship from February 4-11.

On February 10 in my riding, Team Jacobs scored a very rare eight-ender in the sixth end of the semi-final against Team Phillips. Jacobs had been leading 6-3 at the time and had the hammer, with the eight rocks in the ring forcing an early handshake.

The final game against Team Jakubo ended in a 9-2 score and gave Team Jacobs the Northern Ontario Championship title for the third year in a row.

Brad Jacobs and his teammates, E.J. Harnden, Ryan Harnden and Scott Seabrook, now prepare for the Brier that is set to take place in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan from March 3-11. I boldly predict that Team Jacobs will win this year's Brier.

Hurry hard, Team Jacobs.

\* \* \*

• (1405)

[Translation]

#### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will not deny that the debate on the firearms registry was very emotional for me. For that reason, I would like to remind members of the names of the victims of the Polytechnique massacre: Geneviève Bergeron, Nathalie Croteau, Anne-Marie Edward, Maryse Laganière, Anne-Marie Lemay, Michèle Richard, Annie Turcotte, Hélène Colgan, Barbara Daigneault, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Leclair, Sonia Pelletier, Annie St-Arneault and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz.

It is unfortunate that I was unable to convince the other members of the House not to abolish the firearms registry, but I challenge each and every one of them to find a hunter or a farmer who has suffered greater harm because of firearms than these young women.

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[English]

#### THE ECONOMY

**Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is squarely focused on what matters to Canadians: supporting jobs and economic growth.

We are working hard to implement Canada's economic action plan and its job creating measures as we also prepare for the economic action plan for 2012. In my riding, people are happy to see our Conservative government working on the priorities of GTA families and all Canadians.

Recently, the International Monetary Fund forecasted Canada's economy will have the strongest economic growth in the G7 in the years ahead and Canada has created 610,000 net new jobs since July 2009, the best job growth in the G7.

However, the global recovery is fragile and Canada is not immune. There are still far too many Canadians out of work.

We are staying focused on the economy and supporting long-term economic growth, job creation and prosperity for Canadian families.

#### Statements by Members

#### HUMAN TRAFFICKING

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, five years ago, on February 22, 2007, the House unanimously condemned modern day forms of slavery and called for a national strategy to combat human trafficking.

Today, our government is developing a national action plan to combat human trafficking and provide much needed support for victims. However, eliminating this horrific abuse of human rights will require every Canadian to take action.

That is why I am pleased to introduce Motion No. 317, which calls for February 22 to be declared national human trafficking awareness day. This would encourage Canadians to raise awareness of the magnitude of modern day slavery in Canada and abroad and to take steps to combat human trafficking in their communities.

This year, on February 22, I urge all hon. members and all Canadians to take a moment to learn about how to help eradicate modern day slavery. By working together, we can abolish slavery.

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#### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this year, there have been four shootings in Scarborough. Three of these shootings occurred in my riding in the community of Malvern, the neighbourhood that I call home. These four shootings resulted in the deaths of two young men. That is two families and our entire community mourning the loss of their loved ones.

One of these victims was Chris Thompson. Chrissy, as we all lovingly referred to him, was a beloved local barber. He was the father of two and was an active community guy. He will be greatly missed.

The government says that it is tough on crime but is doing nothing to prevent crimes from being committed. It is doing nothing to engage and empower our youth. It is doing nothing to help those who think they have no other option.

Shamefully, as we saw last night, the members opposite celebrated the loss of one of our most effective gun violence prevention tools. The government's only crime prevention strategy is building megaprisons to house our youth.

The government can build all the prisons in the world but the victims of violence and their families would prefer that the violence did not happen in the first place.

*Statements by Members***BOB WILLIAMSON AND JOHN SPERRY**

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to pay tribute to two remarkable gentlemen who passed away in Nunavut last weekend.

Bob Williamson and John Sperry were both men who lived in their unique way and played critical roles in the development of the north and Nunavut. They both lived in Nunavut for many years and were considered true friends of the Inuit. Their commitment and dedication was truly inspiring. Their passing will leave a large void, not only in the hearts of their families and friends but in the hearts of the Inuit as well.

On behalf of the member for Nunavut and myself, I extend my sincere condolences to the Williamson and Sperry families who shared these remarkable men with the larger Inuit and northern families they loved so much.

\* \* \*

●(1410)

[Translation]

**VALCOURT GRAND PRIX**

**Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Valcourt Grand Prix is Canada's premier professional snowmobile snocross event. One of the goals of our event is to ensure economic benefit for the Eastern Townships, Quebec and Canada.

In 2008, over 28,000 spectators descended on Valcourt, and the event generated over \$2.5 million in economic activity. Canada Economic Development recommended \$50,000 in funding for the event. Unfortunately, the government refused to support the event, a decision that may jeopardize the future of the Valcourt Grand Prix.

In light of the current tough economic times, the Valcourt Grand Prix needs financial support from the Canadian government to carry out its mission. I called, but I was told that it was none of my business.

\* \* \*

[English]

**SWAN LAKE FIRST NATION**

**Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today to congratulate Swan Lake First Nation located in my riding of Portage—Lisgar.

Earlier this week, Swan Lake won the gold award in the municipal services category, beating municipalities from across Canada. These awards are distributed by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada and Deloitte. This award recognizes the community's initiative and success in overcoming significant levels of debt to become one of Manitoba's most successful first nations and one of Canada's most economically dynamic aboriginal communities.

In addition to getting out of its debt, it has renovated nearly every house and the band has helped to build a new health centre, band office and school. The band is currently working on building a wind farm on the reserve.

The success of Swan Lake demonstrates what can happen when first nations engage in strong leadership, accountable governance and responsible financial management.

I sincerely congratulate the Swan Lake First Nation.

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**THE VANCOUVER SUN**

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on February 12, 100 years ago, *The Vancouver Sun* wrote out its first edition. It has been delivering the news to British Columbians ever since.

Founders, “Black Jack” McConnell and Robert Ford, both Liberals, ran their paper to never “adversely criticize, condemn, or oppose in spirit” the Liberal Party and to counter *The Province*, a Vancouver Tory newspaper in those days.

*The Vancouver Sun* evolved, providing British Columbians with intelligent, informative, often controversial but never bland reporting from iconic journalists like Jack Wasserman, Al Fotheringham and Marjorie Nichols.

*The Vancouver Sun* was one of the first newspapers in Canada to give women hard news to cover and there are tales of female reporters packing guns in their purses as they covered organized crime and the docks in the old days. I do not think Kim Bolan, Barbara Yaffe or Daphne Brahaman do that anymore, though they still do not shy away from the tough stories.

As Stephen Hume, a *The Vancouver Sun* columnist, wrote:

...a newspaper is, a community having a collective public conversation with and about itself, sometimes an argument, sometimes a commiseration, but always the discourse that is community life.

I congratulate the *The Vancouver Sun*—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HOOKED ON SCHOOL DAYS**

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to wear this green and white ribbon in honour of Quebec's Hooked on School Days from February 13 to 17.

I want to acknowledge all young adults and students who have the courage and determination to go back to school or upgrade their education.

I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate Catherine Jasmin, a young woman who dropped out at 14 and, later, as a mother of two, decided to pursue her education and go to university.

We know that staying in school is not always easy for young people, who face many challenges at home and at school. Nevertheless, I urge everyone here to take an interest during Hooked on School Days and congratulate our children, our friends or even an adult. People who are proud of themselves and have big dreams make our society better and more dynamic.

*Oral Questions***GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the opportunity to talk to more than 12,000 people from the riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain during an interactive public meeting. I was with my colleague, the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé, and the Leader of the Opposition.

The people of Saint-Maurice—Champlain had a very clear message for the Prime Minister: the government is on the wrong track. It is on the wrong track with its attacks against old age security, which families depend on, and it is on the wrong track with its determination to buy fighter jets that do not meet our needs. The list of bad decisions is so long that I will stop there.

The people of Saint-Maurice—Champlain are more determined than ever to get rid of this government that has turned its back on families. They are more determined than ever to elect an NDP government that takes the interests of Quebec to heart. The NDP will continue to fight every day for families that are being abandoned by this government in the riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain and in every riding in the country. Together, we will beat this government.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

*[English]***WEST BANK TRAGEDY**

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very saddened to report that tragically today in the West Bank a school bus carrying up to 50 children as young as four years old overturned and burst into flames. More than 40 children have been injured and there are fears that at least 8 children may have been killed.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of those children. On behalf of all members of the House, we offer our hope for a full and speedy recovery to the families of those injured in this tragic incident.

In the face of tragedy such as this, people rise beyond their differences for the common cause of humanity. We commend the sincere gestures made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas.

We stand united with those affected during this most difficult time and we wish them solace in the face of grief.

**ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***PENSIONS**

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, people are worried about their retirement. They are planning their retirement now. Will there be changes to the old age security program?

*[English]*

Canadians are really worried about their retirement. They need to know now. Will the age of eligibility for OAS be increased to 67? Is it happening or not, yes or no?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government has been very clear that it is not contemplating any changes for those who are retired or those nearing retirement. At the same time, we have also been clear that we are concerned about the long-term sustainability of old age security, and we are looking to take action to ensure that for future generations.

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, talking of broken promises, it is disappointing to see the Conservatives break their word on refugees as well.

During the minority, government and the opposition worked together and came up with a balanced bill on refugee reform. That is what Canadians wanted us to do, work together and do the right thing. Why destroy all the good non-partisan work that was done on refugee reform?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not agree at all with what the Leader of the NDP has said. Canadians expect us to maintain a just and generous refugee determination system, which we have, but one also that is not subject to abuse, where we do not see, and continue to see, thousands of people coming from safe democratic countries making refugee claims in this country. That is not acceptable to Canadians.

Some changes were made in the last Parliament that have been helpful, but are clearly not sufficient to deal with this issue. The government is prepared to ensure that we act on the wishes of Canadians.

*[Translation]*

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, at the time, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism was singing a different tune. He said, "There is a remarkable spirit of co-operation around this bill. It is amazing to see that a consensus could be reached on such a sensitive issue by all the parties in the House with their divergent views." That is what the government was saying at the time. The minister was right: we did improve the refugee system.

Why undo this good work? Why change something that is working? Why be so shamelessly partisan and renege on the consensus reached with regard to refugees?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, Canada has the fairest and most generous refugee system in the world. It is essential to maintain that system and take the measures necessary to put an end to the abuse of that system. Some changes were made in the last Parliament but there are still thousands of people from safe, democratic countries who are claiming refugee status in Canada. This is unacceptable to Quebecers and Canadians, and we are going to change it.

*Oral Questions**[English]***PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, to accuse someone of supporting child pornography is just vile. The minister needs to take responsibility for his comments.

Here is one quote, “I think this bill is too intrusive. There's a lot of concern across the country”. Who said that? The member for New Brunswick Southwest.

So now are Conservative MPs on the side of child pornographers? If not, will the minister stand and apologize to the child victims for using them as political cover to push a bill that even the Conservative backbench would not support, for crying out loud?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will not apologize for ensuring that victims of crime, especially children, are protected, and that is what we are going to do. Canada's laws do not adequately protect Canadians from online exploitation. We want to update our laws while striking the right balance between combatting crime and protecting privacy.

Let me be very clear. Police officers will not be able to read emails or view web activity unless they obtain a warrant by a judge.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, here is a good quote to help him, “This is going to be a gold mine for the hackers and the real bad guys”. Who said that? The Ontario privacy commissioner because she is opposed to his bill that will force every telecom, telephone, Internet, wireless provider to create these elaborate spy backdoors so they can snoop on law-abiding citizens.

Will he strike these provisions that will treat ordinary citizens as criminals, or will he continue to side with the hackers and the snoopers? Will he change that provision, yes or no?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, police officers will not be able to read emails or view web activity unless they obtain a warrant issued by a judge.

I will continue to stand by the Ontario attorney general, the NDP Nova Scotia attorney general and the NDP Manitoba attorney general. Every attorney general in the country supports the bill.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government confessed it was wrong to try to track without warrant every use of email, cellphones and the Internet, but Canadians will be forgiven if they do not trust the government.

Would the Prime Minister guarantee today that he will refer the subject matter of Bill C-30 to a parliamentary committee for full reconsideration, without the limitations of Standing Order 73(1), without time allocation or closure and without secret proceedings behind closed doors? Will the Prime Minister commit to that transparency?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister state yesterday that he wanted this legislation sent directly to committee for full examination on the best way to protect all Canadians from online crime and online predators.

It is important to remember, in the context of that referral, that amendments can be considered, and will be considered, by the

committee, whether they are within the scope of the legislation or outside the scope of the legislation. It is a very broad referral.

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**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government is renegeing already.

On another matter of transparency, or the lack of it, the government's position on F-35 fighter jets is imploding. There are now only two possibilities: either the government will completely blow through its budget for fighter jets, or it will fail to get the minimum number the air force needs.

I have simple questions for the Prime Minister. How many planes will he buy? At what price per plane? When will Canada take delivery? How many, how much and when?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what is imploding is the credibility of the member opposite's party. It was the Liberal Party that entered Canada into the program. It is a good program that has gone on for a number of years.

We are obviously working to give the Royal Canadian Air Force the best possible aircraft on the market. Only fifth generation aircraft will be available to the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Unlike the NDP, the Liberal Party does believe in a well-equipped Canadian air force.

● (1425)

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we already know the many reasons for the delays in developing the F-35. But now we have learned that Chinese spies gained access to secret documents, compromising some security features of this aircraft. We now have reason to believe that anyone in China with a laptop has more information about the development of the F-35 than the Conservative government.

Was the government aware of this breach of the integrity of the F-35 program?

*[English]*

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not think those members would know more about the aircraft than member countries like Canada when it comes to this fighter aircraft.

What we do know is the current fleet of F-18s will need to be replaced around 2020 or in that range. For that reason, it makes perfect sense. It is prudent planning, to prepare to replace that aircraft. We have set a budget aside, as the Prime Minister has mentioned a number of times. The Royal Canadian Air Force will live within that budget.



*Oral Questions*

Unlike other parties, we intend to ensure the long-term viability of the Canadian air force when it comes to the fighter aircraft we need to protect our country, the continent and international missions.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, day after day, I find it hard to believe that the minister is capable of giving that kind of response with a straight face.

It is time for the government to be transparent with Canadians regarding the implications of the government bill on surveillance. This bill means that police officers and even the Commissioner of Competition will have access to Canadians' personal information at any time and for any reason. The Prime Minister admitted that this bill has a number of shortcomings that need to be addressed.

Will the government commit to withdrawing the foolish provisions concerning warrantless access that its own members have trouble accepting?

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is difficult for me to understand which provisions those members consider troublesome, given that they have never once identified accurately any provisions in terms of what is actually in the bill.

That party's member went to the technical briefing, stayed three minutes and then went out and read a prepared statement, without even listening at all to the technical briefing.

What we are prepared to do with the opposition, when this matter is referred after first reading, before second reading, is to consider the bill, hear from the experts as to why the law is needed and consider matters accordingly.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have trouble believing a government that, to date, has accepted so few amendments to the bills studied in committee. I have even more difficulty believing an irresponsible government that dismantles the firearms registry in the name of privacy rights on the very same day that it introduces a bill enabling police officers to spy on law-abiding Canadians as if they were criminals. It is clear that this government is refusing to stand up for the rights of victims of gun related crimes. The government is ignoring the warnings of police chiefs and the families of victims. And, now, it is ignoring the provinces that wish to keep the data.

Will the government preserve the data in the registry until a final decision is made concerning the court challenge—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after 17 long years, this government is getting rid of the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

What we are doing is in fact focusing on legislation that actually targets criminals, people who are actually breaking the law and who should be behind bars, so that ordinary Canadians are safeguarded.

I do not understand why the member continues to want to prosecute farmers, hunters and sports shooters in my riding.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I do not. Let me be clear on the record, I do not want to prosecute. That is in the amendments we presented in committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I have a vague recollection of a speech by the Prime Minister in the 2006 election campaign that spoke of open federalism. That was a long time ago. Rather than uncorking the champagne, this government should admit the contempt it has shown towards Quebeckers. Even Alberta admits that nothing justifies depriving the provinces of data paid for by taxpayers in order to protect them.

Will this government finally listen to the provinces?

● (1430)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously the provinces have powers in this area. It is up to them to decide on their own policies.

[*English*]

I would simply put it this way, I thought yesterday was a great day for law-abiding Canadians. If the NDP really believes and the Liberal Party really believes in the long gun registry, then I challenge them to come to the House every day from now until the next election and tell Canadians they will bring it back. We would be happy to take them on.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have choices to make for the next budget, and a little relief for families would be more than welcome. As Fitch and Moody's stated, this government's plan to cut services will slow economic growth. Over its lifespan, a single F-35 will cost \$450 million. That is the equivalent of a year's worth of OAS benefits for 70,000 seniors.

In the next budget, why not give families a break? Why not put families first?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what this government has done and will continue to do: protect families and put families first. That is why we introduced the universal child care benefit. The NDP voted against that, of course.

We also introduced a number of tax cuts to help families keep more money in their pockets. The NDP voted against that. We are the ones helping families.

[English]

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we voted against them because they did not get the job done. The proof of that is the IMF's economic growth figures for 2012 ranking Canada 152nd worldwide. They are not getting the job done.

Making a budget is about choices. The cost of the Senate last year was \$88 million. That could pay OAS benefits for a year for 14,000 Canadian seniors.

The Conservatives' priorities are more senators and more money for the PMO. New Democrats would put seniors and families first.

Why will the Conservatives not put families as a priority in this year's budget? Why will they not put Canadian families first?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, why does the NDP oppose every measure this government introduces to help families? Why? Why did it oppose the universal child care benefit and tax cuts, cuts that leave more money in families' pockets so that they can take care of themselves? Why does the NDP always oppose such measures?

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**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the F-35s, the government is acting arrogantly and blindly. Let us review the facts. Everyone agrees that the cost will increase and that delivery will be delayed considerably. Everyone also agrees that the F-35s have not proven themselves.

The Department of National Defence has even finally admitted that there is no plan B. Why did this government not think to ask the Department of National Defence to work on a plan B?

[English]

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, here we go again, another railing against the interests of the Canadian Forces. We have come to expect this.

The member in particular would know that senior officers have chosen the F-35. In fact, I refer to a quote from Lieutenant-General Deschamps, chief of the air staff of our Canadian Forces. She would know who he is. He said:

Our analysis of our mandatory requirements for the next generation fighter made it clear that only a 5th generation fighter could satisfy those requirements in the increasingly complex and uncertain future security environment. The F-35 Lightning II is...the only 5th generation aircraft available to Canada.... The F-35 Lightning II also offers the best value of any fighter available....

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to wonder if the minister wants the F-35s so badly so he will have a faster personal taxi service than the search and rescue helicopters. Yesterday, the Associate Minister of National Defence told us to stay tuned for his plan B. His department said the opposite. I repeat, there is no plan B. We even learned about an emergency meeting to discuss a potential plan B. This all smacks of improvisation.

The NDP has been asking for clear answers for some time: how many planes, at what price and when?

• (1435)

[English]

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to show just how informed the member is about the aircraft, there is only one seat in an F-35, so I could not take it as a taxi if I wanted to.

What we do know about the New Democratic Party—and it is not really new any more; it has been around for a while—is that every opportunity we have taken to improve life for the Canadian Forces through programs, equipment, infrastructure, the NDP has voted against it. NDP really means no defence party.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, of course on this side of the House we support our troops. In fact—

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

**The Speaker:** Order. Let us have a little order. The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** Mr. Speaker, in fact, our commitment to our pilots would be to procure planes that actually work.

Let us talk about the budget for a moment. The chief financial officer of the U.S. Department of Defense released new numbers on the cost of the F-35. These planes will be rolling off the line at a cool \$200 million. That is more than double what the Conservatives have been claiming.

With production delayed by several years, taxpayers have the right to know how many planes will the government buy and how much will each one cost?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, who is sounding defensive now?

What we do know is that the Canadian Forces need new aircraft. There have been plans in place now for over a decade to ensure that we face no operational gap. We have put a budget aside that is specifically dedicated to the replacement of the F-18s.

All of the misinformation and the misfired questions coming from the members opposite tell the truth about how they feel about the Canadian Forces. They want them to be smaller, less equipped, and they want them to stay home.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we are happy to talk about operational gaps. Let us talk about what the chiefs of staff have told the government. They have said the CF-18s need to be replaced by 2020, and they have said we need at least 65 new planes. However, basic math tells us we are getting far fewer and much later.

Yesterday, the minister said he had a plan B, just stay tuned. Then we learned from DND that in fact there is no plan B.

With respect to the F-35, we know that the minister has serious problems with managing his department, but does he also have a problem with basic math?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, no, what I have a problem with is the blind partisan criticism that comes from the uninformed member opposite on this program.

This program is designed to ensure that Canada will have a fifth generation aircraft available to face the very complex security environment that we know will exist. That is why this government has been committed across the board from the time we were elected to equipping, supporting and funding members of the Canadian Forces so that they can do the important work that we demand of them.

We are very proud of them. We are going to continue to support them. I encourage the member opposite to do the same.

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has made a clear statement. He says that he is the one who is going to decide what is a safe country for refugees. He says he does not need any help from a professional advisory committee, that he is the minister who has the ability and power to determine that a refugee from some country around the world does not need to have an appeal, that the refugee will have to go through the Federal Court. This is a new power which the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism believes he has an entitlement to.

Why does the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism take—

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

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the thoughtful question. Unfortunately, the premise is entirely wrong because the criteria for the designation of safe countries is laid out in Bill C-31. In part, it will include countries that have a rejection rate at the IRB of 85% or more. I am not the one who makes those decisions. It is the independent decision makers at the quasi-judicial independent IRB.

It is very interesting to see the member's indignation. All we are saying is that those claimants will not have access to the Refugee Appeal Division. The Liberals refused to bring in a refugee appeal

division. It is this government that is finally creating the Refugee Appeal Division.

\* \* \*

• (1440)

**FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS**

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Moody's has warned that deep cuts by the Conservatives will do more harm than good, yet the Prime Minister is vowing to cut baby boomers. When the Prime Minister slams the door in the faces of seniors with his pension reform robbery, the provinces will be left to pick up the pieces. Whether it is pensions, health care or big jails, the government is willing to download costs to the provinces which the provinces cannot afford.

Will the government cancel its plan to pass the buck and its responsibility?

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Speaking of responsibility, Mr. Speaker, that is what this government is all about, because we will not do what the Liberals did in the 1990s, and that is slash transfers to the provinces. We have promised the provinces that we will not do that to them. It is very important that we do not do that. They are our partners. We work with them.

When I listen to the opposition howl over there, it is interesting because every time we put forward an initiative that actually helps the provinces and continues to increase transfers, the opposition votes against it anyway.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives came to power, all the provinces had surpluses. Today, eight provinces and territories are running deficits and those deficits are growing. This government's delusional prison plan will cost the provinces billions of dollars. Its broken promise to maintain health transfers is going to cost the provinces billions more.

Does the Conservative government plan to continue this crazy downloading onto the provinces by keeping our most vulnerable seniors on social assistance until the age of 67?

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again another question from the party that slashed transfers to the provinces.

We have fixed equalization. There was a real problem when we came to power and we fixed that. We made a commitment to the provinces that we would increase transfers to those provinces so they would not suffer like they suffered in the 1990s under the Liberals. The provinces appreciate that. They are able to deliver the health care services and social services that they are entitled to deliver to their constituents.

*Oral Questions***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today Canadians witnessed a government betray its word and table a bill to undo an all-party consensus on refugee reform. Twenty months ago, working together, we created “a reform package that is both faster and fairer than the bill as it was originally tabled”, and a “monumental achievement”. Who said that? The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism said that.

Why is the minister betraying his word? Why is he turning his back on balanced legislation and injecting politics into a process that should be independent and fair?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** We are doing no such thing, Mr. Speaker. The bill adopted in 2010 was a significant improvement over the status quo. It now takes us several years to be able to remove a manifestly bogus asylum claimant from Canada, which is unacceptable. That is one of the reasons we are now getting thousands and thousands of fake claims coming from democratic rights respecting countries like those in the European Union.

Does the member defend the fact that we get more asylum claims from the European Union than from Africa or Asia, and that over 90% of those claimants go on to withdraw and abandon their own claims?

Canadians expect us to act, to defend the fairness and integrity of our immigration system, and that is what we are going to do.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we came up with a number of ideas for improving the refugee system. They were in the all-party bill drafted two years ago. It was an historic compromise that the government has destroyed today. Instead, refugees from a number of countries will be caught in an unfair and discriminatory system based on the whims of the minister.

Will the minister withdraw this bill that betrays his word, and will he agree to work with the opposition?

• (1445)

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the opposition has some common-sense ideas for amending Bill C-31, I am open to hearing them. With the reform we are proposing, the system will continue to be the fairest in the world. Canada is going to provide protection for real refugees within two months, instead of two years under the current system. At the same time, we are going to address the wave of fake claims for asylum from democratic countries. If the opposition has any ideas for achieving that goal, we are open to hearing them, but we have to enhance the integrity of Canada's immigration system.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, they have no time for refugees but they have all the time in the world for oil executives.

Conservatives have attacked people who are concerned about jobs and the planet as environmental radicals and now they have placed environmentalists and aboriginals on a terrorist watch list. To Conservatives, a maple syrup boycott and a cardboard cut-out of Ontario's environment minister are now on the same threat level as al-Qaeda.

When will this minister stop using counter-terrorism as an excuse to silence Canadians?

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, our country has an excellent environmental regulatory system in which the public can participate in a law-abiding way. However, any groups or individuals who resort to criminality or violence will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

My colleague opposite knows that we have a very robust environmental regulatory system here and policies whereby we invest in climate change or adaptation research. Yet she goes and lobbies against our jobs in the U.S.

That begs the question: Does she believe in job creation or is she a job-creation denier?

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is not a robust environmental regulation for long.

Enbridge wanted approval before it told Canadians where it would build its pipeline. However, the government wants to go even further and shut Canadians out of the process altogether. Instead of actually submitting a route, companies will soon only have to submit a name for their pipeline and the Conservatives will approve it. Maybe it will be the protecting bitumen from Internet predators pipeline. I am sure the Conservatives will enjoy rubber-stamping that one.

Why are the Conservatives changing the review process? Why are they weakening protection for our communities?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the priority of our government remains jobs and economic growth in this country. The northern gateway pipeline is currently going through a careful and comprehensive review process. The member opposite knows that.

*Oral Questions*

We want projects that are safe. We want thousands of new jobs in this country. We want to open up new export markets. We do not want unnecessary delays. Perhaps the NDP should be better known as the no development party.

\* \* \*

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that our immigration system, as the most fair and generous in the world, is open to abuse. Whether it is by bogus refugee claimants coming to receive taxpayer-funded benefits, human smugglers or foreign criminals, Canadians, including my constituents of Richmond Hill, have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity and take unfair advantage of our country.

Can the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism please inform this House how the act, the protecting Canada's immigration system act, would help stop the abuse of our immigration system?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank that member for the question and the good work done by him on the immigration committee.

The reforms we propose today, in addition to the bill of 2010, would allow bona fide victims of persecution who are now forced to wait two years for protection to get a hearing before the IRB and get certainty of protection in two months' time. So someone who comes off a plane from Iran with the signs of torture on his back would get certainty of protection in Canada; but instead of taking several years to deport fake asylum claimants, they would be gone in a few weeks.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, workers who are losing their jobs should only have to wait a maximum of 28 days for their employment insurance claim to be processed, but because of the cuts this government made, families have to wait five times longer. The number of workers who are waiting for their employment insurance benefits has doubled because the minister cut jobs in the processing centres.

What does the minister have to say to families who cannot pay their bills because of these irresponsible cuts?

● (1450)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we sympathize with those who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. That is why we are trying to get their benefits to them as quickly as possible. After we saw an unexpected rise in EI claims in January, we added several hundred people to the EI process to speed up the processing of claims.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Canadian families and their children continue to struggle under this minister's watch.

New Democrats are touring the country to hear how waiting months for employment insurance is hurting families, families who cannot make their rent because their EI cheques are delayed, families who are wondering when help will come.

Why can this minister not address the real problem? Why can she not see how her cuts are hurting the families who desperately need their employment insurance?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, families do get their EI cheques as quickly as possible. That is why, after we saw in December and January an unexpected rise in EI claims, we added several hundred people to the EI process, and it is working.

The backlog is being whittled down. People are getting their cheques faster. We will continue to improve our performance for Canadians who need it.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have learned that Canadian Heritage wants to use testimony received by the Standing Committee on Official Languages as a formal consultation mechanism leading up to the next Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality. That violates the Official Languages Act and constitutes fraudulent use of testimony that was given in good faith. The department must hold its own consultation in due form.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages commit to holding a formal consultation about the next roadmap, as required by law?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we certainly did hold consultations before tabling the roadmap a few years ago, and our commitment remains the same. We will hold further consultations. I will be in New Brunswick near my opposition colleague's riding to hold consultations and participate in round tables. We held consultations across the country. We will continue to do so with our provincial counterparts next summer as we fulfill our commitment to both protect and celebrate Canada's two official languages.

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last November, the government made a hasty announcement that it would create a committee to study the issue of the use of French in Quebec companies governed by federal law. It is now February 16, and there is still no sign of a committee—no chair, no budget, no mandate. In short, the government is not interested in francophone issues.

### Oral Questions

The NDP introduced a balanced bill that meets workers' expectations. Will the Conservatives stop dragging their feet and support our bill?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, French is an integral part of our history, our identity, our daily lives, and it is one of the founding languages of Canada. Our government is committed to promoting and protecting the French language in Canada.

We will launch a consultative committee and assess whether a problem exists with the language of work in federally regulated private sector businesses, and the committee will seek to use stakeholders to examine whether employees of federally regulated private sector businesses in Quebec are fully able to work in French.

Our government is proud of Canadian bilingualism and our cultural diversity, and we remain fully committed to promoting the French language in Canada and abroad.

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### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada deserves a Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development who will deliver results for aboriginal people. Instead, we have a minister who delivers aspirations.

Shamefully, the minister has called the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples an “aspirational” document. Last week, when the national panel on first nations education released its report, the minister called the recommendations “aspirational”.

It is time the minister replaced his aspirations with results. Will he admit today that the funding for aboriginal children on reserve is woefully inadequate and—

• (1455)

**The Speaker:** The parliamentary secretary to the minister of aboriginal affairs.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government will keep building on its progress in improving first nations education. We are engaged with first nations. Our government has signed five education partnership agreements with provinces and first nations. The minister was proud to sign the first nations education agreement with B.C. first nations and the province three weeks ago.

We will review the national panel's recommendations and continue to work for quality outcomes for first nation children and education.

\* \* \*

### GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government cannot admit the truth that Conservatives are against free speech for scientists.

Yesterday Francesca Grifo, director of the Union of Concerned Scientists' scientific integrity program, spoke about the muzzling of Canadian scientists calling it a scary thing, something that is happening quite frequently.

This completely contradicts what the minister told us on Monday. Maybe he cannot speak freely as well without permission from his political masters.

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can say that we are very proud to promote the important work of our scientists and researchers, more work, by the way, since this government has funded science and technology to historic levels, which the opposition voted against.

I would point out that at that very conference the member mentioned, our scientists are presenting their work. They publish their work and lecture about their work at universities around the world, and we are thrilled to tell Canadians about the great work being done by our scientists.

\* \* \*

### HOUSING

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, cities like Toronto are facing a housing crisis. The FCM says that housing is the number one problem facing cities. Even the CIBC is saying that most Canadian families are having a hard time finding affordable housing. In fact, one and a half million Canadian households are said to be in core housing need, and this government does not have a plan. Luckily, we do.

Will the government commit today to finally take action and support the New Democrat national housing strategy?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let us face it, for anyone who has been following, the NDP have been talking about this for years, but while they have been talking, we have been doing it.

We have signed a five-year agreement with the provinces and territories regarding affordable housing so they will have stable, predictable funding to deliver the housing that is within their mandate.

During the economic action plan, we also added quite a large amount of money for more affordable housing for seniors, the disabled and aboriginals. Over 14,000 projects for affordable housing were undertaken through that program. It is a real shame that the NDP did not support it.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listen to the minister just about every day and it is clear that she does not understand that her plan is not working.

*Oral Questions*

I will map it out just for Toronto. There are 70,000 households, some 200,000 people, on waiting lists for affordable housing. The backlog for repairs at Toronto Community Housing will be \$1 billion by 2015. The government is doing nothing. It says a lot but does nothing.

Will the Conservatives commit today to supporting the New Democrats' national housing strategy?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would point out that there are several projects and initiatives we have undertaken to provide more affordable housing to those Canadians who need it, apart from the economic action plan and the 14,000 projects undertaken and completed across the country, which of course the NDP opposed. Since June 30 of last year, over 50,000 affordable housing units in Canada have been funded through this government.

While the NDP talk and oppose everything, we do it anyway.

\* \* \*

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. This is exactly what we are doing.

I am proud to report that last night this House passed, by a vote of 159 to 130, the ending the long-gun registry act.

Would the Minister of Public Safety please update the House as to the status of this legislation and how close we are to finally scrapping this ineffective registry?

• (1500)

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member in particular for all of his hard work on this file. Last night's vote marks a leap forward towards fulfilling our promise to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

I would also like to thank the members for Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North who stood up to the NDP union bosses and voted with Conservatives to scrap the registry. It is too bad that the member for Western Arctic did not show the same courage and turned his back on the good people of the Northwest Territories.

While the NDP continue to target law-abiding citizens, our government will continue to put criminals behind bars.

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**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has returned from China but not a word as to whether the Canadian sealing industry has obtained access to the Chinese market.

On February 2, the Prime Minister indicated that he would make this a priority on his trip to China.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Was this a priority when he was in China? Did we gain access to the Chinese markets, and is the Canadian sealing industry a priority to the government?

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member may not have been listening to all of the press releases coming out of China, but the Prime Minister did sign a foreign investment and promotion protection agreement with the Chinese government, which will be a great benefit to Canadian businesses.

On the issue of seals, it is this government that has promoted the sealing industry since we formed government in 2006. We will continue to do that, whether that happens to be with the European Union, the Americans, the Chinese—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**ASBESTOS**

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the operators of an asbestos-reinforced cement plant in Italy were sentenced to 16 years in prison. In Quebec, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux—Construction wants to ban asbestos. It is no longer socially acceptable and has no future.

Meanwhile, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who is also the industry minister and Quebec lieutenant, sounds like a broken record. He is a disgrace to his position and is proving that Peter White was correct when he said that the minister has no influence and no visibility in his caucus.

Out of respect for his region, the minister must demand a plan to deal with the crisis in the next budget. Will he do so, yes or no?

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the minister has been very clear on the government's position and that has not changed.

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**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last spring, we became aware of the situation of Naser Al-Raas, a Canadian living abroad, who was detained in Bahrain for participating in a political demonstration. Since learning of his case, the minister of state responsible for consular affairs and her team have been working hard to support Mr. Al-Raas and his family, as well as urging Bahrain to drop all charges against him.

I would ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs to update the House on Mr. Al-Raas' situation.

*Business of the House*

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to confirm today that Mr. Al-Raas was found innocent of the charges against him and is free to leave Bahrain. The minister of state and consular officials worked very hard to assist Mr. Al-Raas and to press the government of Bahrain on his behalf.

Through our embassy, we are now encouraging him to leave the country and return to Canada. If he is rearrested for demonstrating in Bahrain, our options to assist him will be limited.

We want to thank the Bahraini government for responding to our concerns and I want to acknowledge the great leadership of the minister of state for consular affairs for her good work.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the confidentiality of journalistic sources has allowed us to uncover many scandals, including the sponsorship scandal. Yet Tony Accurso's lawyers want to force the journalist from the program *Enquête* to reveal the identity of his source, who helped bring to light major tax fraud by Louisbourg and Simard-Beaudry.

Is the government prepared to act in the public's interest, to legislate to protect journalistic sources, and to ensure that freedom of the press remains one of Canada's fundamental values?

[English]

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we take the issue very seriously and we cannot tolerate these types of activities that are alleged. There is currently an RCMP investigation going on into this matter so I cannot comment any further.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Bill C-19 has not been enacted yet and the Conservatives are celebrating their victory in an offensive manner. To the loved ones of the massacre victims, it is as though the Conservatives were dancing on their graves. What is more, the government refuses to say exactly when the data in the registry will be destroyed. It seems to just be waiting for royal assent before calling for the immediate destruction of the data, even though Quebec has said it is going to take legal action to keep the information.

Can the Minister of Public Safety assure us that he will wait for Quebec to pursue its legal options before destroying the data in the registry, or does he simply intend to press the button on the shredder?

• (1505)

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last night's vote marks a leap forward toward fulfilling our promise to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. As part of that

commitment of getting rid of the registry, the data will also be destroyed, and that will be done as soon as legally possible.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government across the way came here with promises to change the way things are done in Ottawa. It promised the public, election after election, that it would change things, that there would be more accountability, more democracy and more transparency. Instead, it has organized a blatant attack on centuries-old parliamentary traditions.

The closure motions that muzzle the elected members of this House are meant to be an exceptional procedure used only in extreme circumstances. Now, under this government, closure has become nothing more than a legislative step like any other. It is a complete disgrace. The government House leader is probably on the verge of trying to blame the opposition for the government's methods. Maybe he will blame us for wanting to speak for the many ordinary citizens who are asking for nothing more than for their voices to be heard through the representatives they have elected. It is absurd, it is disappointing, but even more, it is a betrayal of the democratic promise of this country. My democracy is suffering.

My questions for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons are the following:

Does the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons realize that the abuse of closure represents a radical shift from other traditions in this House and British traditions throughout the world?

Does the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons believe that the majority has the right to act without opposition, without debate and by excluding points of view that differ from its own?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I did not hear it right. I thought this was a question about the House agenda. In any event, I will answer a couple of the questions.

First, with regard to the management of the House business, I will renew once again my invitation to the NDP to give us the number of speakers and the length of time they wish to speak on any of the bills before this House. They have yet to ever provide me an answer on that. I have asked in the past here and elsewhere and I will continue to ask.

I appreciate that the Liberal Party has been somewhat forthcoming in that regard. If we see the same from the NDP, we will be able to actually come to co-operative arrangements. However, barring that, it is clear that the NDP agenda is simply to run up the score and compel the government to utilize the resources available in the Standing Orders in order to ensure that we actually do come to decisions and take votes in this House.



[Translation]

Today we will continue with the opposition day. Tomorrow we will be having a debate to take note of the Standing Orders before, as I understand, the Procedure and House Affairs Committee takes on a more extensive and detailed study of proposed changes to the Standing Orders. Following the constituency week we will begin on Monday, February 27, with debate on Bill C-7, Senate Reform Act.

[English]

On Monday afternoon, we will continue debate on Bill C-24, the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act. Tuesday, February 28, will be the fourth allotted day, which I understand is to go to the Liberal Party.

[Translation]

On Wednesday, we will continue debate on the Canada-Panama Free Trade Act. On Thursday morning, we will continue debate on Bill C-23, the Canada-Jordan Free Trade Act.

• (1510)

[English]

On Thursday afternoon, we will begin debate on Bill C-28, the financial literacy leader act.

As the House can see, this will be a jobs and growth week. Jobs and growth remain our government's top priorities.

As we have seen with the North American Free Trade Agreement, free trade creates jobs and economic growth for Canadian families and businesses, and this is true of the two free trade bills that we have before the House. Like the Canada-Jordan free trade act, which, I would point out, in the previous Parliament went to committee after only a few hours of debate, we would hope that we could get the same agreement from the other parties to do so here. I invite them to do that.

I can also say, from my own personal experience, that the Canada-Panama free trade agreement has been around for a long time. I recall two and a half years ago being in Panama with the Prime Minister as negotiations concluded on this agreement. I remember, as Minister of International Trade, introducing in the House on September 23, 2010, for the first time, the bill to implement the free trade agreement. It is about time that it passes into law to benefit Canadians, exporters and workers.

Bill C-28 would create the position of financial literacy leader to help promote financial literacy among Canadians. This is something for which I think all parties have expressed support. I am sure we should be able to come to an agreement on how to proceed. I proposed a motion to the House that laid out a reasonable work plan for Bill C-28 but, sadly, that motion was not supported. I encourage the opposition House leader to get together with us again to try to work on a reasonable work plan.

I do look forward to seeing some progress as we continue the hard-working, orderly and productive session of Parliament we are in. Rather than trying to run up the score and compel time allocation to be used, I would encourage the official opposition House leader to work with all parties in this place to make progress on the bills before us.

### *Speaker's Ruling*

On that note and in the spirit of co-operation and working with my colleagues across the way, I have one further addition regarding tomorrow's debate. I thank my colleagues for this suggestion, which I believe, Mr. Speaker, you will find unanimous consent for. I move:

[Translation]

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the motion "That this House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its Committees", standing on the Order Paper, be amended by adding the following:

"; that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to study the Standing Orders and procedures of the House and its Committees, including the proceedings on the debate pursuant to Standing Order 51; and that the Committee report its findings to the House no later than May 18, 2012"; and that the motion, as amended, shall not be subject to any further amendment; and when debate has concluded, or at the expiry of time provided for Government Orders on the day designated for the debate, as the case may be, the motion, as amended, shall be deemed adopted.

[English]

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### PRIVILEGE

#### STATUS OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on February 8, 2012, by the hon. member for Ahuntsic regarding members bringing their infant children into the Chamber.

[English]

I thank the member for having raised this matter, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the chief opposition whip and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for their interventions.

[Translation]

This question of privilege arose from events that occurred on February 7, 2012, when the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes brought her infant son into the Chamber immediately prior to the taking of a recorded division. At that time, several other members began taking photographs of mother and son, creating a disturbance in the process.

The hon. member for Ahuntsic explained that it had been her impression, when she had a newborn that members could not bring their babies into the Chamber during votes. She therefore requested that the Chair clarify whether there were any House rules or practices on the matter.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

I will begin by saying that it will come as no surprise to the House that I do not see this as a matter of privilege. As the member for Ahuntsic herself has pointed out, the matter at hand really has to do with a need to clarify existing practices, and she has requested that I also review what steps can or should be taken to assist members with infants or young children as they juggle the challenges and obligations associated with being a parent who is also a member of the House of Commons.

*[Translation]*

The events of Tuesday, touching as they do on very personal matters for the members concerned, are always difficult to adjudicate. As a member with four children under the age of seven, I must confess that I am particularly sympathetic to the challenges faced by all elected officials who strive to find a balance between the demands of their work and the needs of their families.

While the events which unfolded on February 7 may seem to suggest that some of our rules and practices are rooted in traditions that no longer mesh seamlessly with modern realities, the truth is quite different. In fact, the House—and the Speakership on its behalf—has a long history of adapting its practices to meet the needs of the day. The Chair has been afforded considerable latitude to reconcile apparent contradictions between our rules and practices and contemporary values.

• (1515)

*[English]*

This is exactly what happened over the years in relation to the kind of situation the House faced last Tuesday. As some members have pointed out, there have been cases in the past where members have brought very young babies into the chamber, mainly for votes. In their wisdom, my predecessors in the chair have handled these situations by turning a blind eye and, given that the presence of the babies did not create disturbances, allowing House business to proceed uninterrupted.

It is important to recall that in the case at hand several members were flouting the rules by taking photographs in the chamber, and it was this disturbance to which the Chair's attention was drawn. Therefore, let me take this opportunity to suggest to members that it would be of great assistance if member's advised the Chair privately, in advance where they can, of a particular difficulty they are facing. I believe this would help us to avoid the kinds of disturbances that were witnessed last Tuesday, which in turn led to the events which have given rise to this ruling.

When considering what kind of guidelines should be followed on an ongoing basis, it struck me that there are few times when members might actually be unable to make alternative arrangements. It is really only during unexpected votes that members could face difficulties. Fortunately, most recorded divisions are scheduled far enough in advance that members should be able to plan accordingly.

*[Translation]*

However, the Chair appreciates that plans sometimes fail. When that happens, members may find themselves in a difficult position. In such cases, provided there is no other type of disruption or

disturbance, the Speaker's attention will likely not be drawn to the situation and the work of the House can proceed as usual.

*[English]*

It would also be helpful to the Chair, and I think to the whole House, even after some incident has occurred involving the Chair, if members approached me directly to discuss any concerns they may have.

*[Translation]*

I should remind members that, more broadly, the House as an institution has a long history of improving facilities to assist members as working parents. Not all members realize that it is now almost 30 years ago that under the leadership of former Speaker Jeanne Sauvé the parliamentary childcare centre, The Children on the Hill, was established, providing members and staff with young children access to workplace daycare. In addition, some time ago, the House installed change tables in a number of washroom facilities in Centre Block and elsewhere. On this point, I have asked the Clerk to assess whether the number of change tables is sufficient to meet the needs of members with infants and to verify that they are appropriately located for their use.

*[English]*

At the same time, the Chair is advised that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is embarking on a thorough review of the Standing Orders. Given the composition of the current House, as the members who intervened on this matter have suggested, it may well be timely for the committee, as part of the study, to review existing practices in this regard. The Chair would welcome the collective wisdom and guidance of the standing committee in this admittedly nebulous area.

In the meantime, the Chair will continue to be governed by the approach taken in the past by previous Speakers, always mindful of my obligation to preserve order and decorum so that the House may conduct its business without disruption, knowing that I can count on the co-operation of all members in this regard.

I thank all hon. members for their attention.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

*[Translation]*

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—EDUCATION FOR FIRST NATION CHILDREN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has seven minutes left.

*[English]*

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the motion before us today is urgently necessary. Children have a right to culturally appropriate education. Children have a right to the same level of education as every other child. Shannen's Dream should be obvious and yet it is shamefully unrealized.

The motion before us says that first nations children have a fundamental right to culturally-relevant education. Seeing oneself reflected in one's studies fosters pride and a deep sense of belonging inside a pluralistic society. The members of the House who belong to minority cultures will understand how crucial this pride and belonging is for healthy personal development. Aboriginal peoples have every right and reason to see themselves centrally located in the history, science, maths, arts and languages that are taught both in their schools on reserve and off reserve and in every school in Canada no matter where it is located and who the students are because it is the true story of our country.

The rest of the motion is about equality. The fact that we still need a motion to state that first nations children are deserving of the same level of education funding as average Canadian children is embarrassing. However, decades of talk and patchwork unevaluated initiatives attempting to bring the standard of education for first nations to the same level as provincial schools have not succeeded.

To quote the Auditor General's report from 2011, it stated, "Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has failed to maintain a consistent approach to education on reserves and failed to make progress in closing the educational gap".

I will reiterate that this failure is due to a lack of political will. If the government wanted to, it could prioritize aboriginal education and commit its ministry to immediately create a first nations education act that would effectively coordinate a collaborative plan that would define the responsibility of each partner in the education system and would ensure that every aspect of the act would be accountable and consistent in its actualization.

In June 2008 the Prime Minister of Canada made a formal apology to the first peoples of Canada for the residential school system. In 2010 the Prime Minister signed on to the UN Declaration of Indigenous Peoples. Implicit in the apology was a promise to future generations of first nations children to succeed where we had failed in the past. Implicit in signing the UN declaration was an obligation to take action to make good on that promise.

Sadly, I believe that in the hands of the government the UN Declaration of Indigenous Peoples has no real weight in Canada. The fact that we are continuing to fail in redressing the damage done by the residential school system is a blight on the government and a source of shame for all Canadians. Unfortunately, it is absolutely relevant to speak of residential schools when we talk about the failings of first nations education today because aboriginal peoples are still experiencing the consequences.

It is shocking to learn that three times as many first nations children are in state care today than were ever sent to residential schools. The Indian Act of 1876 is an outdated and racist document which is a template for colonization, not for restitution and revitalization. We need to put it aside and give our first nations a collaborative and comprehensive education act.

[Translation]

Ellen Gabriel is an advocate for education in Kanesatake. She asked me to remind the House that Statistics Canada expects only three of Canada's 53 aboriginal languages to survive to the end of the century. These three languages will be Inuktitut, Cree and

### *Business of Supply*

Anishnabe. Her own language, Mohawk, one of the aboriginal languages spoken in Quebec, will disappear if we do not do something.

[English]

• (1520)

Ellen asked me to read in the House a letter she wrote to me. She writes, in part:

Dear Ms. Freeman;

I am pleased to hear that the NDP will be introducing a motion to help First Nations children and their communities have the opportunity to have better quality education in their schools.

While Aboriginal children and youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada, comments from the Prime Minister of Canada and certain Aboriginal leaders regarding Aboriginal youths' contribution to society have been somewhat disturbing. They seem to relegate Aboriginal youths' contribution to mere vocational level work to strengthen Canada's economy through resource extraction or the construction industry.... But Aboriginal youth should be provided with the options, to be provided with the tools to obtain their dreams. They should not be seen solely as labourers but we should help them exceed their own expectations.

Aboriginal youth must be given the opportunity to excel academically with a strong sense of their own identity, language and culture. To do so requires sincere political will in achieving reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples, including decolonizing methodologies, and concrete support in language and culture revitalization. To wait any longer will continue the cycle of colonization which has been the root cause of Aboriginal peoples' social, political, economical and cultural problems. It is time to nurture the richness of Aboriginal peoples' culture, language and identity with real action and sincere political will. It is time to respect Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which states in article 13.1 that: "Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retains their own names for communities, places and persons".

We can no longer allow politics to dispossess Aboriginal children and youth of their inherent rights as the Indian Residential School System did for over a century and which the Indian Act continues to do.

So thank you...for your passion and support in defending the rights of Aboriginal children and youth to a quality education based upon their right to their own culture and languages.

Skén:nen

Ellen Gabriel

[Translation]

I would like to thank my colleague for introducing this motion. I would remind all members that we must act, and not just to silence critics.

• (1525)

[English]

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way talked about building partnerships and, quite honestly, that is what gives strength across the country.

In 2010 we introduced about \$15 million in a partnership that is ongoing among the first nations, the federal government and the Province of British Columbia. It is established through a steering committee. Could the member share her thoughts on that partnership approach?

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**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we know the government has not been working in partnership with first nations. Think of the first nations summits that have been happening. We expected concrete recommendations to be put into place. My experience in dealing with the violence against aboriginal report that was done by the status of women standing committee was there was no commitment from the government to take any concrete measures toward bringing aboriginal peoples into Canada in an equal way. I cannot understand why this is the case and why this process of colonization and no restitution keeps happening.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for her compassionate remarks.

She reminded us that the residential schools, which caused such harm to first nations peoples, robbed many of the members of those nations of their culture and language. As a result, it is unlikely that more than three aboriginal languages will survive. The Akwesasne Mohawk reserve is in my riding, and many individuals there are working in the education system to help people rediscover their culture.

How can strong government leadership and partnership, inspired by a motion like the one before us today, help these people reclaim their culture and make economic and social progress within their communities?

[English]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP promises to invest in improvements to education and training for first nations in pursuit of the goal of educational attainment for aboriginal people comparable to that of others in Canada. An NDP government would also remove the punitive 2% funding cap and end current funding inequalities, beginning with education and child and family services. An NDP government would forge a nation-to-nation partnership, which is necessary, and build a relationship based on mutual respect that would recognize the rights of indigenous peoples, including the right to establish and control their educational systems in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning and working with the Assembly of First Nations.

• (1530)

**Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know we are speaking about formal education here today, but we know that education takes place in many different venues. When I was in Wainwright two years ago, with the Canadian parliamentary military program, aboriginal students could participate in a program called Bold Eagle on base in Wainwright. It was put on by the Canadian Forces and 125 aboriginal young people from across the country participated. I attended the graduation ceremony, as did members from the opposite side of the House. We were very impressed with the quality of the young people who were there and the things that they learned.

I wonder if the member could comment on these kinds of partnerships that we are trying to generate throughout the country?

**Ms. Mylène Freeman:** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that first nations education is the responsibility of the federal government. There is

currently a significant gap in outcomes between first nations students and non-first nations students. Far fewer first nations students complete high school, and only 41% of first nations living on reserve, who are older than 15, have a high school diploma, compared to 77% of Canadians.

This is not a complicated thing that needs to be done. What is required is a political will, the will to really co-operate and consult with first nations and to follow that up with adequate investments. This is truly the greatest shortcoming of this government.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to express my support for the motion tabled by the hon. member for Manicouagan.

Our government recognizes the importance of education. Our government works with students, families, first nations and other partners to improve educational outcomes for first nations students. This government's overall goal is to ensure that first nations students realize their potential and develop the skills they need to enter and succeed in the labour market and be part of strong communities.

There is no doubt that education contributes to an individual's ability to share equally in, and contribute fully to, Canada's ongoing prosperity. That is why our government collaborates closely with first nations partners across Canada to deliver tangible and lasting results, and to ensure that first nations students are well positioned for success.

The relationship between first nations and our government is based on a spirit of collaboration. This past summer, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development announced a joint action plan with the Assembly of First Nations that outlined education as a shared priority. Building on the joint action plan just last month, at the crown-first nations gathering, all parties agreed to work together and improve the quality of life experienced by first nations people. I would like to echo what the Prime Minister said during the gathering:

...there has never been a better moment to build on what we have achieved, to move forward, to reset the relationship, to learn from the past, but to focus on the future. The Joint Action Plan points the way ahead, through specific joint commitments, commitments that will effectively change the rules in education, accountability, economic development and treaty relationships.

The Prime Minister's words underscore the fact that our government continues to take action on a variety of fronts to effect improvements to on-reserve education. I will begin my remarks today by providing some important context around first nations education before explaining recent initiatives. Educational outcomes of any school result from many factors: the abilities and training of individual teachers, for instance, and the availability of support materials such as textbooks.

*Business of Supply*

Some first nations schools, particularly those in small isolated communities, face other challenges. Many first nations schools, for example, lack supports such as student and parent councils and boards of education. It is important to note that several reports, including one by the Auditor General, conclude that structural impediments hinder progress for on-reserve education.

Responsibility for educational outcomes for first nations students is shared among several parties including the Government of Canada. Individual first nations and in some cases, regional organizations are responsible for managing and delivering education programs and services in band-operated schools on reserve.

The Government of Canada, through AANDC, supports first nations and their regional organizations by funding programs and services for the elementary and secondary education of first nations students who live on reserve. The primary funding vehicle is the elementary and secondary program. The program provides funding for students who attend band-operated schools and tuition for first nations students who live on reserve and attend provincial, federal or private schools.

The total budget for the program in 2010-11 was \$1.5 billion. This supported approximately 117,500 first nations students who lived on reserve and attended either band-operated schools or federal, provincial or private schools. The breakdown was as follows: 61% attended band-operated schools, 36% attended provincial schools and 3% attended federal or private schools.

Investments from this program target a variety of purposes including teachers' salaries, instructional services and student support services such as transportation, counselling, accommodation and financial assistance.

• (1535)

Funding is also used for the management of programs and services, the development of curriculum and language programs, the recruitment and retention of teachers, the engagement of parents and the community in education, technological and other resources, and school supplies, including computers.

In all, there are approximately 520 band schools across Canada. This number hints at a key factor, particularly in small communities: the inability to realize the advantages generated by economies of scale. In general, the smaller the school population, the larger the per student cost for items such as administration, building maintenance and support services.

Our government also invests significant amounts in the construction and renovation of first nations schools. In 2010-11, AANDC's annual total investment in the building and renovation of schools was \$304 million. Between 2006-07 and 2009-10, the federal government invested approximately \$924 million on school infrastructure projects. This includes the completion of 248 school projects, ongoing construction of 22 schools, 22 major renovations and additions to schools in communities across the country, and 184 other projects. These other projects include renovations and/or additions, purchase of portable classrooms, repairs to teacher housing and construction or design projects.

For the current fiscal year, AANDC expects to invest approximately \$200 million in school-related infrastructure. The funds and

investments I have described suggest two conclusions. One, this government continues to make targeted investments toward improving first nations educational outcomes. Two, money alone will not solve the problem. Additional actions are also needed. Given these realities, it becomes clear that the complex problems associated with on-reserve education require a multi-faceted approach that addresses specific factors in a holistic way to inspire overall progress. This is an apt description of our government's strategy to improve educational outcomes for first nations students.

There is evidence of progress. For instance, the percentage of students enrolled in first nations schools who graduate from high school continues to increase. Our approach to working in partnership has produced results. I am convinced that we will continue to make progress by working collaboratively. In 2008, we began to lay the foundation for structural reform in first nations education by focusing on practical initiatives. These included the launch of two new programs as the building blocks of school-based initiatives common to top performing schools.

The first nations student success program helps first nations educators on reserve plan and make improvements in the three priority areas of literacy, numeracy and student retention. Participating schools develop success plans tailored to increase efforts in these three priority areas.

To monitor progress, the schools implement a student learning assessment process based on provincial jurisdictions. They establish performance measurement systems, also known as school information systems. These processes monitor success and inform instruction, help in priority setting and assist in planning to increase student success over the long term. The program is now available to more than 90% of first nations students attending band-operated schools in Canada, or approximately 66,000 students. Since 2008, this government has invested approximately \$141 million in the first nations student success program.

The second program is the education partnerships program. This program promotes collaboration between first nations, provinces, AANDC and other partners toward improving educational outcomes of first nations children studying in schools.

The program supports the use of shared action plans where first nations and provincial officials exchange expertise and services. Since 2008, we have invested more than \$17 million in the program.

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Another significant development is the signing of tripartite agreements on first nations education. Each agreement involves a province or provincial education authority, the Government of Canada and a group of first nations. The partners agree to collaborate in tangible ways to improve educational outcomes for first nations students. There are now seven tripartite education partnerships across Canada.

● (1540)

Since 2008 we have concluded memorandums of understanding in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta and Prince Edward Island, along with a sub-regional agreement with the Saskatoon Tribal Council. There are existing tripartite partnerships in British Columbia and Nova Scotia.

Earlier this year, our government, the Province of British Columbia and the first nations education steering committee concluded a new tripartite education framework agreement. This is another example of our commitment to working with first nations and provinces so that first nations students have the necessary tools to succeed.

This tripartite education framework agreement is focused on strengthening education programs, services and standards between on-reserve and provincial education systems so students can transfer between the two systems easily. It provides first nations students in British Columbia with access to an education comparable to that provided by the provincial system whether they attend school on or off reserve.

To inspire further progress, the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations established a national panel on first nation elementary and secondary education last year. Panellists were chosen based on their knowledge of education issues, demonstrated interest in aboriginal issues, innovative approaches and their ability to be solutions oriented.

The panel led a national engagement process on ways to improve first nations elementary and secondary education, including options for legislation. The panel travelled across Canada and led discussions with first nations leaders, parents, elders, students, teachers and provincial officials.

The process represented a valuable opportunity to share perspectives and proposed ways to improve first nations education for children living on reserve. Many interested parties chose to participate via online. Submissions that were reviewed and discussed during the engagement sessions were also heard.

The panel published its final report earlier this month entitled, "Nurturing the Learning Spirit of First Nation Students". The report outlines key principles for reform and recommends a series of key actions. The Government of Canada is taking the time needed to review the report and will determine a course of action in due course.

The panel's work is tremendously important. The engagement sessions, along with the studies completed by the Auditor General and the standing committee of the other place, improve our understanding of the factors that contribute to first nations educational outcomes. This research will also inform the development and implementation of effective solutions.

Given that responsibility for educating first nations students is shared among many groups, it is imperative that all groups work together on solutions. This government, first nations, educators, families and students all play important roles.

The challenges associated with education in most first nations communities are unique. It is a serious mistake to assume that the approaches used for off-reserve schools would necessarily lead to similar results on reserve.

Comparisons between federal and provincial or territorial funding do not tell the whole story. There are significant variations in per student funding, depending on where a school is located, for instance. Funding comparisons need to take into account important differences between schools, such as geographic location and relative size of the school. These are both key factors which Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and the provinces use to calculate school funding.

Investments are an important part of improving the educational outcomes of first nations students. However, investments need to be accompanied by systemic changes, including structural reforms. I believe that emphasis should be placed on comparable education outcomes.

● (1545)

Comparable education outcomes are about supporting the delivery of quality education programs and services, meeting standards that enable first nations students to transfer from first nations schools to provincial schools without academic penalties and at similar levels of achievement. This can be achieved through standardized assessments, comparable curricula, teacher accreditation and academic evaluation.

Our government remains committed to working with first nations and the provinces to ensure that first nations children, whether they go to school on reserve or a provincial school, receive the education they require for success.

This government is determined to take effective action on a number of fronts to improve first nations educational outcomes. We all recognize that education is a building block and the best way to foster success. Improving educational outcomes would open doors to a wealth of opportunities for economic and social development.

Given Canada's current demographic trends, we must ensure that first nations people have every opportunity to participate fully in the economy and to meet the needs of their communities. It is in the interests of everyone to see first nations educated, skilled and employed.

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In recent years our government and first nations groups have forged a new spirit of collaboration and have delivered tangible, lasting improvements for first nations education. Tripartite agreements have changed the way education is delivered and administered in first nations communities across Canada. Hundreds of projects to build and renovate schools have been completed. New programs that address the specific challenges of on-reserve education are in place.

These accomplishments make me confident that progress will continue. I encourage my hon. colleagues to endorse the motion before us and to support this government's efforts to improve educational outcomes for first nations students. While we have made progress, there is still work to be done. Let us work together to realize Shannen's dream and ensure all first nations students are part of a strong economic future for first nations communities and Canada.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member's speech was very well thought out and clear. I would like to touch on the word "holistic" which the member used at one point.

In coming from a community that is still battling many of the same issues which the first nations people do, I wonder if the member could talk about the personal struggle. We hear constantly about young people who are doing self-destructive things such as sniffing bags filled with paint or glue. From my experience working with youth, it comes from disillusionment, from a sense of lack of relevance.

In the very pragmatic plan which the member laid out, I am wondering if there is anything that touches on helping young people find a sense of relevance. The member talked about retention in schools. I found that relevance is one of the key things that makes kids stay in school, what it means to them.

What kind of programs are in place to help young people get over their sense of lack of relevance so that going to school becomes relevant?

• (1550)

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Mr. Speaker, certainly it has been the goal of this government to work collaboratively with first nations and other service providers when it comes to providing education on first nations reserves. We understand that education itself contributes to an individual's ability to share equally in and contribute to Canada's ongoing prosperity. It is in education itself that one could find some identity and a sense of self-worth.

That is truly why in 2008 we launched the first nations student success program. I spoke to that program during my opening remarks.

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has been very active and interested in the first nations students success program. I am wondering if she could elaborate on that for me and other MPs.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Mr. Speaker, I come from Saskatchewan. There are 74 first nations in our province. I have two first nations in my riding, although they are businesses. One of the reserves in one of my colleague's ridings does send its children to schools in my riding.

The hon. member is correct that I am very interested in this program. It was designed to help first nations educators on reserve plan for and make improvements in the three priority areas that I mentioned in my remarks: literacy, numeracy and student retention. It is a results-based accountability component and is supporting schools in the development and implementation of school success plans, a student learning assessment process and performance measurement systems.

To date, with \$141 million in new investments, as I said earlier, over 90% of first nations students attending band operated schools are benefiting from this project.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. I would respond to him by saying that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. A lot of money can be saved if there is appropriate investment in education. I have figures at hand from 2006. The social and economic costs associated with first nations students who do not reach high school level are estimated at \$3.2 billion over 10 years. Investing in and having a good relationship with the first nations is good for both our economy and theirs. What does my hon. colleague think?

• (1555)

[English]

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Mr. Speaker, those are the very things I highlighted in my remarks. I spoke to a number of initiatives on which our government has worked in partnership with first nations to bring forward.

When it comes to building relationships, we saw tremendous events happen on January 24 with the Crown and first nations gathering. I believe our government has shown tremendous leadership. The many initiatives I have spoken to today demonstrate that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[English]

I rise in the House today to defend a fundamental right of every human being to education as declared in article 26 of the UN declaration on human rights and of every indigenous people as found in article 14.1 of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People.

Education is like no other thing and the long road for recognition of this right has been difficult. It has long been the habit of despots in history to deny the education of others. Keeping them without an education has been a way of trying to control them.

Therefore, there has always been a direct relationship between education and true democracy. An educated society is a society in which people are armed with the tool of understanding. This understanding translates into criticism of how the world is run. This criticism allows our society to advance and progress. Education also increases participation and helps defeat the forces of exclusion and marginalization.

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Having been raised in working class family, I am well positioned to judge the effects of education on a young person. Had I not had access to free education as a child and a teenager, as well as reasonably accessible post-secondary education as an adult, I am not sure what my life might have been like. The tools I gained through my education have been the main factors in my career.

Equal conditions for all based on merits, not ability to pay, is the only way forward for any country that dares to call itself civilized.

However, the fundamental lesson I learned, with regards to education, from the Liberal government of Paul Martin is that if this right is not constantly defended, it is not a given. It was when that government was trying to devolve itself of its responsibilities with regards to post-secondary education in the 1990s that many of us on this side of the benches, including myself, had their first taste of political battle. Many of us forged our political wills in the fires of the student movement at that time.

However, as an elected official, I am learning this important lesson once again in a different way, in a new and deeper way, from the people of the Algonquin First Nation in my riding by attending their demonstrations and listening to their voices. Here is what I have learned from them about education. These are lessons that all of us in this supposedly august chamber should heed very carefully, because the first nations in my riding understand better than us the real power of education.

They have taught me that education is a means to give hope and encouragement to each person to reach his or her full potential intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically and spiritually, that it is a lifelong journey, that it is not only for this generation, but for the future, and that learning is a gift from the Creator.

They have also told me that education should not be taken out of its social context. While it is an opportunity for an individual to achieve his or her fullest potential, that potential is also important as a member of a community and as a member of a nation.

I have also learned from them that education is: a preparation for holistic living; a means of allowing free choice in where to live and work; a means of enabling their people to participate fully in their own spiritual and educational advancement; a means of enabling individuals in their communities to learn to live good, meaningful lives and become self-reliant; a means of having respect for themselves, one another and for their elders; and a means of enabling Algonquin students to learn to make a good living within their traditional values.

Truly, education is about the hopes and dreams of children and their families. As parents, we all want the best for our children and we want them to succeed and have good lives. Education is an important road to that success.

However, the sad reality is that even today in Canada, in 2012, one of the most advanced countries in the world, this beautiful vision of education is not a right for an important part of our own population.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

The situation in which first nations students find themselves in this country is deplorable. On average, first nations students receive \$2,000 to \$3,000 less than non-aboriginal students. Moreover, increases in education funding for the first nations have been capped 2% per year since 1996. This does not take into account inflation and demographic growth, which, together, have consistently been in excess of 2% per year. Funding should have increased at a rate of 6.2% from 1996 to 2006 in order to keep pace with inflation and demographic growth. And yet, what did this government and previous governments do to meet this need? Absolutely nothing. What is the government doing now? Very little.

First nations students are the only Canadian students without no guarantee concerning the future funding of their education. Federal funding for first nations education does not cover libraries, technical equipment, sports and recreation facilities, language programs, students' performance, curriculum development, student transport, employee benefits and student data processing systems. Is this possible?

This limited funding makes it difficult for the first nations to recruit and maintain skilled teachers, because they are unable to offer salaries and benefits comparable to those offered in neighbouring public schools.

Given that obstacles to learning are more numerous among first nations communities, it is to be expected that aboriginal education requires more action and funding, and we have to accept this.

First nations education must also be seen from a socio-economic perspective. The socio-economic plight of the first nations often forces band councils to redirect funding allocated to education to other more pressing priorities, such as drinking water and housing. Given the precarious situation that many first nations find themselves in, something must be done to ensure that grants for education are used only for educational programs.

In my riding, the first nations of Kitigan Zibi and Barriere Lake are no exception. In Kitigan Zibi, 60% of people do not have access to clean tap water. There has been no investment in the elementary school and no high school has been built since the government put the Algonquins of Barriere Lake under trusteeship. It is shameful. Moreover, no new housing units have been built in Barriere Lake since 1986.

How can we expect to make education a priority when people do not even have a place to live or clean water to drink? We are all responsible. Canada must respond to its greatest challenge of the 21st century: it must ensure a strong presence in the society of its founding peoples, the first nations.

[*English*]

We must and we can do more. As a country, we owe very much to our first nations.



*Business of Supply*

In his statement on National Aboriginal Day, the Prime Minister said that his government was “committed to working with aboriginal communities, as well as provinces and territories, to provide aboriginal people with the education and tools they need to reach their full potential”. However, the government has yet to live up to that promise. It has raised hopes time and time again but has yet to walk the talk of real investment in education for first nations. The first nations summit of national chiefs has done nothing more. Nothing has been delivered.

We need bold and visionary actions. The NDP wants to forge a nation to nation partnership with first nations, building a relationship based on mutual respect that recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to control their own education. We want to do this based on concrete actions, not on empty words. That is why we would immediately remove the punitive 2% funding cap and end current funding inequalities, beginning with education and child and family services.

The issue of first nations education is not a difficult problem to solve. It just requires political will. As Sitting Bull once said, “Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make for our children”.

• (1605)

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I could not help but notice that my colleague across the way was talking about comparable education. We know there are significant variations in per student funding depending on where a school is located, as well as the relative size of the school.

I wonder if the member would be willing to comment on that or share a little more about comparable education.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Speaker, I guess the comparison that most concerns me is when we compare aboriginal students to non-aboriginal students. When we look at the disparity, both in funding and in the level of education, it really makes a mockery of our country, unfortunately. We need to address that clear and difficult question. That demands different types of actions within certain schools and within certain districts, particularly within first nations.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, every time my colleague gets up to speak, I enjoy it very much.

We have been talking a lot in this House about first nations reserves. I have no reserves in my riding but I do have a large urban aboriginal population. In Canada, half of first nations people live off reserve. Part of the reason they are living off reserve is because the conditions on reserves are so horrible that they have to move away from their traditional lands.

I was just wondering if my colleague could perhaps comment on aboriginal education off reserve. I am thinking about how we might be able to improve education among this now urban community?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Speaker, many Algonquin people in my riding, who would have normally stayed on their reserves, have gravitated toward Ottawa-Gatineau, in particular, for their education. It just points to how difficult the conditions are on some first nations reserves to get access to quality education.

There are a number of organizations and programs in urban settings that are growing. Aboriginal people in urban settings are

organizing themselves in order to ensure their education, both traditional and non-traditional. I am thinking of certain organizations like the Aboriginal Friendship Centres and others that offer these types of programs. They are to be congratulated for them.

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, coming from a rural riding myself, Simcoe—Grey, I can appreciate the intent of this motion.

Our government has moved forward with seven tripartite educational partnerships across Canada, whether that be in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta or Prince Edward Island, as well as many subagreements, even in Saskatoon. It really is about partnerships in order to aid these younger people to fully reach their potential.

I would like to ask the member opposite for his thoughts with regard to those partnerships and how those partnerships will benefit aboriginal Canadian children.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Speaker, clearly, any partnership that is done in mutual co-operation is to be both awarded and congratulated.

Having built some of those partnerships in my past career, particularly in the research field, it has, unfortunately, been the case in the past, particularly with aboriginal peoples, that those partnerships have not been equal. In fact, they have been exploited.

The only thing I would add is that I would hope that, on the seven new initiatives, the government will actually take the principle of reciprocity seriously.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when we are dealing with a motion like this one, it is important to link the data to real situations, to what communities actually experience. This is why I will begin by painting a picture of what is going on in aboriginal communities located in my riding.

I want to apologize in advance if my pronunciation of the names of aboriginal schools and communities in Algonquin is not perfect. My objective is to improve my Algonquin language skills during my term, but I am still a beginner.

The first community I want to talk about is Winneway, in eastern Témiscamingue. This is a fairly remote community, where the Amo Ososwan school provides kindergarten to grade 11 education. The teaching is in English and Algonquin. This is the only school in my riding that provides a complete education program, from grade 1 to the end of high school, in the community. At one point, the facility was deemed inadequate, thus posing a health risk to students. Therefore, the decision was made to rebuild the school, but the reconstruction is still not complete.

At the Timiskaming First Nation, the Kiwetin school provides an education up to grade 8. This means that students who want to continue on after grade 8 must either change province to study in English in New Liskeard, located 30 km away, or go to Notre-Dame-du-Nord and complete their education in French.

*Business of Supply*

Further north, in Abitibi, at Pikogan—a reserve close to Amos—the Migwan school is an elementary school where the curriculum is in French, but they also teach Algonquin. After students finish elementary school, they have to go to a provincial high school in Amos. I should point out that Pikogan is really a model that should be followed and promoted for elementary education.

In Wolf Lake, which is another community, very few people live on the reserve. The majority of them live off the reserve. Therefore, children have only one school on the reserve and they must travel to Témiscaming, to another provincial school that provides an education in English and in French.

There is also the Eagle Village—Kipawa community, which has a rather large population of 825. In my riding that is a significant number. At least two-thirds of that population live off the reserve. There is no school there either. Children attend the same school, in Témiscaming, where the teaching is in French and in English. Even though it does not have a school, this community would like to have one.

The main purpose of this motion is to ensure that children have the right to a good-quality education that takes into account their culture. The real problem in the communities in my riding, except in the Longue-Pointe First Nation's Winneway school, is that the children are unable to go to the end of high school without transferring to a provincial school that does not teach the Algonquin culture and does not take into account their reality.

They all have to transfer to another school. In the case of the first nation community in Timiskaming, where the second language is English, the children who want to continue their education are torn. They have to choose between travelling a long way to go to school in English in Ontario—this is an anglophone community—and trying to get by in a French school. This is not an easy choice.

• (1615)

I would like to quote Marguerite Mowatt-Gaudreau, a teacher at the Migwan school in Pikogan, and Gisèle Maheux:

Understanding the language of instruction has been identified as an obvious problem. Many of the students surveyed—29.4% at the elementary school level and 38.8% at the secondary school level—indicated that they understand very few of the teacher's instructions and very little of the information given by the teacher in class, if any at all.

We therefore find ourselves in a situation where, in order to pursue their education, our aboriginal children must transfer to a regular school with all the other children that does not teach the Algonquin culture. They also often face a situation where they do not even understand the teacher's instructions or the work they are given to do, which is an extremely difficult situation to adapt to.

Obviously, this type of situation can lead to a high dropout rate. Mr. Lepage, an education and co-operation officer with Quebec's Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, stated:

Far fewer aboriginal people reach secondary and post-secondary levels of education. Over 40% of aboriginal people did not reach secondary III, as compared to 20% for the rest of Quebecers. Although the data in this regard are incomplete, we can see that dropping out is a major concern in most aboriginal communities, even at the elementary school level. For example, in some of these communities, the dropout rate is 10% among elementary school students and 50% among secondary III students.

It is extremely disconcerting to think that our young children, who are not even 12, who are 10 or 9, who are already dropping out of school.

The third year of secondary school in communities like mine is often the time when students are forced to leave their school in their aboriginal community to attend provincial public schools. I think this is something we could address. Young people are dropping out just when they have to leave their community school, which teaches the Algonquin culture and language, in order to go into the regular school system. I think this is significant.

As a nurse by profession, I would like to underscore one last thing. The WHO talks about health determinants. One of the major health determinants is poverty and level of education. We all agree that there is a link. People with a very low level of education have a much harder time getting a better-paying job and therefore, unfortunately, they are more likely to live in poverty.

It is imperative to provide aboriginal students with a high-quality education in order for those communities to be viable in the long term. It is essential that our children be able to aspire to have a good job later on. We must not forget that those children are going to share their talents with the community. Aboriginal communities are very close-knit. If a member of the community does well, they will help everyone around them. They will help their family and everyone break the cycle of poverty. I believe it is essential for us to do more in terms of education.

I would like to make a suggestion. If it is not possible to provide an education from grade 1 through to the end of secondary school in aboriginal communities, can we fund the provincial schools so that they can teach Algonquin and aboriginal culture in their provincial programs?

• (1620)

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in my colleague's remarks as I am quite familiar with the world she described. I lived and breathed it for five or six years.

Why, in her opinion, do students drop out of school in these communities? How does she explain why almost every school and every Algonquin is anglophone in a completely francophone environment?

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, I tried to demonstrate in my speech the link between dropping out of school and being forced to attend a school located outside one's community, a link that is self-evident to me.

Aboriginal students can support and help each other when they are together. They are all in a similar situation. They have grown up in the same culture and are therefore able to help each other. All of a sudden, they go from a small school with approximately 100 to 200 students to, for example, a big high school with 2,000 students, where they are thrown in with a mass of students who do not understand their culture and experiences and do not support them when they face problems that are specific to aboriginal communities. Unfortunately, the easy solution for these students is often to drop out of school.

*Business of Supply*

As far as aboriginals' use of English is concerned, it is important to understand that it is not their first language and that these children learn a second language. Unfortunately, the French language has a number of subtleties that are difficult to learn. Communities therefore often opt for English given that it is the second language and has fewer subtleties, which makes it a little easier to learn.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if the hon. member knows about the program the federal government has, the education partnership program. It involves first nations schooling and partnerships with provincial schools. To date, more than \$17.5 million has been invested to develop and enhance these partnerships.

Can the member explain if she has heard about the program and what she thinks of it?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, of course I have heard about this partnership. In my speech, I really sought to focus on the concrete results we are currently seeing in communities. I provided an overview of what is currently occurring in my communities and what the problems are. Currently, elementary and secondary school students are not able to go to schools located in their own communities, and I think that this is a major problem that needs to be addressed.

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. I have a question for her. The Attikamek live in Manawan in my riding. It is quite far north of Joliette. Apparently, they have no specific budget for language and culture. As a result, all their activities to promote and safeguard their Attikamek identity are funded out of their teaching envelope, which is not very large, and this leads to a direct reduction in teaching services for young Attikamek. What does my colleague think about that?

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, when funding stops, when it is difficult to obtain funding so that the aboriginal culture can continue to be valued and when students are left to their own devices, there is a risk that they will drop out of school, which I emphasized in my speech.

It is important to support schools so that they can provide basic education, but also education about culture that takes into account the cultural specificity of aboriginal communities. This is a major point for consideration if we wish to reduce school dropout rates and increase the standard of living in our aboriginal communities.

• (1625)

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I would like to thank the member for Manicouagan for putting this motion on the order paper. It gives me an opportunity to talk about the aboriginal people in my riding. I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Eva Ottawa, Christian Awashish and David Boivin, chiefs and grand chief of the Attikamek community, for their dynamism and their involvement in their respective communities. Manawan, to which my colleague referred, is third-biggest reserve of the Attikamek community in this region.

Today, I want to draw the attention of my colleagues to the Attikamek nation, which has lived in Mauricie for centuries and, in many regards, is ignored by the governments in place. This population, which is primarily concentrated in the areas surrounding the Gouin reservoir, a few hundred kilometres west of La Tuque, Quebec, is facing growth problems not only linked to population growth, but also to geographical isolation, the non-recognition of its ancestral land, and the numerous economic difficulties affecting the entire community.

The Attikamek were not included in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and are still waiting for concrete solutions from the government concerning the recognition of their ancestral land. The Attikamek do not receive any royalties from Hydro-Québec for the use of their land. This is also true of the Mauricie forest, which has been shamefully exploited by a number of Canadian and Anglo-American companies since Canada was conquered by the British.

Canada got rich at the expense of the Attikamek nation and to date has not been able or willing to recognize the ancestral rights of this nation, which enabled us to develop the industrialized Canada that we know today. Our lack of vision in the area of forestry development is being felt today in the closure of pulp and paper and softwood lumber mills, and the aboriginal people are the principal victims of our historical mistakes. We have neglected the first nations, we have overexploited the forest and we persist on this path of ignorance.

Today, I call on the government, which has turned a blind eye to the needs of the first nations, to ensure that any potential solutions to our growth problems include, as a matter of course, the Attikamek and the other first nations peoples of Canada. A percentage of the federal budget should be allocated to the educational, economic and social development of these nations. Every action we take and the grants allocated by the federal government to Canadian communities should mandatorily include a percentage earmarked for the Indian nations. We should make a joint effort to improve the standard of living of the Attikamek. We must strive to increase the number of graduates in these communities. We must increase the standards of social services for remote populations. The health of this nation is a measure of our commitment to future generations and an acknowledgment of their historical contribution to our collective wealth.

How is it that in the 21st century we have to call out to the government when it comes to the health and education needs of the Attikamek? Must we accept the social problems and the growing crime problem in these communities as inevitable facts? A great Canadian, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, predicted that the 20th century would belong to Canada. There is no doubt that in one century we have become one of the most democratic and prosperous nations on the planet. But there is still a shadow on our image: our silence in the face of the injustices experienced by the Attikamek and other first nations is an embarrassment. The silence of this government is an embarrassment. But looking beyond our historical mistakes, we have the economic capacity to change the course of events.

*Business of Supply*

•(1630)

There are glaring education problems among the Attikamek. They have to find solutions that will enable them to look to the future with serenity. The first injustice in the aboriginal education system stems from underfunding for infrastructure. We would never accept the dilapidated state of the school equipment the Attikamek have if these were communities in the south. In the community of Wemotaci, for example, the building of a school that is needed because of population growth is in jeopardy because there are insufficient funds. The project is constantly being postponed and changed, given the reduction in funding available for building schools in aboriginal communities.

We have to consider updating all of the education infrastructure in Attikamek communities so that the schools are able to play their role in modern society and in societies where technological knowledge has become essential. The same is true of the human resources needed to serve both the regular school population and those with special needs. In January, the chiefs of the Attikamek communities reminded the government, in a media release, of its obligations to the aboriginal nations in relation to education. The difficulties these communities are experiencing in relation to education are mostly connected with the economic underdevelopment that has existed for decades.

As well, the chronic underfunding of resources for students in aboriginal communities shows that the aboriginal school system is a system designed for second-class citizens. Education funding in Canada off reserves cannot be compared with funding on reserves. Everywhere in Canada, students in the cities and towns of this country receive more in education grants than any aboriginal person. The federal government absolutely has to accept the principle of equal education funding for all citizens of Canada.

Growth in education budgets in Canada exceeds 6% in all communities except among aboriginal people. The latest report produced by the Assembly of First Nations and the government on education in aboriginal communities describes an education system that encourages academic failure rather than success. The government complains about money invested in the first nations but never realizes that the first investment has to be in education. Updating schools and school structures in aboriginal communities calls for a phenomenal amount of catching up, which has to take into account the underfunding that has taken place for nearly a century.

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her excellent speech. We appreciate the latest recommendations of the Liberals regarding first nations education. However, we are also aware that they were in office for a long period of time during which they could have implemented many of the policies they are now proposing. The fact is that they chose not to move forward on this issue during that period.

Why did the Liberals wait until the Conservatives took office to decide that first nations education is a priority, considering they had 12 years to take action?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Speaker, this morning, Carolyn Bennett pointed out that, during its last term, the Liberal government finalized the Kelowna accord, which is about education for all aboriginal communities. However, the current government ignored

this agreement and completely forgot about it. Therefore, it is not because the Liberals did not do anything. They worked hard on this issue, but the Conservatives ignored this accord, which was so important for aboriginal communities.

•(1635)

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the Chair the fact that the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain used the name of a member of the House. I simply wanted to point this out.

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Pardon me, I did not hear that, but the hon. member is correct.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as someone who has had a great deal of experience with first nations education on both coasts of Canada, I can tell members that our government has spent \$1.5 billion on education over the last year for 118,000 first nation students. Therefore, I hope the member opposite will agree that the answer is not more money.

The answer is to make structural changes to remove the impediments to providing adequate education to first nations from coast to coast to coast. Money is not the answer. The answer is in working with our first nation partners to provide a structure that will remove those impediments so we can deliver the education those students need.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I am very familiar with the Wemotaci reserve. I met the chief on two occasions, and we ate together. When a band council receives a budget, it is an overall budget. The band council must meet all the needs with the budget that it gets. It can allocate 2% of it to education. In fact, it is almost as if the band council were a municipal, provincial and federal government at the same time. It must pay money in all sorts of areas. Therefore, it is wrong to say there is enough funding for education, because education accounts for only 2%, compared to 6% in the rest of the country.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to provide some comments on the opposition motion today. It is a motion from which I would think every member would recognize the valuable lessons to be learned. If we do not take the actions necessary to provide good quality education for all people in Canada, focusing attention especially on first nations, at the end of the day we will be denying opportunities for future generations of children.

*Business of Supply*

The member made reference to the issue not just being about money. I agree in principle with that statement: It is not just about money, but one that will take a great deal of leadership. That is why many of my colleagues within the Liberal Party talk a great deal about the Kelowna accord, because that accord was not just an idea of someone in the backroom. It was the result of an accumulation of hundreds and thousands of people, I would suggest to you, who ultimately came together to try to resolve an issue that has been outstanding for many years.

A number of people took great pride in the achievement of the Kelowna accord, from first nations to people who just watched it on the news, to politicians such as me. I know of this accord first hand, because I have heard former Prime Minister Paul Martin speak on numerous occasions about the Kelowna accord, which would have gone a long way to resolving many of the issues of today.

The Kelowna accord was not hatched overnight. Whether as a result of work by Prime Minister Chrétien to Prime Minister Paul Martin, to ministers who had this particular file, and most importantly to the first nations' leadership, who recognized the need to come up with of comprehensive plan to deal with the issues, those leaders and stakeholders recognized that while money was critically important, we needed to establish and have a plan in place that would make a difference.

When I represented Winnipeg North for many years as a provincial politician, I would drive to work in the morning down Burrows Avenue, turn right on Salter and drive straight up to the Manitoba legislature. I have witnessed firsthand a lot of sadness over the years about the children of the community who have fallen through the cracks. Many of those cracks were a result of government inaction.

We need to see stronger leadership at all levels. I am not just talking about the federal level but also about the provincial level and, to a certain degree, the municipal level, and certainly our chiefs and other stakeholders.

We need to recognize that the people who cannot defend themselves, the ones who are need of advocacy, are the ones from birth up to the age of 15 or 16 years old, as they try to get some sort of public education. The continued number of dropouts in the portion of the province I represent, and the entire province, I would suggest, has been very discouraging.

● (1640)

Nonetheless, there have been wonderful gains made and some great stories that could be told. I could talk, for example, about the Children of the Earth, a school located in Winnipeg North that recognizes the cultural needs of first nations, of aboriginal people. A number of years ago I had the opportunity to tour that particular school. It has amazing graduation rates of 82%. It is a school that today provides good quality education for, I believe, over 230 people residing in Winnipeg. That is a result of the initiatives it has taken and the leadership it has demonstrated in trying to make difference.

We can take it from there to other non-profit groups out there who also want to be able to contribute to ensuring that all young people are afforded the opportunity to have good quality education. My hat goes off to them.

However, the reserves have been neglected to a great extent. We need to do a lot more in supporting the leadership there. That is why I would have encouraged the government to continue with the Kelowna accord. While it would not have resolved all of the problems, it did get us going in the right direction and showed that the national government truly cared and wanted to make a difference. It set the framework for our being able to move forward. I think there is still phenomenal goodwill among many chiefs and their councils who want to work with the government in improving the quality of education on reserves as much as possible. In good part, the government has turned a deaf ear to that. There has not been an overall comprehensive plan coming from the government to try to deal with this issue. I think that will be at great cost. The longer the government sits back and does nothing, the greater the numbers of children, in the hundreds if not thousands, who will be without the type of public education they need to be able to prosper and do that much better in society as a whole. That is quite unfortunate.

Whether it is the province of Manitoba or other jurisdictions, we will find there is quite a discrepancy. In certain areas we will find a higher number of children participating in public education and getting relatively decent marks. It really does vary by province. In certain areas, there are serious deficiencies. Unless we address those deficiencies, it will get worse.

It does not necessarily mean that Ottawa has to be the leader. There are many people within our first nations who are prepared to come to the table and demonstrate the leadership on reserve. When that happens, the government has to be more open-minded in meeting those needs. When I say "open-minded", in good part I mean ensuring that the resources will be there. It is very difficult for students to learn without the proper facilities. It is very difficult for students to learn if they are hungry throughout the day at school. I have heard many professionals and stakeholders say that one cannot learn on an empty stomach, yet we expect hundreds if not thousands of children across Canada to do just that.

That is why I believe the federal government is missing the boat by not having a more all encompassing approach to ensuring that all children in Canada have good quality public education, because education often equates to opportunities. I believe we have to ensure that all children have opportunities, and all of their education is being challenged.

● (1645)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** 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 Abitibi—Témiscamingue, National Defence; the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Environment.

Questions and comments. The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. friend's speech on this important subject.

I have the privilege of representing five first nations reserves in my riding of Macleod. Some of them are forward-thinking and very aggressive in their business planning and business models. There are great opportunities for them when we talk about education.

*Business of Supply*

One of my first nations has developed a carpentry shop on reserve. Our government has funded skills training for on-reserve education, providing skills for young people so they can become involved in the work force. The carpentry shop, for example, not only provides training on physical work and buildings but also on the tendering process for the necessary items for contractors. Another first nations reserve has a welding shop.

Could my hon. colleague tell us what budget allocated even one cent for the Kelowna accord, because I never read that budget? Could the hon. member please tell me which budget that was in?

• (1650)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the sad thing is that the minister just admitted that he has never even read the Kelowna accord. If he does not have a copy I am sure we could arrange to get him a copy. One has to be concerned that the minister did not even read the Kelowna accord. I wonder if the Prime Minister even read the Kelowna accord. That is what happens when members get outside the glass bubble, because sometimes they make mistakes.

The member made reference to the reserves that he represents. There are many children from many different reserves in Manitoba who live in Winnipeg North. There are numerous success stories. We should not try to say it is all doom and gloom.

We understand the importance of quality education and want to make sure that all children are provided with it.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the point about opportunity raised by my colleague across the floor.

Just some 120 short days ago the Province of Ontario was described in the English-speaking world, not just in Canada or the United States or North America but in the English speaking world, as having the best educational test scores globally. That is after considerable investment has been made over almost eight years by a government that has profoundly invested in education in contrast to the federal government here.

I want to ask my colleague an important question about opportunity. We are studying right now at the natural resources committee the massive mining and resource opportunities in and around aboriginal communities. We are hearing that these opportunities are not going to be available for so many young aboriginal people.

Could the member expand on the importance of education in actually achieving these opportunities?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the provincial government in Ontario places importance on education and equates it with opportunities. We need to see the same leadership from the national government in dealing with some of the educational challenges in our remote areas and reserves. If we can make that connection, then we will have more people of aboriginal ancestry as leaders in many different sectors, whether mining, tourism or other industries. The list is endless. It is about leadership and knowing that the answer to many of the problems that we have today regarding first nations issues can be equated with education.

I hope that the government will revisit the Kelowna accord. I can tell the members opposite that the money was in fact there: the government of the day actually had surpluses of billions of dollars. The money was there for the Kelowna accord.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

I am really very happy to have the opportunity to speak to this motion, which my excellent colleague from Manicouagan has had the courage to introduce in the House today. I would like to thank him for that.

I also thank him for his dignity and moral strength. He is doing exceptional work. Often, when I spend time with him, I realize what a force of nature he is. And when he gets together with my colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona, we suddenly find ourselves in the presence of a revolutionary force. To them both: *nia :wen*.

The subject before us today is a painful and shameful one. Talking about the living conditions of aboriginal people without starting to hurl insults at a lot of people calls for effort. As well, spending an entire day contemplating my share of guilt in the slow destruction of an entire civilization, because that is what we are really talking about, is difficult, very difficult.

Here is a list of the other emotions I have felt today: guilt, sorrow, shame, and, at times, rage. The way that aboriginal people are treated in this country is dishonourable. I am not saying “bad”, I am saying “dishonourable”. We are forced to admit to ourselves the extent to which we deceive ourselves. In this country, which is so proud of itself, which spends its time announcing its greatness of spirit and its greatness in general from the rooftops, there is apartheid. We quite simply accept that aboriginal children do not have access to the same hopes as other children. We resign ourselves to the fact that the lot of aboriginal children is inequality, poverty and cultural assimilation. Would we accept this for our own children?

The mere fact that we have to discuss an initiative like Shannen's dream is appalling. Aboriginal children do not have access to the same Canada as other children have. It seems very clear to me that aboriginal people do not live in the same Canada as we live in. They are alienated in their own country, the country that belongs to them even more than to us.

Need I say that I am outraged? More than just outraged, I am humiliated. The fate of the aboriginal nations is emblematic of what is wrong with Canada. It is a defect, and everyone knows that we do everything we can to conceal it from the outside world. I am ashamed. What we are debating tonight is the worst stain that has ever sullied Canada's name. No one anywhere in this country can escape it: it is congenital.

*Business of Supply*

As a Quebecker, I am particularly sensitive to the leftover colonialism in Canadian society. Quebec had to fight hard to extract itself from the damaging influence of its history. In the wake of the conquest, the defeated nation lost its way in darkness. It took over 200 years for us to pick ourselves up and regain our self-esteem. I refer to the history of Quebec because there is a clear parallel between the first nations and Quebeckers. New France, defeated militarily, was destined to disappear completely and become British. The Canadians who had built it became, unceremoniously, British subjects. To add insult to injury, they were made to think of themselves as a underclass. They were no longer Canadians, they were French-Canadians. The British, however, were simply Canadians.

The aboriginal nations, which signed land treaties that were never even remotely respected, quickly understood by means of silence and isolation, that they were being relegated to the dustbin of history. And by that, I mean the sad story of reserves and the forced assimilation of aboriginal nations. For the aboriginal people, it was very clear that Canada was largely built on trickery. And still today, this trickery continues unopposed.

The Romanians, who also have a history of upheaval and whose country was under foreign control for some time, have a good expression, “kiss the hand you cannot bite”.

You may say that modern Canada has nothing to do with the Ottoman administration of the 19th century. But is that really true?

Canada is a land conquered by force and trickery. The Indian Act is a colonial document imposed by a conqueror. It is we who are responsible for the inequality aboriginal people face. The day will come when we will have to sit down with the aboriginal people as equals and listen to what they are trying to tell us. In the meantime, we cover our ears, look elsewhere, and merely confirm our guilt. It is our fault. I refuse to praise a colonial system that, like a diabolical machine, creates and perpetuates the problem.

What I mean in drawing this parallel is that Quebec needed all its strength and a stable, prosperous government to establish itself as a modern society. What chance do the aboriginal nations have, deprived of their natural resources and reduced to political trusteeship, when they have to ask everything of the department that is in charge of them? We know where that leads: no books in the schools—and Attawapiskat. The Indian Act is not the most intelligent document I have laid eyes on.

What link is there between the Constitution and Shannen's dream? There is a direct link. Constitutional apartheid is the reason why there are no books in aboriginal schools. When you take everything away from someone you cannot seriously expect there to be miraculous economic spinoffs. Enough is enough. Where would Canada be without its natural and human resources? Where would Quebec be without its great rivers and its hydroelectricity?

• (1655)

Neither one would have the standard of living it has now. But are these truly our resources or have we simply taken them from the aboriginal nations? The Supreme Court will decide that, someday. While we wait for that, aboriginal children must continue to dream about the possibility of a dream. While we wait for that, there must

be initiatives like Shannen's dream to remind us that some children do not have access to the education that is their inalienable right.

What have you given back to the civilization that welcomed you and gave you a country? The question itself has become a platitude, as is the answer. Nothing, except humiliation, poverty, contempt and racism. When did you last hear someone speak an aboriginal language? It took every effort to have French, the 14th most commonly spoken language in the world, accepted in this country. What chance can these minuscule aboriginal languages have? We are throwing a cultural treasure overboard, one that is more important than all the grand shows put on for Canada Day.

Protecting aboriginal languages should be a priority. We should at least have a plan. Instead, to strengthen Canadian culture, we print posters of flags that end up in the garbage and we celebrate British royalty with great pomp and circumstance. One need not have tremendous insight to conclude that essentially, we do not care the slightest bit about the disappearance of the millennium-old civilization in this country.

Quebeckers in particular should be sensitive to the threat. Loss of language is something that normally resonates for us. But in many people's minds, aboriginal languages are antiques that are good only for family outings to the museum. We have to fight against this negligence and these prejudices.

The aboriginal part of our culture is systematically excised from public awareness. Where will you go in Quebec if you want to learn an aboriginal language? To which university? There are no post-secondary programs in an aboriginal language, not as a second language, let alone as a first language; not in Mohawk, not in Algonquin, not in Atikamekw, not in Innu. Nothing at all. Aboriginal means “from that land”. If we do not promote these languages in Canada, who will do it, and where?

In my riding, Louis-Saint-Laurent, there is a project underway to revitalize the Huron language. This is an initiative that I support and encourage. In order for the Huron nation to truly prosper, it must get its language back; that seems logical to me. To free itself from the yoke of history, it must have its own words and its own language. Quebec has learned this.

Wendake is a very prosperous urban community. The people who live there have access to institutions in Quebec City. Unfortunately, its residents have never had access to education in their own language, and the result is that they have suffered irreparable harm. Thanks to the efforts of extraordinary people in Wendake, the Huron language will be revived.

But the remote reserves do not have books in the schools, and teaching takes place in unsanitary facilities. Why, still today, do aboriginal schools not have enough books and resources to pass the language on to the children? We are talking about human rights here, but we have become completely insensitive.

*Business of Supply*

We delude ourselves when we sing aloud about how Canada is the most beautiful and greatest country in the world. Those ditties, all of that, are hollow. The problem is not going to be solved by encouraging everybody to hang the maple leaf on the garden shed. The maple leaf flag, which had its anniversary yesterday, does not represent aboriginal people. Canada does not exist for them; it exists only for us. The aboriginal people do not live in the same country as we do. They live in a kind of legal grey area: a constitutional limbo.

Can we really ignore our sense of morality? Apparently we can; we have become expert at it, since this has lasted 150 years now. How many times have I heard people say the Indians have everything they need. That is racism and resentment. Where is the awareness campaign that might combat these hateful prejudices? Where is the reconciliation effort? Nowhere. Are we going to continue down this path even longer? It would seem we are. Achieving Shannen's dream would itself be a step in the right direction. Failing to achieve it would be to condemn us all. The aboriginal nations' affliction is all Canadians' affliction. If we do not save everyone, we save no one.

The aboriginal population of Canada is now growing faster than all other ethnic groups. I see historical justice in this. The aboriginal people may end up becoming a majority in their own country again; we will have been merely an episode in history. We will be asking them to fund our schools, and we will see how they reply.

• (1700)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my friend, the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, for expressing her feelings so well regarding an issue that affects aboriginal children across Canada, and particularly for urging us to make Shannen's dream become reality. What changes should be made to Canada's policies so that the change everyone is hoping for can take place?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her question. Like me, she has a clear understanding of the issues facing Canada's first nations, particularly aboriginal children. I am convinced she knows how dishonourable it is to see children live in the conditions faced by many first nations. Some very simple measures could be taken. First, we could provide true funding to schools and help children get access to books and textbooks, which is not the case right now. This is really minimal. It is said that millions of dollars have been thrown at these reserves, but we are talking about management in a broad sense. We do not try to find out what these people really need. We do not give them a chance to get what they really need. That would be a significant first step.

• (1705)

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I remember a conversation I once had with a member of the Innu community. He said there are some 50 aboriginal languages in Canada, but only four of them have a critical mass, meaning that enough people know them and use them daily to give those languages a chance to survive in the long term. In other words, an overwhelming majority of these cultures are on the verge of dying.

I would like to put the following questions to my colleague. When we lose dozens of ancestral languages like these, what do we lose?

Does the issue go beyond the financial aspect? Why should we invest to preserve these languages?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his questions. I take a special interest in this area, because as a linguist I have often pondered the issue. The fact is that the trend is not irreversible. When we say that a language is below the threshold for survival, the decline can still be reversed. Education is one of the most important measures to help preserve a language. There is no question about that and all linguists agree. It makes all the difference in the world when children go to school in their language and interact with their friends in that language. We have witnessed it in Quebec. It makes a huge difference when a child learns French in school. It is the same thing here. If we give aboriginal children the opportunity to attend primary school in their language, this will do a lot to revitalize aboriginal languages.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one of the things on which I think we can all agree is that the future for first nations has to improve. On our side we do not think that improvement necessarily depends on spending more money. We have already spent \$1.5 billion in Canada on first nations education for 118,000 students.

There are some reserves across the country that are flourishing. The reason they are doing better and better is that they focus on education and economic development. There is one in my riding that continually supports its students. It invests in and sends the children to the public schools. Other first nations have schools on their reserves and are doing very well, but they put an emphasis and focus on working with the federal government, provincial government and municipal government together to provide the best education they can for their students. They use the economic development money to fund education.

Does the member see some benefit in working together with all levels of government to support the students?

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. He is quite right to say that it is not a question of simply throwing money at the reserves and telling them their problems are solved. What we are saying is that these people do not necessarily have the authority to decide what to do with that money. They do not have the authority to give courses or provide education in their own language. Simply giving them money is not the answer. We also need to give them the tools and resources that will help them be more successful and prosperous in the future.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for sharing her time with me. I also thank the member for Manicouagan for sponsoring this motion and the member for Edmonton—Strathcona for seconding it.



I am excited today with the commitment that our caucus has shown to this issue and that we brought it forward as an opposition day motion.

Today the finance critic and I met with the Minister of Finance to talk about the official opposition's priorities with respect to this budget. In our priorities we talked about this issue. We talked about education in first nation communities and how important it was that the government and all members of the House focus their attention on doing a better job of ensuring that young aboriginals would have equal access to not only education, but through education to employment opportunities throughout the country. I am encouraged by the fact that the Minister of Finance indicated that this was a problem, that he understood it and that he wanted to find a way to resolve it. As I understand it, the government has indicated it will support this motion. Therefore, that is some reason for optimism.

I am from Nova Scotia and I have seen some incredible progress being made by the first nations communities in Nova Scotia. There are 13 Mi'kmaw communities in Nova Scotia. Eleven of them are part of what is called Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, which is Mi'kmaw education. It is a partnership among the Mi'kmaw, the province and the federal government and has been in place since 1994. Some communities, like Eskasoni for example, have been working on the education issue going back to 1980. They and this partnership recognize how there are parties to this problem and they need to work together to come up with the solution. They have been making incredible progress. Whether it is on reserve or off reserve, the partners in Nova Scotia have been addressing aboriginal education in a way that is providing for hope and better futures for those aboriginal families and those children. This is the kind of solution that we need to look to in our country. I know there are other jurisdictions in British Columbia, with the Nisga'a, where real progress has made in matters with respect to aboriginal education.

If we are committed to doing it, we need to recognize the spirit of this resolution and the fact that this problem has been ignored for too long. We need to not find fault but find solutions and deal with the problem, and it may take resources. Members in this caucus have identified the fact that the level of education per student for aboriginal children is much lower than it is for other students, and that is not good enough. Therefore, we need to reinvest to ensure solutions are found, but we need to sit down together.

I am encouraged also by the fact that one of the movers and shakers in terms of Mi'kmaw education in the province of Nova Scotia, Chief Morley Googoo, is now a regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations and will be responsible for the education file for the assembly. We have reason for hope. Not only do we have the information now that has been provided by the panel and not only do we understand the problem, but we in the House need to bring our collective commitment to this problem.

• (1710)

We will push the government at every opportunity. It needs to recognize that it is its turn to step up to the plate, get out of the box and not look simply at the dollars but recognize that there is a problem. We talk about skills shortages, the economy and the aging population, but we recognize the fact that fastest-growing young population in the country is coming from aboriginal communities.

### *Private Members' Business*

We need to ensure those people have an opportunity to participate, as they will, in culturally-sensitive education programs so they can participate in our communities and we can build a stronger country.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and the recorded division is deemed to have been demanded and deferred until Monday, February 27, 2012, at the end of government orders.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I believe you would find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That this House express its deep concern for the safety of Iranian citizen Saeed Malekpour following reports of his imminent execution; that Canada hold Iran accountable for Malekpour's treatment; and that this House call on Iran to reverse its current course, meet its international human rights obligations and release prisoners such as Saeed Malekpour and others who have failed to receive fair and transparent legal treatment.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Does the House give its consent for the member to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** 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)

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask that you see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

### MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

The House resumed from November 24, 2011, consideration of the motion.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to Motion No. 274, which essentially calls for information. Quite unbelievably, this information will not even begin to be collected until September 2012. That is 33 months since Canadians began travelling offshore for treatment. Even more unbelievably, this information will not be available for several more years. This is unconscionable, given that thousands of Canadians have already travelled for CCSVI treatments.

*Private Members' Business*

The motion also calls for the concerns and views of patients to be well-represented and heard. It is in fact essential that the views of patients are heard. That is why my bill, Bill C-280, calls for an advisory panel of medical experts in CCSVI, with an individual who has been treated for CCSVI to, among other things, advise the Minister of Health. My bill calls for real representation.

The reality is the government failed to hear world leading CCSVI experts and failed to hear Canadians living with MS. During this time, 800 Canadians died of MS and MS patients worsened on average by one EDSS, or disability score. It is unconscionable. Simply calling for being heard is grossly inadequate.

The questions members of Parliament must think about regarding Motion No. 274 are the following. Does this motion further advance the science of CCSVI? Does this motion do anything to ensure that proper health care is not refused to a person following treatment for CCSVI? Does this motion ensure that the Minister of Health works with the provinces and territories to ensure a comprehensive strategy for CCSVI? The answer to all these questions is no. The reality of the motion is it does nothing for patients and maintains the status quo.

In January 2012, 13 CCSVI advocacy groups, representing over 14,000 members, wrote to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health and copied all members of Parliament, saying that Motion No. 274 “does nothing for science or for Canadians with MS and we oppose it”.

Those living with MS understand how the government has played politics with their lives. They understand that on May 2010, my colleague, the member of Parliament for St. Paul's and I were ignored when we wrote an open letter to the health minister asking for clinical trials for CCSVI and a registry. They understand that Dr. Zamboni, Dr. Simka and Dr. McDonald, the leading experts in the world on CCSVI, were ignored when they asked for clinical trials at the neurological subcommittee I founded.

Those living with MS understand that a top ranking CIHR official denied a registry in 2010 because it was outside the mandate. They understand that a top ranking CIHR official should have known what diagnosis and treatment was being undertaken in Poland in 2010, but did not because he had not done his homework, sadly, to the detriment of patients. They understand that the government failed to invite the leading international experts in CCSVI to the August 26, 2010, meeting. They understand that those who publicly criticized the validity of CCSVI were, however, allowed to participate in meetings, despite their bias. They understand that the government convened an expert group with no experts in the imaging and treatment of CCSVI and that the government failed to attend international scientific conferences, failed to undertake site visits to labs and operating theatres and blindly accepted a handful of studies.

Those living with MS understand that it was a cursory review at best by top researchers and that the government failed to review a large body of research, extending back to 1839. They understand that by the time of the August meeting, eight provinces and territories were pushing for action on CCSVI. Yet behind closed doors at the meeting there was a unanimous decision not to undertake clinical trials, despite the fact that both the presidents of the CIHR and MS

Society were present and had previously been open to them and advocated for them respectively.

● (1720)

For over a year the process failed Canadians with MS and failed to meet the standards of the Canadian health system. It put in place a scientific expert working group with no scientific expertise or experience in CCSVI, which did not even declare conflict of interest until I pushed for it, which did not even undertake a comprehensive literature review until I pushed for it, and which analyzed interim and final results from seven studies funded by Canadian and U.S. MS societies for which we already had answers.

Finally in March 2011, 10 months after our initial request, the government reversed its position and announced a registry for MS. Collection of data will begin 33 months after Canadians began travelling overseas for treatment. Since when do scientists fail to collect data? As one Canadian neurologist who had the CCSVI procedure said to me, “If we had collected the evidence in a registry for the last many months, would we still be calling these anecdotal stories?”

Until November 25, 2011, all we had was announcements for clinical trials and a registry. Canadians with MS across this country understand the brutal, cynical politics of that week. They understand that M-274 was moved up to be debated before my Bill C-280. They understand that the motion does nothing for patients and keeps the status quo. They also understand, and are deeply offended by, the government's announcement for phase I and II trials to pre-empt this bill. They understand that it will take roughly three years to proceed with a phase III trial or a multi-centre trial with large patient groups.

In stark contrast to Motion No. 274, which maintains the status quo, my bill would call for action and accountability. It would call on the Minister of Health to convene a conference with the provincial and territorial ministers responsible for health for the purpose of establishing a national strategy for CCSVI. The national strategy would ensure that proper health care is not refused to a person following treatment, identify the most appropriate level of clinical trials for the treatment of CCSVI to place Canada at the forefront of international research, and estimate the funding necessary for clinical trials and for tracking individuals who have been treated for CCSVI. It would establish an advisory panel of experts in diagnosis and treatment.

Finally, politics continues to be played with MS patients' lives. I had my Bill C-280 moved up to be debated before Motion No. 274, as it should have been if the government had not pushed through Motion No. 274 before my bill was read in the fall.

Because the 13 advocacy groups were so afraid the government would once again play politics, they wrote to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health and issued a press release saying that if the government moved Motion No. 274 ahead of Bill C-280, it would be playing politics with their lives.

I then invited all MPs and senators from all parties to attend a breakfast on February 14 with leading doctors treating CCSVI. I did this because this is a non-partisan issue; it is a humanitarian issue.

Those living with MS waited on tenterhooks to see what politics would be played next. The answer came on Friday, February 10 at 3:23 p.m., following the airing of the *MS Wars: Hope, Science and the Internet* documentary on David Suzuki's *The Nature of Things*.

That fair and balanced documentary included an interview with Dr. Gianfranco Campalani, a vascular surgeon who has seen marked improvements in his MS symptoms since his CCSVI treatment in 2007. He considered it unethical for doctors to deny treatment to those with CCSVI. The day after the program aired, the Minister of Health announced a briefing on MS on February 13 at 5:30 p.m. to pre-empt my breakfast on February 14 by a mere 14 hours.

Those living with MS and their families understand that this debate was never based on the science, as it should have been, but rather wilful blindness, medical politics and collusion with special interest groups. As a scientist and professor of health studies, I treated the issue as I would any scientific question. I went to the experts. I went to seven of nine international conferences and presented at three. I learned the science. Why did the government not?

I therefore beseech all MPs to do the right thing, to vote for action. MS patients say that we know what the right thing is. Let us do the right thing. Canadians with MS are waiting, getting sicker and in some cases dying.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise again in this House to address an issue that affects many people. I want to thank the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright for his motion. The motion essentially proposes that more information be provided to MS patients, both on the disease and on the treatments. As we know, these include the treatment for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, which has been making headlines in recent years.

As a doctor, I must admit that I am both intrigued with and skeptical of Dr. Zamboni's theory regarding CCSVI. I am intrigued because he seems to have achieved results and because, if his research turns out to be valid, it will be a major advance in medical research. However, I am skeptical not only because the research is not complete, but also because it is not the first time that a miracle cure for multiple sclerosis has been announced. I have in mind the 1988 announcement by a French physician, Dr. Le Gac, that the disease could be cured with high doses of antibiotics because it was caused by a virus.

It is my wish that the treatment will be available as soon as possible for all those who need it and that it will be proven effective. Patients and those close to them are putting a lot of hope into the procedure. They want to get well, and I can understand that. However, as a health care professional, I find it difficult to have someone undergo a procedure if a positive outcome has not been demonstrated and if the patient does not have all the information

### *Private Members' Business*

required to make an informed decision. I hope that the matter is cleared up as soon as possible.

The invitation to tender for clinical trials has finally been issued by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. However, the minister had announced in June of last year that these trials would take place. Once again, they will not begin before May 2012, and the call for tenders provides that these trials will be conducted over a period of at least three years. This is a very long time for a person who is confined to a wheelchair and who thinks a cure is possible. I just wonder about the time that will have elapsed between Dr. Zamboni's announcement and the beginning of the clinical trials. This is a terribly long wait. The clinical trials that were announced are good news, but they come late for MS patients.

Living with MS is not easy. The symptoms are often unpredictable. When someone is suffering from a cyclical type of multiple sclerosis, which means about 85% of patients in Canada, that person is asymptomatic until there is a flare-up. Afterwards, the person either recovers completely or has lasting effects. When a person suffers from the progressive form of the disease, MS is synonymous with a slow loss of autonomy, without any hope of improvement.

What is dramatic is that the people who are diagnosed with multiple sclerosis are in their prime. They are usually between 15 and 40. So, these are young people who are active in the labour force and have a family, or people who are dreaming of changing the world and making a contribution to our society. Learning that our body is an obstacle to achieving our goals is a hard reality to accept.

In Saint-Hubert, there is the Association sclérose en plaques Rive-Sud. This organization, which could see its funding eliminated by the United Way of Greater Montreal, provides support to patients and to those close to them, so that they can learn to live with multiple sclerosis. The association has been providing these services since 1976.

• (1730)

The Association sclérose en plaques Rive-Sud supports people with multiple sclerosis and their families as they learn to live with and cope with the illness. The association responds to the needs of both the individual and the family, in person or by telephone, and helps to break down the isolation of people with MS by offering activities like coffee meetings, speakers and community dinners.

Living with multiple sclerosis is very difficult, and I want to congratulate them on the work they do, both employees and volunteers, and of course their board of directors. I would like to thank them for the work they do in our community and for supporting the cause of multiple sclerosis.

Like some of my colleagues, I had the pleasure of meeting some extraordinary people who suffer from multiple sclerosis last October. They came to meet with me on behalf of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Personally, I had the pleasure of meeting with Denis Baribeau and Hana Salaheddine, who live in Trois-Rivières and Montreal, respectively. I was impressed by their will to live and by how active they are.

*Private Members' Business*

Denis and Hana made some recommendations that I think are important and useful. One of them is to amend the employment insurance system to make it possible to receive partial benefits. At present, 80% of people with MS are ultimately no longer able to work. As well, some people with MS have to be absent from work for treatment or when they have flare-ups. More flexible employment insurance benefits would be of enormous help to them.

They also proposed that more support be provided for family caregivers, in particular by making the tax credit for caregivers refundable, which is not the case at present, and implementing a national strategy for family caregivers. This is an avenue that should be explored, in my opinion.

It is important to provide support for people with multiple sclerosis. The illness is difficult enough, without even counting the financial complications, employment and mobility. We also need to provide the most accurate and detailed information possible about the treatments available. And we have to provide them with the best available treatments as soon as possible. I know the CCSVI phase I and II clinical trials should be starting soon, but we have to expedite the trials as much as possible so that people with MS and their families can know where they stand.

• (1735)

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her well-thought out speech and her position on this motion.

This is obviously a very contentious and emotional issue for a lot of people. We are here tonight to talk about Motion No. 274. I would encourage MS sufferers and their families to get involved in this debate, to get involved in the gathering of the information, to make sure they are out in the public telling their stories and that they are lobbying governments so their issues are treated very seriously.

My colleague across the way talked about the need for urgency and acceleration. We certainly believe that things need to be done as quickly as possible and at the same time safely in order to deal with these issues.

I am here tonight to speak in support of Motion No. 274.

I want to recognize a young lady in my riding who has been very courageous in this fight that has gone on in the last few years.

Her name is Michelle Walsh. She lives on a ranch in Beechy, Saskatchewan. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1991 when she was only 18 years old. She now has secondary progressive multiple sclerosis. She found herself in a situation where she was bedridden before she underwent this therapy in Bulgaria in July 2010 and then in California the following January. She has been a very outspoken supporter and advocate of CCSVI in Canada. She is one of the ladies who has kept my office very informed about the meetings and the new information regarding MS. I just want to recognize her and her persistence and the work and time that she has put into this issue.

I want to thank my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright for moving this important motion. It is focused on providing information to Canadians living with multiple sclerosis.

MS patients, their families and caregivers must be able to make informed decisions about the management and treatment of this disease.

MS is a devastating disease that impacts many Canadians, yet it is one that we are still trying to understand. Access to timely and accurate information is critical. Getting that information to MS patients, their families and caregivers requires effective collaboration by many different partners.

The provinces and territories are responsible for health care delivery. Scientific experts carry out the research and make new discoveries. Health care professional associations and national voluntary organizations such as the MS Society provide support and resources and so much more. The federal government also plays an important role in funding research and in helping to ensure that Canadians are informed and that all partners are on the same page for the benefit of MS patients nationwide.

I am proud to say that the Government of Canada has already launched important initiatives that support the motion before us. I will expand on these initiatives shortly, but first I will take a few moments to highlight why this is an important issue.

MS is a disabling chronic disease of the central nervous system. The effects of it are significant. It affects vision, hearing, memory, balance, mobility. It remains unknown what exactly causes MS to happen. It is commonly thought that environmental, viral and genetic factors may be involved in triggering MS.

Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world. As many as 75,000 Canadians are currently living with this disease. Every year millions of Canadians are affected by MS personally, through a family member, a friend or a neighbour. As my colleague pointed out, MS usually strikes young adults, with women three times more likely to be diagnosed than men.

Anyone close to a person with MS knows how difficult it can be to live with this condition. MS patients and their families show tremendous courage in the face of such an illness.

There is no known cure for MS at this time, but we do know there are treatments that can help slow down the progression of the disease, control symptoms and help maintain quality of life. We know that good information and support are essential for people living with MS.

Advances in science, new studies and new treatments offer hope for patients. Obviously the most public and controversial issue is also referred to in this motion, and that is CCSVI.

As members may know, in 2009, Dr. Paolo Zamboni proposed that vein blockage, a condition he labelled chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, could be the cause of MS. He suggested that opening up the blocked veins in the necks of MS patients would relieve those symptoms. The liberation treatment, the Zamboni procedure, the CCSVI procedure are all terms used in the media to describe this medical procedure.

*Private Members' Business*

His procedure has had mixed results. Experts tell us that more research needs to be done on the safety and effectiveness of the Zamboni procedure, as well as to find out whether blocked veins are linked to MS at all.

This motion tries to bring together the information on this and other treatments and opinions in one place.

For people living with this crippling disease, new emerging information can be both confusing and exciting. Information about the Zamboni procedure is important to Canadians living with MS. This is in part why the motion is timely and significant.

● (1740)

Patients and their caregivers need to have the best information available. They need to understand what is known and what questions still need to be answered through scientific research. They need to know that their governments, MS organizations, researchers and doctors are working together to shed the most amount of light possible on treatment options. They need to be able to take comfort and security in the knowledge that they are not making decisions alone, that they are doing so with the best available evidence and information.

In collaboration with its many partners, the federal government is already helping Canadians living with MS to get that information through two key initiatives. First, the federal government is supporting the development of the Canadian MS monitoring system. Second, it has launched a clinical trial on the safety and efficacy of the CCSVI procedure. Both of these initiatives align with Motion No. 274.

I will speak first about the monitoring system. This system will help make available good information on the treatment of Canadians living with MS.

Canada's premier health information organization, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, is leading the monitoring system development in collaboration with the provinces and the territories, the Canadian Network of MS Clinics and the MS Society of Canada.

Some provinces have already moved on some of these issues. In mid-January the Government of Saskatchewan under Premier Brad Wall announced plans to spend over \$2 million to cover costs for patients selected to participate in a two year clinical trial in Albany, New York. British Columbia has set up a B.C. CCSVI registry in the province. It is operated by the MS clinic at UBC Hospital at Vancouver Coastal Health. Alberta has set up what is called the Alberta Multiple Sclerosis Initiative, or TAMSI, in order to gather evidence to improve the understanding of CCSVI. Provinces are already beginning to move, and nationwide we are moving as well.

The goal is to measure and monitor the evolution and treatment of MS in Canada, including patients who have undergone CCSVI. Over the long term, this system will monitor patients' outcomes and help identify the most effective therapies in the treatment of MS. It will give Canadians living with MS, health care professionals, researchers and policy-makers better access to information on disease patterns and the use of treatments across Canada.

Specifically, CIHI is working with partners to put in place a national system that will collect patients' clinical and demographic

information from participating MS clinics, including information on the CCSVI procedure. The monitoring system will operate according to CIHI's stringent privacy protection policies. Participation is voluntary. Information from this system will be available to patients through regular reports.

For the first time Canada will have a truly national source of data on MS that will support those living with MS as they work with their doctors to consider management and treatment options.

As the only voluntary organization in Canada that supports both MS research and services for people with MS and their families, the MS Society will play an important role in bringing patients' views to the table.

The other key federal initiative that will provide information on MS is a national clinical trial on the CCSVI procedure. There have been, and I think we all acknowledge this, mixed results from this process. The number of complications reported by Canadian MS patients who have undergone the CCSVI procedure abroad reinforces the importance of further research on this procedure. The procedure is not a simple one. We must ensure that it is safe and that it does and can work.

For this reason the federal government asked the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to put the clinical trial in place. The launch of a national clinical trial was based on scientific evidence and recommendation from CIHR's scientific expert working group on CCSVI, made up of domestic and international MS experts. The clinical trial is looking at the scientific evidence on the safety and efficacy of the CCSVI procedure. To this end, CIHR is putting the necessary measures in place to advance the clinical trial.

A competitive and rigorous peer review process to select the research team will be completed by the end of March 2012. There is a sense of urgency but we want to make sure that we protect Canadians as we move ahead.

Provinces and territories, along with U.S. and Canadian MS societies, have shown interest in conducting this important research.

The results of the clinical trial will provide information concerning the risks and benefits of CCSVI.

It will also provide Canadians, health professionals, caregivers and patients living with MS with new research evidence to better understand the condition, including this treatment option as well as other possible treatments.

Like many diseases, we cannot prevent MS and we do not yet know what causes it. Yet a significant percentage of Canadians must cope with its unpredictable, lifelong impact.

Canadians need to know there is help available for them to make informed decisions. That is the spirit of the motion. Consistent with Motion No. 274, both initiatives I have discussed are helping to fill information gaps related to multiple sclerosis.

*Private Members' Business*

● (1745)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am very honoured to stand in support of Motion No. 274 to enable multiple sclerosis patients and their families to have access to information to make informed decisions. I want to thank the member for Vegreville—Wainwright for bringing forward this very important issue.

The reason I am in support of the motion and eager to speak to it tonight is that in Burlington, my home is located on a small block with maybe 25 or 30 houses, and three women on the block have MS. It is vitally important that we make sure we have the appropriate information for them on all the treatments, particularly the Zamboni treatment that has been well promoted over the last number of years, so that they can make the right decisions based on the actual science that is available. That is what this motion is talking about and that is what this government is doing.

The motion asks that we ensure that Canadians living with MS, along with their families and caregivers, have access to the information they need to make informed decisions in the management of their condition. I would like to thank the member for bringing this motion forward. MS touches the lives of friends and family of each and every one of us and we need to move on this issue.

MS is a neurological disease that can affect vision, hearing, memory, balance and mobility. Unfortunately, there is no known cure. The current treatment is geared toward managing symptoms and slowing down the progression of the disease.

An estimated 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians currently live with MS. Women are more than three times likely to develop the disease. Canada is faced with one of the highest rates of MS in the world. By understanding more about the disease, its progression and the use of treatments in Canada, we can more effectively plan care and identify best practices for MS treatment.

Many members have heard about the chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, CCSVI, procedure, which is more commonly known as the Zamboni procedure. It is named after the Italian surgeon who proposed that blocked veins in the neck may cause MS. The procedure is a surgical technique to open those blocked veins with the objective of relieving MS symptoms. It is not a cure, but the objective is to relieve the symptoms.

It has raised significant interest from MS patients and patient associations, but it has also raised calls for better understanding of the safety and efficacy through scientific research. Through information sharing and research, our knowledge and understanding of MS, its progression and possible treatments can evolve.

Good information is essential when weighing the benefits and risks of treatment options. Patients, through discussions with their physicians and their families, must have the ability to make informed decisions on the management of their condition. However, information is still missing. There is much we do not know about this procedure and so much we could collectively share and learn by taking advantage of the information that currently is collected in MS clinics and creating a nationwide resource.

Motion No. 274 encourages governments, patient groups and medical associations to address these gaps. The motion before us today supports the need for Canadians living with MS, along with their families and caregivers, to have access to up-to-date information necessary to make informed decisions in the management of their condition.

I am pleased to say that working with our partners, the Government of Canada has announced two key national initiatives that will help Canadians get the information they need about MS and its treatment: the Canadian MS monitoring system and the clinical trial on the CCSVI procedure. Both are addressed in the motion before the House and both will arm MS patients with the information they need about the issues of utmost importance to them: their care and treatment.

Today I would like to take the opportunity to discuss in detail the new initiative, the Canadian MS monitoring system, which is being driven by a strong collaborative effort. The goals of the monitoring system are consistent with Motion No. 274, to obtain better information about MS in Canada, including those who have undergone the CCSVI procedure.

● (1750)

With support from the Government of Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, or CIHI, is developing the system. CIHI is working in close collaboration with the Canadian Network of MS Clinics, the MS Society of Canada and provincial and territorial governments. This unique collaboration is bringing together political and technical experts from across Canada, as well as patient input for the benefit of those coping with this disease.

CIHI is an independent, not for profit corporation that provides essential and relevant information on Canada's health system and the health of Canadians. The Canadian Network of MS Clinics was established about a decade ago by health professionals to advance collaboration and information sharing on MS across the country. We are fortunate in Canada to have such dedicated and highly trained doctors and nurses working together to support people living with MS and to help them achieve the maximum quality of life possible.

The MS Society of Canada is also a key partner in this initiative as it is the only national voluntary organization in Canada that supports both MS research and services for patients and families. The MS Society is focusing on the priorities and interests of patients and the development of the system and will ensure that the information that is collected is shared with patients, families and their caregivers. The provinces and territories are also engaged in working with the federal government in developing the system and participating in its design.

*Private Members' Business*

The vision driving this collaboration is of a longitudinal, observational monitoring system for all of Canada. By working in partnership, we are building on the strength of multiple perspectives in developing this comprehensive national information system with the best interests of patients top of mind.

Consistent with Motion No. 274, advisory and technical committees have been established to guide the development of the system. Through these committees, provinces and territories, as well as people living with MS, provide valuable input and advice on the development of the system. This ensures its relevance to the needs of those who are intended to benefit from its use.

Overall, the system will collect clinical, demographic and health status information of patients from participating in MS clinics on a voluntary basis. It will operate according to stringent privacy protection policies.

Why is this important to patients? To begin with, we do not have the adequate pan-Canadian information on MS rates. We do not have any coherent way of sharing how patients cope with their disabilities, what works and what does not work for their quality of life. More important, we are not taking full advantage of what is being learned in MS clinics across the country about the care and treatment for MS.

This system helps fill the gaps. It will also collect information on patients who have undergone the CCSVI procedure abroad.

This information will help us to better understand trends in MS and the use of treatments, support the delivery of care, monitor patient outcomes over the long term and identify future needs and resources. As a national data centre, the monitoring system will offer a broader view of MS in Canada.

This motion is very important in terms of gathering the information and using information that exists but is not attached to anything so that we are able to give proper information to patients, caregivers and families. MS is important, not only on my street but in my community. I have been active with the MS Society of Canada for a number of years. April 22 is the walk for MS in my community which raises a little over \$86,000 every year. I am the MC for the day at the event.

I encourage everyone watching today to get involved with the MS Society, help those in need, join in the walk and do whatever they can to improve people's quality of life. The MS Society does great work in this country. The Canadian Institutes for Health Research is doing great work in this area. I want everyone to get behind this cause. I thank the member for moving the motion.

• (1755)

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this last five minutes of the second hour of debate to make a few closing comments.

My motion is meant to ensure that patients suffering with multiple sclerosis, their families and caregivers have access to good information to help them make the decision on the management of their condition.

I want to be clear that the motion is meant to fill a desperate need for information over the next few months and couple of years until the process that is being gone through now by Health Canada and

others is complete. It is also meant to bring attention to the issue so that the process that is taking place now is sped up so that we can lessen the burden of cost and effort on MS patients and others who now travel outside of Canada because they cannot have the liberation therapy procedure completed in Canada.

Motion M-274 would establish an information portal that allows MS sufferers who are considering undergoing liberation therapy treatment outside of Canada to gain anecdotal information from patients who have already had this procedure done. This would allow people who have had the treatment to provide information about the process and the results in various clinics outside of Canada, because the procedure is not available in Canada.

I have had many meetings with constituents throughout my riding of Vegreville—Wainwright, individuals across the country, groups in my constituency, various other players in this whole process, as well as the Minister of Health, representatives from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, doctors researching MS, doctors who work with MS patients, representatives of the MS Society and many others. I certainly learned a lot about this terrible disease and about this procedure, which really does offer hope.

From these discussions, it has been clear that the CCSVI treatment does work for some people and that it offers hope for many more people. I also want to say that our Conservative government has implemented a comprehensive strategy that is being applied on an accelerated timeline to determine the potential of this procedure.

Our government remains committed to working on clinical trials in Canada and continues to operate at an unprecedented rate in studying the liberation therapy treatment. An action plan was developed in 2010 in order to pinpoint areas for federal action and to ensure questions and concerns raised by Canadian MS patients are addressed. This strategy includes three main actions carried out over the course of the past year and a half: first, supporting research led by CIHR; second, developing a Canadian MS monitoring system; and third, facilitating and sharing research evidence to ensure that individuals living with MS have access to up-to-date information.

What else can we do? First, as members of Parliament, we should be encouraging constituents with MS to participate in the studies on liberation therapy treatment, such as the B.C. CCSVI registry and the Alberta multiple sclerosis initiative. If more patients participate in these programs, it may provide better treatment for patients with MS in the future. This could help provide a stop-gap benefit and the information gleaned could help speed up the approval process at the same time.

*Private Members' Business*

Second, it seems very unfortunate that the CCSVI treatment, the treatment using angioplasty or venoplasty to open the veins, or stents in some cases, has actually been attached only to MS because that process is used to open veins for other conditions as well. I believe having it attached to MS has actually slowed the whole process down. It is unfortunate that was not realized before but maybe things still can be sped up if that connection is removed.

• (1800)

Third, we can encourage the College of Physicians and Surgeons to take another look at this procedure to be absolutely certain that this long drawn out process cannot be sped up. I encourage it to have another look at that.

I thank all of my colleagues for speaking to this motion. I want my constituents to know that I will not stop here.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Deputy Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 93 a recorded division on the motion stands deferred until Wednesday, February 29, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Pursuant to Standing Order 37 the House will now proceed to consideration of Bill C-350 under private members' business.

\* \* \*

• (1805)

**CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT**

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC)** moved that Bill C-350, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accountability of offenders), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today to speak on behalf of my private member's Bill C-350, which brings forward important offender accountability measures. This important legislation will encourage the accountability and responsibility of offenders with a goal of ensuring that their obligations to society are addressed.

It should come as no surprise to any hon. member of the House that our Conservative government firmly believes in holding offenders to account and providing victims of crime with better support.

We have said from day one that we are committed to supporting victims and to taking their concerns seriously. That is one of our highest priorities and we have delivered on that commitment in a number of ways, particularly through legislative changes relating to pardons and parole. We have passed legislation that repeals the faint hope clause, meaning that offenders who commit murder are no longer eligible to apply for full parole prior to the parole eligibility date fixed by law. We have passed legislation that allows judges to impose consecutive parole ineligibility periods for individuals convicted of more than one first or second degree murder.

We have taken the concerns of victims of white collar crime into account by passing legislation that imposes tougher sentences for fraud, and we have passed legislation to end accelerated parole review that applies to those who commit white collar crimes.

This past September, we were proud to introduce the safe streets and communities act, which includes measures that hold offenders accountable and supports victims. Of note, we have proposed that offenders must play a larger role in their own rehabilitation and reintegration programs, that pardons be renamed by the more appropriate term "record suspensions" and that the right of victims to attend and make statements at parole hearings are enshrined in law.

We have made great progress over the past six years. We have listened to the concerns of victims and we have acted on them, but we are not done yet.

That is why I am proud to speak to Bill C-350, which would take another step in the right direction toward increasing offender accountability and improving restitution measures.

My goal is straightforward. In simple terms the bill would ensure that any monetary award owed to an offender as a result of a legal action or proceeding against Her Majesty in Right of Canada would first be put toward financial obligations, including child support and restitution orders. The reason for this is to teach these individuals, some of whom have never had a responsible day in their whole lives, that in society we have obligations, and we are meant to meet them.

Let me tell hon. members what that means in real terms.

First and foremost, the bill would add wording to the purpose section of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that refers to encouraging the accountability and responsibility of offenders and ensuring that their obligations to their fellow Canadians are addressed. The addition of these words will put an increased focus on offender accountability as a key purpose of a correctional system that actually corrects criminal behaviour. It will drive our correctional system to reform these criminals into responsible and accountable citizens.



*Private Members' Business*

Second, Bill C-350 proposes important changes to how debts owed to offenders are distributed. It is extremely difficult for victims and their families to understand why we would allow an offender to receive a monetary award when they themselves are struggling or are waiting for financial restitution from the offender as a result of a civil law suit. The proposed amendments will help rectify this issue when it involves a payment by the Crown. This is another measure to ensure that offenders will be held accountable for fulfilling legally owed debts.

The bill states that any award owed from a legal judgment against the Crown will be paid on a pro rata basis in the following order of priority: the first priority is that the debt must be put toward spousal or child support orders.

• (1810)

When we think of victims, we often think only of the individuals or families directly harmed by the offender's actions. The bill before us addresses the needs of an often overlooked group of people, those innocent individuals who are indirectly impacted by the offender's actions, such as the offender's spouse and children, the families of the offenders.

If an offender is a bread winner in the family, the line of income and financial stability is suddenly gone when the offender is sent to prison. The resulting financial hardship and instability can have immediate and detrimental effects, particularly on children. An unemployed mother whose spouse is convicted and incarcerated for a crime could suddenly struggle to provide the basic necessities for her children: a warm home, food, clothing and other essentials. It is only reasonable that debt owed to the offender by the Crown should first provide for these vulnerable individuals.

The next priority is to pay any restitution for damages or injuries caused by the offenders as a result of their offence. Just as importantly, and falling in line with our focus on supporting victims, the next two priorities include payment of any victim surcharge orders and any outstanding civil judgments against the offender.

Victims can face years of recovery as a result of physical injury or emotional distress. The bill would ensure that the recovery and financial stability of the victims of crime would be taken into account before issuing the balance of a financial award to an offender. It is only after these priorities are addressed that an outstanding amount would be paid to the offender.

This is a fair process. We have heard from victims of crime advocates who tells us that any step toward improving offender accountability and victim restitution is a step in the right direction.

Bill C-350 would go a long way toward increasing the accountability of offenders and ensuring that better restitution measures are in place for not only the victims but the spouses and children of those offenders.

I believe the bill is good legislation. Canadians want and deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities. That means offenders need to be off our streets. It also means that offenders must be held accountable for their actions. Canadians will not stand for a system that allows an offender to file spurious lawsuits or court actions and then be rewarded for this prior to them making their debts whole.

With this bill, our government continues to create a system of justice and public safety that meets the high expectations of Canadians, and that takes into consideration the concerns of victims of crime.

This legislation is simply common sense. What it says is that when an offender is incarcerated, there is a reason the person is incarcerated. Why should the offenders family suffer, why should the victims suffer and why should the offender, who is incarcerated, reap financial rewards when the victims, both spousal or children, or a direct victim of the offence are hurting? This tries to right that wrong.

I urge all hon. members to support this important legislation, with amendments. We will welcome amendments on this legislation.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the mover of the bill talked about how the government was concerned about victims of crime. It is a mantra we hear from members opposite all the time. This is not really about the bill, although the member spoke about it, it is about the government's attitude. We do not have a problem with judgments being paid. They are paid anyway, so I do not know how necessary the bill is.

However, in the meantime, if the member and the government are so concerned about victims, why is he not bringing forward a resolution calling for the reinstatement of the criminal injuries compensation that the Government of Canada, for many years, provided funds for? Provinces had programs and the federal government assisted those. Most of them collapsed as a result of not having the funds. Why is he not calling on his government to do that? Victims are out there suffering from crimes and do not get the restitution they need because many of the offenders do not have the money.

Second, if you are so concerned about victims of crime, why did you not listen to the victims of gun crime when they appeared before our committee on Bill C-19, saying that they were fearful of the loss of the kind of gun control that was in place?

• (1815)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would remind all members to direct their comments through the Chair and not directly to sitting members.

The hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to direct my comments through you to the member.

I am glad to hear that the member and, I assume, his colleagues will support this wonderful legislation. Very often when an offender commits a crime, there is usually an innocent family standing by, an innocent spouse and children, who really are not involved at all, but are unfortunate enough to be associated with someone with criminal intent. An offender possibly breaks into a residence and does harm to innocent people or their property. It is only reasonable that we address this.

The legislation is critical. If someone is incarcerated, it must be for a serious reason and that person should accept the responsibility. That is why I encourage my colleagues to support the legislation.

*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, could the member provide some comment with regard to the whole concept of restorative justice in which victims and individuals who perpetrated the crime come together to see if in fact something can be done that would adequately compensate or even give victims comfort in terms of what the eventual outcome might be?

Does the member support the concept of restorative justice?

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Madam Speaker, the legislation deals directly with something that has for too long gone unattended. By that I mean that there are people who are not being looked after properly. Victims have been hurt and the families of the offender have been hurt just by being associated with the offender. The bottom line in all of this is they are the innocent victims.

If offenders are in jail, they committed serious offences. If they are serving time, they must have committed rather serious crimes and obviously need rehabilitation. They need to accept responsibility. The bill tries to encourage offenders to accept their responsibilities.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry introduced Bill C-350, which makes offenders accountable for their obligations to society, to their family and to victims.

This legislation was originally introduced on September 28, 2010, as Bill C-292. That bill also sought to make offenders accountable, so that they would fulfill their obligations to society. Therefore, that objective was added to section 3 of Corrections and Conditional Release Act . Under Bill C-292, if an inmate was awarded money following a legal action or proceeding, the government would seize that money and split it equally between the beneficiaries of a restitution order, a child or spousal support order, and a civil judgment against the offender.

If the offender had no obligation or debt to these people, he still could not get the monetary award, which was distributed to organizations that help victims or to other similar entities. This bill did not make any sense then, because if, for example, an inmate was abused in jail and then compensated following a civil proceeding, he still could not get the money, even though he had no obligation to his family or to the persons I mentioned.

Consequently, the bill was significantly improved. In the case of Bill C-350, the obligation to distribute the money that the inmate would receive has been removed and that money is now given to him. So in this sense it is an improvement.

We can think of other examples. This is not just about people who suffer abuse in jail. It could be a reckless driver who was responsible for an accident causing death and who received compensation through the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec. This bill would also have allowed the government to seize this compensation and redistribute in accordance with the priority list in Bill C-350.

The previous version of Bill C-350 was amended. The responsibility of offenders regarding their obligations remains the bill's primary objective. However, Bill C-350 seems more specific in certain respects than Bill C-292 was. First, it indicates in a more

concise fashion who would get part of the compensation received by an inmate. An order of priorities is set: first, the money owed by the offender pursuant to a spousal or child support order will be given to his family, then the money owed by him pursuant to a restitution order, followed by civil judgments and fines.

The compensation will no longer be paid in equal parts, as stipulated in Bill C-292. It will instead be pro-rated in the manner described in Bill C-350. If there are any remaining funds, they will be paid to the inmate. I should think that the inmate would be entitled to the money. This provision is different from the one in Bill C-292 because of concerns about areas of jurisdiction. The remainder of the obligations set out in Bill C-350 are pre-existing legal obligations. By listing these rights, the bill seems to do a better job of addressing the priority of claims. However, the priority of claims also falls under provincial jurisdiction.

It is our belief, therefore, that this bill contains relevant provisions such as the protection of families and victims. All members of society must be held accountable for their obligations, and that obviously includes prisoners. Being incarcerated in no way removes the inmate's obligations and responsibilities. An inmate must still meet the needs of his family and, obviously, comply with child and spousal support orders.

● (1820)

Compensation is of equal importance for victims. According to the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, in the eyes of the law, a victim is a person who has suffered physical or psychological harm as a result of a crime. Family members, legal guardians and dependents are considered victims when the victim is deceased or when the victim is a child or a person who is unable to act on his own behalf by reason of an illness or disability.

The victims' compensation scheme was established not only to make restitution to victims, but also to compensate for any financial losses resulting from the crime. Victims may require all manner of care in order to recover. For example, we can think of medical expenses and psychological support.

The purpose of the principle of restorative justice is also to ensure that the victim is not victimized a second time. Consequently, making restitution means that the victim will have no need to navigate the judicial process a second time in order to receive restitution. This process, therefore, forces the victim to demonstrate that the harm suffered by him resulted from the crime.

Victims and victims groups have been calling for some time for legislative provisions of this nature that would force inmates to comply with family support and restitution orders. This was referred to in a document written by the solicitor general dated 1987.

We are also pleased to see that the bill identifies priorities and that support payments will be at the top of the list. The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime made the following recommendations in the report entitled "Toward a Greater Respect for Victims in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act":

That the Government of Canada amend paragraph 133(3) of the CCRA to include a necessity for conditions to ensure offenders fulfill their court ordered sentences, including restitution and victim fine surcharges.

That the Government of Canada amend subsection 78(2) of the CCRA to authorize the CSC to deduct reasonable amounts from an offender's earnings to satisfy any outstanding restitution or victim fine surcharge orders.

Still, this legislation is not perfect. In my opinion, the problem with this bill is that it creates two civil law systems: one for prisoners and the other for the rest of society. The protection of the law applies to all citizens, including prisoners. In civil law, there are provisions that force individuals to repay their debts. For example, salaries may be garnished to force an individual to pay child support. However, there is a big difference between existing provisions and this bill.

Unfortunately, the government cannot intervene to enforce court orders, thereby circumventing the courts. The government cannot take over the courts' role in the justice system. For example, in the case of support payments, the family must take the case to a civil court and go through the normal justice process. Any loss of basic civil rights cannot be taken lightly lest the justice system revert to principles of punitive justice.

In my opinion, we cannot deny some individuals their rights in order to help others. We cannot rob Peter to pay Paul. That is why we must strike a balance between victims' rights and prisoners' rights.

This bill includes another important measure aimed at better integrating prisoners into rehabilitation programs. Such programs have been very successful. It is not enough to hold prisoners financially accountable. They also need to understand the reason for their actions and the consequences of their actions. Rehabilitation is an integral part of the rehabilitation process for prisoners. This kind of program should also be offered during the inmate's parole period.

To sum up, the spirit of Bill C-350 is entirely relevant. Offenders must be held accountable for the financial obligations issued in lawful orders.

Let us all support this bill and hear from experts regarding the bill's validity.

● (1825)

[English]

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill going to committee to study various aspects that have raised questions such those my colleague has just touched on.

As the member who is sponsoring the bill mentioned, it is very important that offenders be accountable. Therefore, the principle that underlies the bill is a good one. Liberals have always believed in personal accountability. It is a tenet of liberalism and, of course, that extends to offenders who are serving time for the crimes they have committed.

It would have been interesting if the sponsor of the bill had provided some concrete examples of situations where victims have suffered because of the absence of such legislation. It leaves us wondering whether the bill is responding to a real problem, or whether it is more of a theoretical exercise.

It is important for anyone watching at home to understand that this is not what has been referred to in the past as profits from crime legislation, introduced under a previous Liberal administration. The

### *Private Members' Business*

purpose of that legislation was to confiscate the proceeds earned by a criminal who, for example, wrote a book about his or her crime. That legislation, Bill C-205, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Copyright Act, was introduced in 1996 by the Liberal member from Scarborough. That bill would have prohibited a criminal from profiting by selling or authoring a story of their crime. However, this is not what we are dealing with here. It is important that the two ideas not be confused.

The reason I bring up Bill C-205 is that, despite its good intention and good principle upon which it was based, it did not complete the legislative process because of the election. However, even a similar bill did not complete the legislative process. It was deemed unconstitutional when it was debated in the House because it violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. More than that, the issue fell under provincial jurisdiction because it is a matter of property, which is generally dealt with under civil actions within provincial jurisdiction.

Bill C-350 does raise some comparable issues about jurisdiction. In fact, as my hon. colleague from the NDP mentioned in his speech, Bill C-350 had a predecessor, Bill C-292. Unfortunately, that bill did not make it to the stage of adoption precisely because of jurisdictional problems.

I will read a quote from the researcher of the committee, Michel Bédard, who presumably was looking at the bill, but this was before I was appointed to that portfolio. He said:

I have doubts as to the federal government's power to pass provisions of this kind. It's important to understand that, according to the division of powers in Canada, property and civil rights fall within provincial jurisdiction. Under that head of power, the provinces have jurisdiction over contracts and all private law, including debt priority ranking. That includes debts owed to creditors, in particular.... It's important to realize that federal jurisdiction regarding debt priority ranking is limited to certain well-defined areas, such as bankruptcy, tax collection and banks.

● (1830)

In other words, this new debt priority ranking cannot be connected back to bankruptcy law, to banks, to tax collection or other areas of federal jurisdiction. What he is saying is that Bill C-292 had nothing to do with these areas where there would be a federal role. That is something we are going to have to discuss at committee when the bill gets there.

I believe that the committee researcher expressed the same reservations about Bill C-350. Again, this is going to have to be discussed at committee, which does not take away from the hon. member's noble motives in wanting to protect victims and underscore the need for offender accountability.

There may be a way in which the bill is constitutional, but there are some doubts. Establishing a debt priority ranking is a power, as I said, usually given to the provincial government. Bill C-350 uses this concept and applies it to a criminal matter where the federal government does have jurisdiction under subsection 91(27) of the Constitution Act of 1867. However, the constitutionality of this manoeuvre is open to debate.

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Section 2(a), on using crown funds to repay spousal and child support debt, deals with a tricky issue. While it is true that the government does have jurisdiction over marriage, it may depend on how a judge interprets this provision. For example, a court could interpret the provision to apply only to all legally married couples. Furthermore, as stated above, the federal government can legislate in the area of marriage and divorce. However, there are certain parts of marriage and divorce law that have been delegated to the provincial courts. The nuances of such a relationship require further study.

Sections 2(b) and 2(c) of Bill C-350 use the Criminal Code provisions of restitution orders to establish a debt priority for victims and third parties, as well as victims' surcharges. Restitution is defined as equity aimed at restoring a person to whom a duty was owed to the position in which he or she would have been had the duty not been breached. It does this through a variety of remedies, including compensation. It could be argued in regard to restitution orders requiring an offender to pay financial compensation to a victim or third party that the federal government is legislating in a provincial area.

The constitutionality of restitution orders, as a federal power, was upheld most recently in *R v Zelensky* in 1978. However, Bill C-350 goes much further than the Zelensky decision in that it elevates restitution orders in the debt priority ranking. Bill C-350 establishes that payment to parties outlined in the bill receive priority over any other debts or fees incurred as a result of the offence. Currently, restitution orders are placed on the same level of priority as other provincial fees levied during the criminal court process, like administrative fees and fines.

There is another interesting aspect. What happens if the offender is innocent and after doing his or her time in prison wins a court case whereby their innocence is proved? Are there measures to reverse the situation to take care of that eventuality?

This will all be studied at committee and I look forward to doing that.

● (1835)

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in support of Bill C-350, which addresses crucial changes to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act as it relates to the accountability of offenders.

I would like to thank the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for his hard work on behalf of victims of crime.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to briefly review what the bill is all about. Bill C-350 is about putting more focus on offender accountability and restitution. It will do this through two key changes.

First, the bill would amend the wording in the purpose section of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which currently refers only to custody and supervision, and rehabilitation and reintegration. The new wording will clarify that one of the purposes of the federal corrections system is the following:

encouraging the accountability and responsibility of offenders, with a view to ensuring that their obligations to society are addressed.

Second, the bill sets out the priorities for debt repayment in cases when an offender is owed a monetary award as a result of a legal action against the crown. What this means in essence is that an offender will first have to satisfy outstanding debts before collecting any award. The debt owed to the offender would be paid on a pro rata basis and in the following order of priority, to amounts owing, pursuant to the following: a spousal or child support order; a legal restitution order; any victim surcharge order; and any person with a civil judgment against the offender. It is only after all of these priorities have been addressed that any outstanding amount from the monetary award would be paid to the offender.

While our government supports the rights of offenders to be treated humanely, we also believe that offenders must be held accountable for the debts they owe. Learning how to do this is an important part of their rehabilitation.

This legislation would ensure that crown debts are distributed with these obligations in mind and ensure that priority is given to victims and the spouses and children of these offenders.

At its core, the bill is really about supporting victims and holding offenders accountable for their legal obligations. That is why our government is pleased to support this legislation, with some minor amendments. When the bill reaches committee stage, we recommend amending it to add clarity regarding the role of the Correctional Service of Canada in the administration and operation of these provisions.

Our government is wholly committed to supporting victims and ensuring that the justice system takes the consideration of victims to heart, and I am proud of our impressive track record. For example, we have committed \$52 million to enhance the federal victims strategy to better meet the needs of victims. We have created and provided ongoing support to the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime as an independent resource for victims. We have provided support to the National Office for Victims at Public Safety Canada to give victims a greater voice in the corrections and conditional release process, and to help them access the services that they need.

These are only a few examples of how our government has dedicated itself to supporting victims of crime.

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Just as important, we remain committed to making sure that offenders are held accountable. Because more needs to be done, our government included offender accountability measures as part of our safe streets and communities act that we introduced in September 2011. Bill C-10 contains measures that will help to enhance offender responsibility and accountability while strengthening the management of offenders during their incarceration and parole. It would also give victims access to more information about the offender who has harmed them and modernize disciplinary sanctions for offenders. Under that proposed legislation we would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to emphasize the need for offenders to conduct themselves in a way that demonstrates respect for other people and property.

As well, the proposed changes would require all offenders to obey all penitentiary rules and conditions governing their release, while also actively participating in the setting and achieving of objectives in their correctional plan, including their behaviour, program participation and meeting their court-ordered obligations such as restitution to victims. This ties directly to the legislation that we are discussing today.

Another element of offender accountability found in our safe streets and communities act is amendments to modernize the system of discipline in federal penitentiaries by addressing disrespectful, intimidating and assaultive behaviour by inmates, including the throwing of bodily substances.

• (1840)

The safe streets and communities act also delivers on the issue of victim support. Victims have limited information about an offender's life in prison. They do not know whether offenders are taking part in rehabilitation programs, if they are absent from the institution temporarily or are being transferred to a minimum security facility. Yet victims deserve to have access to as much information as they reasonably can about the offender, and Bill C-10 would enshrine in law their ability to take part in parole hearings and to be kept better informed about the behaviour and management of offenders.

Clearly, the measures proposed in the safe streets and communities act will work in tandem with Bill C-350, the legislation we are discussing today.

Just as clear is the message we are hearing from victims and advocacy groups across this country. They are asking us to move swiftly to strengthen the rights of victims. They are asking us to make changes to our laws to improve the accountability of offenders, and they are asking us to create mechanisms that support victims of crime.

I spoke earlier of our ongoing financial support programs, like the National Office for Victims and the federal victims strategy. While we have made progress, much work still remains to be done.

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, we reiterated our intention to move swiftly ahead with efforts that support victims, that give our law officers better tools and that support crime prevention programs. That is what we told Canadians we would do, and that is exactly what we intend to do.

Today I am very pleased to support the bill with our proposed amendments, and I call on all hon. members to ensure its speedy passage.

• (1845)

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the bill moved by the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

However, I am rather ambivalent about it because, although we agree that prisoners ought to be accountable and we agree with the recommendations of the Ombudsman for Victims of Crime who talked about some of these issues and suggested that the Corrections and Conditional Release Act be amended to ensure that offenders who fill their court ordered sentences, including restitution, and victim fine surcharges and also the suggestion that there be authorization for the Correctional Service of Canada to deduct from an offender's earnings while in prison reasonable amounts for the restitution or victim fine surcharge orders, some of this can be done by regulation. In fact, there is no need to change the act to do that at all.

I am curious that the member did not address that. I want to talk about the government's talk about victims. Who are we talking about? We are talking about somebody who has successfully sued Her Majesty the Queen on the basis that there was something committed against them. It specifically refers to any debt owed to an offender as a result of a monetary award made by a court, tribunal or agency proceeding against Her Majesty the Queen or any agent employed by Her Majesty the Queen in the course of performance of his or her duties.

Who are we talking about? Are we talking about a prisoner who has been abused by some agent of Her Majesty the Queen who then successfully sues Her Majesty the Queen and is entitled to a monetary award? I do not know how many people there are like that. Perhaps the member can address that in his closing remarks. Are we talking about two? Are we talking about 10? Are we talking about hundreds of people? Is there really any purpose for the bill? Is there anything to be gained by this? It only deals with people who sue Her Majesty the Queen.

The member referred to spurious lawsuits. If it were a spurious lawsuit against Her Majesty the Queen, it would not be successful. It would be thrown out of court. I do not know what the evil is that is being corrected. However, I do agree with certain aspects of what the member said in that, yes, if an offender has obligations to his family, which is supported by a court order in the case of spousal support, child support or the other items listed, they would get the money before the offender would. However, I think that is already provided for by the law of the provinces referred to by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis and as noted by the parliamentary officers who advise on legislation.

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I think there are some problems with this. The notion is not a bad one. I do not know whether it can be amended at committee to allow for deductions from offenders' pay to cover court restitution orders or to cover the other ones that are mentioned here, whether it be spousal support, the business dealing with victim fine surcharges, for example, or restitution orders. These are things that surely should be able to be handled by a different sort of amendment that authorizes deductions of those items from payments due to an offender.

The member is on the right track when it comes to trying to find a way to ensure that offenders who are receiving money while in prison can have deductions made to look after these matters, but we should not build it around what he has done in saying that this is for people who successfully sue the Crown for some action taken against them by an officer of the Crown in the performance of his or her duty. That obviously means somebody committed something against the prisoner who might be considered a victim of a civil tort.

● (1850)

The bill is a bit misguided in that sense but there may be something that can be done with it. New Democrats are not saying that the bill does not deserve further consideration in committee but we need listened carefully to what legal experts told us about jurisdiction. In my province, there is a judgment enforcement act that deals with the issue of priorities as to who gets what money from a court judgment. It may be that this legislation could override that and that is something that needs to be further examined.

There is a bit of a mix-up in terms of what the member has suggested. I would like to know, in terms of his own research, why he feels this bill is necessary. Are there hundreds and thousands of people incarcerated who are receiving monetary awards on claims against Her Majesty the Queen? How many are we talking about? Is this a problem that needs to be solved in this way or would we be better off looking at the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to ensure that the provisions in sections 76 to 78 ensure that payments may be deducted. Subsection 78(2) states:

Where an offender receives a payment [or income]...from a prescribed source, the Service may

(a) make deductions from that payment...in accordance with regulations made under paragraph 96(z.2) and any Commissioner's Directive...

That seems to me to be the place where we ought to be looking because that is the provision of the act that allows for deductions to be made from any prisoner's income.

I have listened to the member and I do not agree with his statement that the government is concerned about victims because, if it were, it would have listened to the victims who testified before the public safety committee on Bill C-19. They were concerned about the wholesale lack of protection that would be left if the bill were to pass through the Senate because of all the other measures that were taken away, along with the so-called long gun registry. It did not listen to them. It did not listen to the victims and families of École Polytechnique who testified. It also does not seem to be interested in reinstating support for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Boards across Canada, some of which have shut down due to lack of federal support.

Victims are going without the compensation that was available previously during the 1990s. In fact, I represented a large number of

victims of sexual abuse at a particular orphanage in St. John's. We went to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on a regular basis to get support for counselling and what was available under the Criminal Injury Compensation Act. However, that act no longer exists. There are no criminal injury compensations in my province anymore because of lack of funding and federal support.

We do not hear anybody on the other side say that we should get back on track with criminal injuries compensation. Maybe I am putting something in their ears over there. Maybe they should ask the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Justice why they are not supporting criminal injury compensation in Canada, which used to be the case with previous governments. We do not talk about what we are doing for victims. We talk about what we are doing to offenders.

The biggest worry I have is that many of the things being done to offenders within Bill C-10, for example, would lead to more hardened criminals, less rehabilitation and more crime as a result. When people are not rehabilitated when they are in prison, when they are released they will be more likely to offend, which will lead to more victims. They have the wrong end of the stick when it comes to the approach the government is taking.

New Democrats will support this bill at second reading, allow it to go committee where we can see if something can be done with it that fits the jurisdiction and the Constitution and that can provide for deductions being made from prisoners' incomes to meet some of the objectives that the member suggests.

● (1855)

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-350, a private member's bill introduced by the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry regarding the accountability of offenders.

This is an important topic. Canada has in the order of about 40,000 prisoners presently, which represents a very small share of our population. Although it sounds like a large number, it is less than 1% of our population. About 15,000 of these prisoners are in federal custody while the remainder are in provincial penal systems. Our incarceration rate is in line with, or slightly lower than actually, incarceration rates from many of Canada's peer countries, with an exception. It is far less than a third of the rate of incarceration in the United States.

In addition, the crime rate in Canada is actually decreasing, including the severity index for violent crimes. Even so, it seems that the government intends to greatly expand our prison system. Under the government's planned changes, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, last year, estimated that the cost of running of our prisons could grow to \$9.5 billion annually in 2015-16. That is up from \$4.4 billion in 2010, which is more than double. That could require the construction of up to a dozen new prisons. Mr. Page found that the numbers could be twice as high in the provincial system as well.

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I can only see our prison population ballooning even higher than the Parliamentary Budget Officer's estimates with the legislation introduced recently by the government, such as Bill C-10. We could see any number of people convicted and sent to jail for five years for just circumventing digital locks to listen to their purchased CDs on their iPods or copying their DVDs onto their laptops, for example. Who knows how many people might be sent to jail when their cell phone locations are scanned by the authorities and they happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, going home from work through an area where a protest breaks out.

With these and other changes from the Conservative government, including mandatory minimum sentences, I expect to see our prison population in this country growing and growing under the government.

This raises questions. How are taxpayers expected to pay for so many Canadians in jail when the federal government is running a steep and rapidly growing deficit and our provinces are struggling financially as well? Surely the government is aware that we would have a hard time paying for megaprison and megaprison populations while trying to balance the books.

Does the Prime Minister intend to burden we taxpayers, our taxpayers, our constituents and the provinces with so many prison costs that he will just throw up his hands in a few years and say that we cannot possibly afford it anymore and that the prison system needs to be privatized.

This would fit in lockstep with his overall philosophy of allegedly creating smaller governments and privatization. However, it could have catastrophic consequences for Canadian society. If incarceration itself becomes a profit centre when the Conservatives privatize the jails, it will be in many corporations' best interests to send more people to jail for longer and keep them there.

That means that our goals as a society will have changed from rehabilitation and good outcomes for citizens to one of maximizing the incarceration rate, a growth industry. A well-funded private prisons lobby could emerge to keep pressure up for ever-harsher laws. They could lobby to ensure that many more people cease to be productive members of society, no longer paying taxes but instead left rotting in prisons or being criminalized even further there.

To me, this is a disturbing picture of Canada's future if we continue down the government's path. We can see how badly that road has worked out for the United States of America. In the early 1980s, privatization of prisons took off in the U.S. with the war on drugs and harsher sentencing. States could no longer afford to run their prison systems and so companies starting taking over more and more prison services and eventually entire prisons. Incarceration skyrocketed, doubling every decade from less than half a million in 1980 to over two million by the year 2000.

● (1900)

Our neighbours to the south now have by far the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. They have the largest prison population on earth. With less than 5% of the world's overall population they have almost a quarter of the world's adult prison population. We have all heard about the extraordinary incarceration rates of African Americans and other visible minorities in the U.S.;

entire generations thrown in jail. Are we going to replicate that failed system here in Canada?

I cannot begin to detail the tragic social costs that come when incarceration becomes a profit-making enterprise. Sadly, this was all for nothing. U.S. statistics show that cost savings promised to the taxpayers by privatized prisons simply have not materialized. It is no wonder that states such as California and Texas are now backpedaling on privatized prisons.

For Canada, this is a very real possibility given the crime agenda advanced by members on the other side of the House. Statistics Canada found that 93% of Canadians are satisfied with their personal safety, so most do not live in fear of crime or criminals. Perhaps they should start worrying about some politicians as being costly to their welfare.

This private member's bill takes on a new importance in light of all of this. If we are to have so many more people in prison, then we need to make sure that families and others surrounding them do not pay more of a price than they need to. The aim of this bill is to make sure incarcerated people are held to account for their actions financially with respect to victims and families. That is a laudable goal.

As my colleagues have discussed, it mandates that family members and victims to whom the offender owes money would be compensated first from any financial gains awarded to that offender by a court settlement. I support an underlying presumption in the bill that the principle of accountability and learning accountability is important in the rehabilitation process of all inmates.

My colleagues on this side of the House and I believe it is important to rehabilitate offenders, not harden them and offer criminal graduate degrees. Part of that rehabilitation involves meeting obligations to others. It is taking responsibility for debts owed.

I also see a welcomed item in this legislation, and that is child support. Children of offenders should not be punished for their parents' crimes. All too often they are. They often fall through the cracks. Children whose parents have been incarcerated face unique difficulties. Aside from the sudden separation from their caregiver, sometimes their only caregiver, these children have to deal with fear, depression, anger and guilt. They are often moved around from caregiver to caregiver. They are at higher risk of failure in school and delinquency. They are often left in poor circumstances financially as well. I am glad to see that Bill C-350 counts child support as a priority for repayment of debts.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I know that this version of the legislation has been tweaked from a previous iteration to take into account not just child support but also respect for the jurisdiction of the provinces as well. I am very happy this seems to signal an openness to improvements so that the bill may pass with broad support from all parties. It gives me hope that we can improve things for Canadians if and when the bill passes in the other place. I know from personal experience that all too few private members' bills actually end up becoming law. I wish the member luck with his legislation.

To sum up, the bill has merit in that it seeks to help victims and families. I support this private member's bill going to committee for further consideration.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Madam Speaker, on January 30, 2012, and a number of other times since, I asked this government a specific question to find out what its contingency plan is for the F-35 program. Once again, the government is turning a deaf ear.

For months now, we have been learning every day that there are new problems and malfunctions with regard to the F-35s. These technical problems are not so surprising if we consider that the production and construction of these planes were authorized long before the technical trials and test flights were complete.

These test flights are essential for making a number of minor and other more significant adjustments to the plane. They are also essential to avoid having to send a plane back to the plant for adjustments because the test flights were poorly done. Imagine the public safety implications if all of NATO's F-35s were recalled.

The partner and purchaser countries are dropping out one by one: Australia, Italy, the United Kingdom, Turkey and even the United States are reducing their procurement goals. The Netherlands has suspended its decision, believing that purchasing the F-35s would be irresponsible given the unknown final costs, the inconclusive test flights and the unending delays.

Let us consider the budget forecasts. In the beginning, the Government of Canada estimated that the cost of the aircraft alone would be \$75 million per jet. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that the cost will be between \$128 million and \$146 million per jet. The United States estimates the purchase price of each jet to be \$156 million. Allow me to specify that these figures were calculated before the recent announcement that various

countries were withdrawing from the program. As a result, we are talking about cost overruns of \$3.5 billion to \$5.25 billion just to purchase the F-35s.

Unfortunately, money does not grow on trees. Clearly, in order to pay for the F-35s, the government will have to either make cuts to other services or purchase fewer planes. We will not be able to afford them.

Either way, the problem is that our military will have operational problems. Representatives of the Canadian Forces have stated many times in committee that it would be very difficult to have a functional air fleet with fewer than 65 fighter jets. That leaves the option of making cuts to other services, but there comes a point when the government cannot just do whatever it wants. We are going around in circles trying to solve this problem.

It is important to note that every time another country withdraws from the program the price and the cost overruns go up.

Last week, a study showed to what extent the F-35 was not suitable for the needs of the Canadian Forces. Today, a defence expert stated in committee that the Canada first defence strategy is not sustainable or feasible in the long term. The consequences of the government's lack of judgment and chronic lowballing when it comes to military procurement will endanger the capacity of our troops in the near future.

We must review this government's strategy before it is too late, before we are backed into a corner and forced to make a quick decision that is not well thought out. When will we have our plan B?

• (1910)

**Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue. We have been dealing with this issue in committee. We are listening to various stakeholders and this remains an important defence issue for the Canadian Forces and for Canada. The missions in which our pilots are asked to climb into CF-18s and, eventually, into new fighter jets, continue to be very important for our country.

Protecting our sovereignty in the Arctic and having the ability to fly over the second largest land area in the world, and the largest land and water area in the world, are not abstract notions. For the general population and for Canada—which is a reliable NATO ally and which has an air force tradition—it is important to select the right aircraft and the proper equipment for its pilots, which are among the best in the world as we saw again last year during the Libyan campaign.

But let us talk about the real issues. Our CF-18s are nearing the end of their lifespan as safe aircraft for our pilots. Thirty years is a long time. They will get an extension of a few years, since their useful life has been extended. We fully realize that a new aircraft must be chosen pretty quickly. That is why a long time ago, that is, four elections ago—at the end of the nineties if I my memory serves me right—a Liberal government decided not to move forward unilaterally, but to join other partners, namely our NATO allies, to build a new generation aircraft equipped with the modern technology required to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We have been working on this for a decade.



We have accomplished something because the number of partners interested in this project and committed to it has not diminished but increased. Hon. members opposite always forget that countries like Japan not only continue to participate in the project, but have actually increased their order. It is true that some countries are going to spread their order for certain aircraft over a longer period of time, including the United States, but we still have a strong team with reliable partners—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Madam Speaker, the government says it has been following the progress of the F-35 closely, yet there have been many problems: runways that are too short, communication systems that do not work in the far north, range capability that is lower and speeds that are slower than the aircraft it is replacing, our CF-18.

The F-35s are slower and cannot go as far, and they are not compatible with our air refuelers. Also, replacing the CF-18s is far too important. As a responsible country, we cannot afford to be without fighter jets or to improvise. A plan B is therefore essential. If we do not need one because everything is fine, that is great. However, if we need one, we should have one. It is crucial that the government come up with a plan B, but it has none.

• (1915)

**Mr. Chris Alexander:** Madam Speaker, 24 F-35s are already successfully flying through the air. True, they are in the United States, but we can see them and observe them. They have a new level of technology and that is what counts in the world of aviation. Stealth is important in the 21st century. Communication with our allies, with our 10 partners in the program and eventually with all our NATO allies is important. The ability to carry out operations with other partners and allies is also key. The F-35 will give us the opportunity—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

#### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Madam Speaker, tonight I am going to speak about infrastructure and, especially, the gas tax. I have trouble understanding the government's position. My original question dealt with the indexation of the gas tax. I do not think the government understood my question, so I want to explain the context in which I asked it.

Each time Canadians put gas in their cars, they pay the federal government 10¢ per litre. It is a tax levied by this government and previous governments. The government gives 5¢ of the 10¢ to the municipalities. Is that clear? When the government supported making the gas tax permanent, the 5¢ arrangement was made permanent. All that the NDP is asking for is that 1¢ more be given to the municipalities, so that they can carry out their infrastructure projects. That equates to \$500 million per year for our communities. Moreover, it is taxpayers' money.

Since January, I have travelled throughout my riding and spoken with the mayors. When I asked them what their needs were, they often emphasized the lack of sustainable funding for infrastructure projects. In Rivière-Beaudette and Sainte-Justine-de-Newton, the

level crossings are a problem. In Vaudreuil-Dorion, a new section of Highway 20 needs building and exits added in order to promote commercial transport at several locations along Highway 20 and Highway 40.

The government had promised \$350 million to carry out projects associated with the continental gateway, sums that were never allocated. What worries me is that the government treats infrastructure projects like election campaign tools. How else can this government's failure to return the gas tax to taxpayers be explained? The Conservatives have spent years condemning a carbon tax. They carry on like hypocrites and keep the gas tax to carry out their projects: megaprisons, the Queen's Jubilee, the commemoration of the War of 1812, the name change for the Canadian Navy. When elections are near, it is all about infrastructure.

All the marketing exercises—signs, costly press conferences—are not only money wasted, they also set a dangerous precedent. Are we to believe that each new government is going to engage in a publicity stunt every time it achieves something? Here is my advice to the government: it should do its job, be transparent, and it will not need to engage in this kind of marketing.

I would like a precise answer to my last question and not the kind of off-the-cuff answer that is usually given. Why did the government vote against our motion to give one additional cent to the municipalities?

• (1920)

[*English*]

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member calls on us to increase the gas tax in order to pass more money to municipal politicians. That is a matter of disagreement. We on this side of the House believe in leaving more money in the pockets of the hard-working taxpayers who earned it, rather than taxing them more and more at every stop.

Now he is trying to deny what he was saying earlier. He said he wants us to transfer more gas tax revenue to the municipalities. The reality is that money has to come from somewhere. If we are going to increase the transfer of gas tax money, and there are no extra dollars hiding under anyone's pillow, the only way to pay for it is through an increase in the gas tax. That is precisely what the NDP is proposing.

The NDP is doing this in an environment where municipalities have enjoyed an explosion in federal transfers over the last decade and a half. It was not very long ago that the federal government did not fund any municipal or provincial infrastructure. That changed starting about a decade and a half ago and the increases have been spectacular. The annual transfer of federal funding for provincial and municipal infrastructure reached \$9 billion, an all-time high last year. This is an incredible amount of money for taxpayers to be spending on municipal and provincial infrastructure at the federal level. The good news is that we have achieved results in exchange for the dollars spent.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I am looking at a graph demonstrating the average age of a core piece of infrastructure in Canada. The average age was 17 years a decade ago. Today, it is 14.5 years. We have now reached the stage that our infrastructure is the most youthful it has been since the 1980s. This fact is the result of a massive build-up of new infrastructure and a renewal by communities of their infrastructure assets. This is an objective way of measuring the quality and the renewal of the infrastructure that the Canadian people use. I am pleased to report to the House that this objective measurement points to improvements in the degree of renewal of infrastructure across the country. Therefore, we are getting results for the Canadian people.

The NDP members will always want us to spend more money. I would remind them it is true that government can give people everything they want, but it will have to take everything they have in order to pay for it.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Madam Speaker, I am sure Montrealers would not notice the new infrastructure the member across the way talked about. Furthermore, he twisted my words and took them out of context again in implying that we desire an increase in the gas tax. I will say it again, this time in the other official language. For every litre of gas that is bought at the pump, the federal government takes 10¢ out of the pockets of taxpayers and only gives back 5¢.

The member says repeatedly that we want to take money out of taxpayers' pockets. Actually, we want to give it back. The Conservatives play both sides of the coin. They denounce taxes and then secretly like the revenue that those taxes bring in. Because of this cynical political play, they lose an opportunity to be smart leaders on the economy.

I like many of the members across the way personally as people, but as policy-makers I find them to be incredibly lazy and complacent. If the government explained to Canadians honestly how the gas tax works, how it contributes to healthy infrastructure repair, maintenance and creation, they would have an opportunity to renew our infrastructure.

• (1925)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Madam Speaker, what the hon. member does not state in his question is that it is true only a portion of the gas tax that people pay at the pumps is remitted to the municipalities for infrastructure, but the additional portion is also used as part of general revenues to fund direct projects that the federal government engages in.

The reality is those dollars are accounted for. Every penny that people pay in gas tax is already dedicated to projects across the country. If the hon. member wants to increase the amount of gas tax credit transfer to the municipalities, he will have to raise the gas tax itself. Money does not grow on trees. The government cannot give something without first taking it away. The hon. member and his party are proposing a tax increase, and we just disagree.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Madam Speaker, on November 4, I asked the Minister of the Environment why the government seemed to be shutting off funding for the Lake Superior binational program and I received a dismissive answer.

The minister's answer called into question the information I had received from Lake Superior Binational Forum members, while leaving some faint hope that the funding would appear at the 11th hour.

We have since learned that funding has indeed dried up for Binational Forum, which is an important component of the binational program, a program designed to restore the graded areas and protect Lake Superior as a unique headwater from pollution and urbanization.

For those who are not familiar with this body, the Binational Forum is as grassroots as it gets. It brings the stakeholder communities from Lake Superior together to ensure the work done by the binational program, and ultimately the International Joint Commission, reflects the experiences, needs, abilities and opinions of basin communities.

It has been served by volunteers, many of whom have served for the full 20 years the forum has been in existence. Indeed, my colleague, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, who is with me today, was the co-founder and first Canadian co-chair of the forum.

The work of the forum has been lauded by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the International Joint Commission and even in Environment Canada's 2011 report on the lakewide management plan.

The decision to cut funding has destroyed the ability of the forum to function. If Canadian participants want to continue attending the meetings, they will have to pay out of their own pockets. With no Canadian participation, the vehicle designed to support the binational program cannot perform its function.

What dismays many members, who were part of the original proposal, is that they, along with many others, have contributed thousands of hours of personal time and the government has not seen fit, or even find it necessary, to consult, notify or even thank them. There was no communication at all, just silence and ultimately a letter confirming the disappearance of the Canadian funding, which was in response to Mr. Glen Dale's email.

Why has the government unilaterally walked away from long-standing funding for the coordination of the Canadian component of the Lake Superior Binational Forum? Has the government informed other parties, including the United States Environmental Protection Agency of this decision? Where is the government's sense of decency and consideration and commitment to protecting Lake Superior? Why have we reached the point that long-time volunteers are lauded one year and cut loose the next, without even being made aware of the decision until well after the fact?

It is interesting, because we certainly have to look at what the project was actually meant for, why the forum was put in place. It is a demonstration project for zero discharge of persistent toxic substances and sustainable ecosystem management and has played a crucial role.

Mr. Dale received a letter from the minister, which says:

Having completed this review process, I regret to inform you that my department is unable to provide funding for the coordination of the Canadian component of the Lake Superior Binational Forum this year.

What impact will that have on the Canadian component? That is what I want to know. I hope the parliamentary secretary will be able to answer the questions I have just asked.

• (1930)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, our government is firmly committed to the environmental stewardship of the Great Lakes, like Lake Huron in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. Our government continues to work with our U.S. partners in order to achieve shared objectives toward the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes.

Each year, Environment Canada receives a tremendous number of excellent proposals seeking support for a range of activities which contribute to the protection of environmental quality. As stewards of taxpayers' money, we institute a rigorous process to evaluate these proposals and to ensure that our funds were allocated to the highest quality proposals supporting our top priorities.

The Lake Superior binational forum did not receive funding this fiscal year in that review process. However, work on Lake Superior continues through a number of initiatives, including the binational lakewide management plan, which is co-operatively restoring and protecting the ecosystem of the Great Lakes.

As well, on January 23 of this year the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment joined the member for York—Simcoe to announce an additional \$215,000 to restore the shoreline at Elmhurst Beach, part of the government's initiative under the Lake Simcoe clean up fund.

The Government of Canada continues to invest resources in addressing high priority issues in the Great Lakes. Budget 2011 provided new funding to address the recurrence of toxic and nuisance algae in the Great Lakes. Budget 2010 provided \$8 million per year for remediation of areas of concern in the Great Lakes.

The governments of Canada and the United States are currently engaged in the negotiation of amendments to the Great Lakes water quality agreement to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in addressing current and future challenges. This is the keystone agreement that ensures that Canada and the United States work together to address environmental problems and protect the waters of the Great Lakes.

The amended Great Lakes water quality agreement will continue the work on each of the Great Lakes, areas of concern in the Great

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

Lakes and issues of concern. Through the amended Great Lakes water quality agreement, the Great Lakes community will be provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in activities that support the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the intervention. The member seemed to be focused on Lake Simcoe. We are talking about Lake Superior here.

We see that the Government of Canada has made a decision which essentially destroys the ability of the forum to function as a key part of the Lake Superior binational program. It signals an end to the dialogue that has occurred at the local level. Smaller communities in particular will be further distanced from participating in decision-making and activities that will affect them.

Ultimately, we have learned that the government has more money for fake lakes than it does for our biggest Great Lake, the biggest one in the world. It has more money for self-promotion than it does for the communities of Lake Superior to work with their basin neighbours on a common plan that protects this world-famous and entirely unique body of water.

I would like to bring the House's attention to the fact that here are the transfer payments that the government has said are no longer required under its 2011 estimates for environment. They include the contributions to support environmental and sustainable development initiatives to the tune of \$22 million.

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Madam Speaker, I will point out to the member opposite, as I mentioned, before that work on Lake Superior continues through a number of initiatives, including the binational lakewide management plan, which is co-operatively restoring and protecting the ecosystem of this Great Lake.

Negotiations on a new Great Lakes water quality agreement are progressing. They will ensure meaningful opportunities for public participation in restoration and protection of the Great Lakes.

As we look to the future and the implementation of the Great Lakes water quality agreement, the Government of Canada will explore mechanisms to enhance engagement and support the restoration and protection of all the Great Lakes.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:34 p.m.)



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